

Straighten Up and Fly Right: The Dichotomy between British and American Women Auxiliary Pilots of World War II

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

March 31, 2014

Advised by Professor Kali Israel

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my gratitude to my adviser Professor Israel for her support from the very beginning of this project. It was her willingness to write a letter of recommendation for a student she had just met that allowed me to apply to the Honors Program. Thank you for all of your support and patience that helped me to complete the project. I apologize now for all of those panicked emails—thanks for calming me down and reminding me of my love for the subject. Thanks also to Professor Brian Porter-Szucs for being so willing to help each one of us create our best work possible. Additionally, I would like to thank the librarians and students working in the Woman's Collection at Texas Woman's University for their assistance and work putting together such a vast collection of documents and artifacts from the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

Outside of academics, I would like to thank my parents Lisa and Michael Klick for instilling in me a love of history and the drive to push myself academically, as well as my two sisters Cailin and Brenna for genuinely asking me how my thesis was going, and then listening to me blather on about it. Thank you to my friends for all of your support. And finally, thanks Matt for the tough love, reminding me that I chose to take on this project so I had better stop complaining and write, knowing the whole time that I was capable of completing this project despite my own doubts. I love you all.

Abbreviations

British

QMAAC: The WAAC after receiving commendations for their conduct during a German offensive in 1918 was renamed the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, with the Queen becoming Commander-in-Chief, World War I

RAF: Royal Air Force, World War I and II

WAAC: Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, World War I

WRAF: Women's Royal Air Force, World War I

ATA: Air Transport Auxiliary, World War II

ATS: Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's auxiliary to the Army, World War II

WAAF: Women's Auxiliary Air Force, World War II

WRNS: Women's Royal Naval Service, World War II

American

AAF: Army Air Forces, World War II

ATC: Air Transport Command, World War II

MCWR: Marine Corps Women's Reserve, World War II

SPARS: Coast Guard female auxiliary, World War II

WAAC: Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, World War II

WAC: Women's Army Corps, converted from WAAC following militarization, World War II

WAFS: Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, World War II

WASP: Women Airforce Service Pilots, World War II

WAVES: Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, Navy auxiliary World War II

WFTD: Women's Flying Training Detachment, World War II

Introduction

“ I’m very happy that we’ve trained a thousand women to fly the Army way...I think it’s going to mean more to aviation than anyone realizes. I’m very happy that General Arnold and General Yount, who made this possible, are here for the final phase of this wonderful program. This program that will go down in history. Not only in history, but I’m sure it’s going to do something that is so vital and has been so badly needed in aviation for so many years, and that is women’s interest. And I’m sure that if there’s a reason to call you girls back up after December 20, that all of you will respond and that we’ll have probably 95% of you back in the Air Forces anyway.... ”

--Jacqueline Cochran, Director of Women Pilots¹

In this speech to the final graduating class of the Women Airforce Service Pilots on December 7, 1944, Jacqueline Cochran, Director of Women Pilots, sent off the last of the first group of American women to fly military planes. The program was cut short despite the country’s need for ferry pilots, ending on December 20, 1944. Cochran predicted that the women would be remembered for their great service to their country and for contributing to the progress of women everywhere—unfortunately, reality did not measure up to her high hopes.

With the exception of a few small blips between the 1970s and today, the WASPs have been largely forgotten by the general population. The United States Air Force, as it came to be known two years after the end of World War II, began to contemplate enlisting women during the decade and in 1976 they allowed women to join on the same basis as men. Despite being largely forgotten for 32 years, many women from the era of integration in the USAF have credited the WASPs with setting off a chain of events that eventually resulted in women being accepted into the Air Force. In 1979 the WASPs were given retroactive veteran status, as they

¹ Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Parrish, “Jacqueline Cochran Speech to the LAST WASP Graduating Class, 7 December 1944, *Wings Across America*, http://wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/cochran_speech.htm.

had remained civilian throughout the entirety of the program.² President Obama, in 2010, awarded the WASPs with the Congressional Gold Medal and hosted a wreath-laying ceremony for the 38 women pilots who died in the line of duty.³

A similar organization was set up in Great Britain that gave women the opportunity to fly military planes for their country, also during World War II: the Air Transport Auxiliary. Originally all-male, ATA added a female pool in late 1939 and the first British women military pilots took off for the sky early 1940. Unlike the WASPs, so-called ‘Atagirls’ were able to fly from the creation of their pool through the end of the war, and several did just that. However, like the WASPs, they remain unknown in the United States despite the fact that 25 American women pilots flew with them prior to the creation of WASP. They have not received that much acknowledgment in the United Kingdom for their services either, beyond a special memorial in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London for those who lost their lives and memorials to the ATA at various airfields. In 2008, all surviving veterans of ATA were finally awarded a special Veterans Badge by the British government, giving them official recognition for their wartime service.

A major cause of this unawareness is the lack of published materials available on either group on women pilots, and on the two women pilots’ groups side-by-side in particular. In the span of almost 70 years now since the end of WASP, several former WASPs and Atagirls have published their memoirs, specifically focusing on the years in which their programs existed, though their distribution is not extensive. The scholarship available on either group, and especially the two groups combined, is also scarce. The vast majority of the works on the WASPs focus on their lack of militarization or the glamorization of women pilots in the media,

² Anne Noggle, *For God, country, and the thrill of it: Women Airforce Service Pilots in World War II: photographic portraits and text*, (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1990), 14.

³ For more on this, see Staff Sergeant J. G. Buzanowski, “First Female Military Pilots Gets Congressional Gold Medal,” 11 March 2010, United States Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=58279>.

which occurs in ATA writings as well. Historian Molly Merryman's *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II*, as an example, attempts to answer why the WASPs were disbanded when there was still a wartime need for their services, why top officials in the Army Air Forces allowed it to happen, and why Congress did not pass the militarization bill when almost all other women's auxiliaries had been militarized. Although Merryman does provide a detailed description of WASPs in the media and the negative media campaign, she fails to look at the other side of the issue: how the military was able to employ women pilots in the first place, during a time when traditional gender roles ruled, and what the government and military thought of these women.

As for the women of the ATA, scholarship on their experience in World War II is practically nonexistent. Several books published during the war mention them, such as E. C. Cheesman's *Brief Glory, the story of the A.T.A.* which contains a chapter on the female ATA Pool, and a few popular histories and memoirs exist, but overall they are rarely examined. As a result, I relied heavily on Giles Whittell's *Spitfire Women of World War II* which combines personal interviews with the pilots, information gleaned from memoirs, and primary research at the Maidenhead Heritage Association and the Imperial War Museum. For the story from a first-hand perspective, I depended on *The Forgotten Pilots: a story of the Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939-1945* by Lettice Curtis, an ATA pilot who flew for Britain from July 1940 through September 1945 and became the first woman to fly a four-engine bomber in Britain.

The issue with militarization is perhaps why the WASPs have found themselves in the press more often than the women of the ATA both during World War II and today, as books and articles are published. Although each program was newsworthy when first established, as women had never before flown military aircraft, the WASP continued to be in the news and continues to

be written about because of its unresolved quest for militarization. Militarization refers to the act of turning a civilian group into a military service, complete with military rules, benefits, rank, uniforms, and a certain air of legitimacy. Most of the other women's auxiliaries in both Britain and the United States were militarized over the course of World War II, but neither the WASP nor the ATA received entry into the military. The ATA, as it will be explained later, could not be militarized because of the auxiliary's original mission; WASP, however, could have been militarized. Doing so would have forced the women to stay in the program, which is why some of the women were against it (as civilians, they could leave to start a family for example). It also would have provided the women with life insurance—something people in such a dangerous occupation required, but were not given as civilians. Militarization is a factor in the acceptance of the women pilots by the public and is an important distinction between the American and British pilots, but the question of whether or not the women should have been militarized will not factor into this work as it has in almost all previous accounts of the WASP. Rather, I present it as a part of the larger difference between the United States and Great Britain during World War II and the way in which the women pilots exemplify this difference.

In addition to researching the women pilots themselves and their experience in World War II, World War I and the interwar period factored heavily into my research. For this, I drew from Susan Zeiger's, associate professor of history at Regis College, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919* to understand how women in America functioned with the military and the various forces they came up against as women in uniform. On the British side, historians Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield's work on the ways in which women were involved during the two world wars and the effect that societal

pressures had on them, *Out of the Cage*, provided a glimpse into the similarities of the British response to two wars and how the public responded to women involved in war work.

Overall, primary sources were the main factor in developing this work, particularly those written by the women themselves. This may have added some bias to descriptions of each female pilot auxiliary and their country, as each woman experienced her time as a military pilot in a different way and she may have remembered incorrectly, but for the most part the women took the time to perform research on areas that they were not involved with in order to provide a balanced work on their respective programs. WASP Byrd Granger's *On Final Approach: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of W.W. II* was invaluable in this way, for Granger added the experience of hundreds of WASPs, archival information, original Air Force documents, National Archive files, and General Henry H. Arnold's papers to her own experience flying with the WASP. She gives a detailed description of the program from its birth to its deactivation and evidently believed that no detail was too small to not be included. Lettice Curtis' work on the ATA functions in a similar way, with a similar amount of detail though it is not organized by date, unlike Granger's *On Final Approach*.

As a historian, my first intention is to ensure that knowledge of the WASPs and Atagirls reaches those who are interested in the history of women, of the military, and of pioneers. Unbeknownst to many, women did actually fly planes during World War II, often ferrying them from factories to air force bases, while others pushed the boundaries of gender and towed targets for anti-aircraft gunnery practice or experimented with some of the first unmanned drones. Those in Britain also came to be paid the same as their male counterparts in the ATA, while the American women never received a pay increase even though some managed to transition all the way up the scale to B-17 Flying Fortresses and the like. None of this came without struggle,

however. Even though the women did ‘straighten up and fly right’ as the famous World War II song sung by the Andrews Sisters (Nat King Cole, originally) called for, some of the male pilots did not which resulted in deaths of WASPs in particular, and in a shadow cast over the women pilots. The ATA women eventually overcame gender discrimination, but the WASP program could not, and ended because of it. Therefore, instead of fixating on the fact that the WASPs were never commissioned like past works, I wish to express that each group provided an invaluable service to their country and at the same time demonstrate how the difficulties the women came up against resulted from an important distinction between the United States and Great Britain.

I propose that the dichotomy between need and experimentation explains the differences in each country’s response to its women pilots and the organization of the programs themselves. To start, I will offer a discussion of the history of women pilots in Great Britain and the United States as well as an explanation of how the two countries dealt with women and war in the First World War and the interwar period in order to investigate the ways in which history impacted the experience of women pilots in World War II. Following this general history, Chapter Two selects the important distinctions between the two programs and draws out the ways in which they differ, so that in Chapter Three the overall theme of need versus experimentation can be credited with these differences.

Chapter One

Introduction of Women Pilots to the War Effort

“The Army Air Forces last week tapped the one group of experienced pilots that had not yet heard the come-hither of the armed services. To ferry aircraft from factory to aerodrome, release uniformed airmen for combat service, it invited the 500 or 600 women with commercial pilot licenses to give it a lift, sat back to await a rush of ladybirds....As boss of the new squadron the Air Forces picked photogenic, 28-year-old Mrs. Nancy Harkness Love....She looks forward to the day when the WAFS will become a uniformed part of the armed forces, like their British opposite number, Air Transport Auxiliaries.”

--“WAFS,” *Time Magazine*, September 21, 1942¹

Three years prior, the Air Transport Auxiliary was created and women began to fly in its female Pool just months later. By the end of 1942, women in Britain and the United States ferried planes for the air forces. However, these women did not just spring up out of nowhere—they had predecessors in World War I and many of the women involved in the World War II organizations got their start during the interwar period. Through the actions of these women, the WASP and ATA female Pool were created, but this is not to say that female experiences in the First World War directly led to the inclusion of women in ferrying auxiliaries in the Second World War. It may prove true with respect to Great Britain, somewhat, but the United States certainly did not follow a linear path in terms of using women in, or alongside, the military. It was through a series of progressive individuals in the aviation world and in the military that women were permitted to fly military planes. And, only after the public came to terms with seeing women in uniform performing auxiliary services did the greater populations of each country come around to accepting the sight of women in the cockpit of bombers. Even then, the

¹ “WAFS,” *Time Magazine*, 21 September 1942, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

citizens of Britain and the United States had different attitudes toward these women which came as a result of each country's position in World War II.

World War I

Women's participation was at first limited to the female sphere—philanthropy, volunteer work, knitting for the troops—but this all changed in 1915. That year, Great Britain passed the National Registration Act which recorded the occupations of men and women aged 16-65.² Suddenly, uniformed, voluntary organizations for women popped up, such as the Women's Legion, the Women's Volunteer Reserve, and the Voluntary Aid Detachment. Through these organizations, women could participate more actively in the war effort than ever before. Two years later, in 1917, the first female military auxiliary was created: the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, or WAAC. Just months later came the Women's Royal Naval Service. By the end of the war, "between 80,000 and 90,000 women had served in the auxiliary services, the majority in the WAAC" and the rest in the WRNS.³ As for the aviation side of the war, women had worked at independently-run air stations from the outbreak, and by the end of 1917 they were permitted to serve with the Royal Flying Corps. The WAAC and the WRNS were found to be a success by this point, and to release even more men to fight, the Air Council decided in early 1918 to follow suit and create its own women's auxiliary. For the sake of efficiency, the Air Council joined the RFC and the Royal Naval Air Service to create the Royal Air Force and at the same time formed a women's auxiliary air force, christened the Women's Royal Air Force by the King in March 1918.⁴

² Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴ Beryl E. Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue: the story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: P. Stephens, 1989), 14.

WRAF women did not fly, but they looked the part of a female airman. They wore blue military-issued uniforms and served alongside the RAF. These women were civilians, enrolling rather than enlisting. Their duties were similar to those available to women outside of the military, in the realm of domestic and clerical work, but because of their association with the RAF, many technical positions involved in airplane manufacturing were open to them as well.⁵ Despite the WRAF's success in freeing a large number of men to fight in the trenches or in the air, it was disbanded once the demobilization process ended with no hope of being reinstated post-war.

Women in the United States also participated in World War I, despite the country's late entry to the war, and served in a variety of positions. The American Expeditionary Forces employed 16,500 women overseas and thousands of other women enlisted in the Navy and Marines, with others serving in civilian wartime positions.⁶ Again, like Britain, the duties of most of these women were 'pink collar' clerical work or nursing. Female yeomen and marines were given assignments that involved working in such positions, they received the same pay as Navy yeomen, and were eligible for veteran's benefits.⁷ This in fact makes them the most progressive women's military group up until the 1970s. Subsequent naval commanders after World War I were not as supportive of the inclusion of women in the military. After changes made by the Department of the Navy, the President issued the Naval Reserve Act of 1925 which made it impossible for women to enlist in the Navy in a future war.⁸

⁵ Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, 35.

⁶ Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 168. Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy until 1921, had found a loophole in the previous Naval Reserve Act which stated that "all [capable] people" could serve with the Navy, and he considered to mean men or women. The new Act replaced the phrase with "male citizens of the United States," thereby abolishing said loophole.

As for the aviation sector, a sort of air force has existed in the United States since 1909, when the government purchased its first military plane from the Wright Brothers.⁹ In July 1914, the aeronautical service expanded and became, officially, the Aviation Section of the U.S. Signal Corps.¹⁰ Near the end of World War I, the Aviation Section was replaced with a division separate from the Signal Corps and drastically reduced in size.¹¹ Just as Great Britain was creating a Royal Air Force and the WRAF, the United States was demobilizing its Aviation Section. This fact proves crucial to each country's experience with its aviation service during World War II, as Britain already had an independent air force in place while the United States' was still connected to the Army.

Interwar

Although the women's auxiliaries were disbanded at the end of World War I, a handful of people in the United States did manage to continue the conversation about women in the military. Two in particular were Anita Phipps and Major Everett Hughes. After the success of female participation in World War I and the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 giving women the vote, the Army determined that adding a woman liaison between the Army and women voters would better its image. Anita Phipps was the second incumbent chosen for the position of Director of Women's Relations. She used her position to plan the establishment of a women's corps, fully militarized. However, her plan, like Major Hughes', was buried when she resigned.

⁹ General Henry H. Arnold, "The History of the Army Air Corps, August 1939," *National Aeronautics Magazine*, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection, 27.

¹⁰ Arnold, "The History of the Army Air Corps, August 1939," *National Aeronautics Magazine*, 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Major Hughes, a future D-Day planner, devised a plan for the participation of women in war in 1928.¹² “Any future war,” he stated, “would require the participation of women who should be integrated into the Army and trained before the inception of crisis.”¹³ As quoted in the official AAF-sponsored history *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Hughes argued that women serving in dangerous zones should be militarized and used “as required in corps areas, branches and theaters of operations, organized according to tables of organization, and accorded the same rights, privileges, and benefits as militarized men.”¹⁴ This was exceptionally forward-thinking, as at the time women were being cut out of the military completely—just three years before the Hughes Plan, the Navy excluded women from service.¹⁵ The public and a large part of the military believed the armed forces was a man’s world, as evident from the change in the Naval Reserve Act, and so the Hughes Plan was shelved in 1931.¹⁶ Oddly, military planners revived neither Phipps’ nor Major Hughes’ plans while forming the women’s military organizations in World War II; the Hughes plan was not rediscovered until 1942 and even then did not figure into discussions much.

Plans for militarizing women did not exist in interwar Britain, nor was the issue even raised. Despite the success of the WRAF and QMAAC, women in Britain no longer factored into military discussions once World War I ended. In 1919, the British people were exhausted and ready to ‘go back to normal’, to the time before close to one million died and an entire generation was lost. The good times they remembered were all from before the war, so the

¹² A Brief History of the Air Transport Auxiliary," ATAHISTORY, <http://www.airtransportaux.com/history.html>.

¹³ Patricia J. Thomas, “Women in the Military; America and the British Commonwealth Historical Similarities,” *Armed Forces & Society*, no. 4 (1978), 628.

¹⁴ Kathleen Williams Boon, James Lea Cate, and Wesley Frank Craven, “Women in the AAF,” in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 504.

¹⁵ Thomas, “Women in the Military,” 627.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 628.

majority of the public reverted back to their pre-war mindsets—which included excluding women from any sort of military work.

In the interwar period, women came together twice in Britain with representatives from the main women's organizations of World War I—Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), and the Women's Legion—yet their call for a unified women's legion endorsed by the British military went unheard. Eventually, the Army and Air Councils in 1938 recognized the Emergency Service, which the representatives established in 1936, but the women continued to push for a Women's Reserve.¹⁷ Having a women's reserve was thought to be “unnecessary and undesirable” by the Councils, yet they would later come to depend on women once the shortage of manpower became apparent.¹⁸ Somewhat premonitory, knowing how early the ATA formed and accepted women, the Air Ministry disagreed and wanted a women's military organization at the ready in case of an attack, as aviation had become central to European and American militaries. Talk of women in the military ceased until 1938, when another world war was looming. In 1939 the Air Ministry received female workers from the Auxiliary Territorial Service—not the separate women's reserve it hoped for, as the RAF had in World War I, but women could at the very least take on jobs in aeronautics and work alongside the military.

World War II

The United States did not have the luxury of having an independent air force when war broke out as Britain had; the Army Air Forces was still attached to the Army at the dawn of World War II and so had to work through Army channels despite being strictly aviation-oriented, leading to an inordinate amount of inefficiency. The United States' air service was renamed two

¹⁷ Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, 86.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

more times before the aforesaid Army Air Forces (AAF) of World War II came into existence in June 1941.¹⁹ Disorganization caused the gap between the countries in development of their air forces. The opposite of what had occurred in World War I with respect to the air forces happened in World War II: the Royal Air Force already existed and so just continued to develop, while the United States turned the Air Corps into the AAF. Although effective in mobilizing men and planes, the Army Air Forces had difficulty bringing women into the mix. At the time, the AAF had to sort out the problem of turning civilian men into military pilots and securing an unprecedented number of airplanes, while Commanding General Henry H. Arnold quietly worked on his plan for an air force independent from the Army. Employing women pilots involved winning over the public and potentially creating a new organization, all of which took time, and the AAF already had enough to work on. A women pilot's organization was not necessary at the time, and so early suggestions were ignored. At the same time, with the RAF already its own branch of the British armed forces, military officials in Britain had the time to develop a plan for integrating women into its ferrying Pools.

The Royal Air Force had been a part of the British armed forces since 1918 and although it reduced its use of women during the interwar years, it was ready to utilize this untapped resource once total war broke out for a second time. Over the past twenty-some years, the RAF had grown apart from the Army. The independence of the RAF caused women's auxiliary positions to drastically differ from the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) jobs for which they were trained. Rather than train women twice, first through the ATS then again if sent to work with the RAF, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) was created to assist in jobs similar to

¹⁹ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 65.

those held by WRAF women in the First World War.²⁰ Their jobs may have changed, but they were still auxiliary, working alongside the military not in the military.

This all changed in 1941 with Parliament's passage of the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations, which officially brought women into the British military for the first time. These Regulations changed the status of the ATS and WAAF women, making them official Members of the Armed Forces of the Crown.²¹ WAAF officers were commissioned. ATS and WAAF women were militarized. The switch was utterly unprecedented in Great Britain; women had their own organizations auxiliary to the military in World War I but they still worked *alongside* the commissioned men, not *with* them. Now some of them could commission, just like the men.

The United States looked to Britain for insight into employing women in the armed forces so as to remove men from non-combat positions and send them to war. Late entry into World War II allowed American military officials time to observe the women's military organizations in Britain and gave the public time to get accustomed to the idea of women being involved in the war effort as quasi-soldiers. The ATS and WAAF served as models for the United States' new women's auxiliaries, WAAC (Army), WAVES (Navy), SPARS (Coast Guard), and MCWR (Marines).²² American military observers in Britain saw the potential for the use of women in the United States after viewing the success of British women in auxiliary positions; they were warned that the British women would not be available for American use because of the serious manpower shortage, so they had to consider creating their own auxiliaries. It was common knowledge that the Soviet Union was again using women on the front lines, and

²⁰ Ministry of Information, Great Britain, *British Women at War*, (London, 1944), 16.

²¹ Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, 106.

²² WAAC stands for Women's Auxiliary Army Corps; WAVES for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service; SPARS for the Coast Guard motto in Latin and English, Semper Paratus, Always Ready; and MCWR for Marine Corps Women's Reserve.

so between that and the publicity praising the ATS and WAAF, American women began to demand the opportunity to serve their country alongside the military.²³

Congress dragged its feet on the issue until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, despite attempts by Representative Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts to pass her bill that would create a women's corps within the Army prior to the attack.²⁴ She finally succeeded, after a great deal of reworking her original bill, and by early 1942 the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) was established. In the summer of 1943 the auxiliary was militarized and renamed the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Thousands of women signed up when WAAC was created, but recruitment dropped off quickly and did not increase much after its militarization. Critics in the Army made women feel unwelcome, there were rumors of immorality, and many women just did not want to live the Army life. Also, if the women were auxiliary to the Army, they were civilians who could leave at any time. Despite some women's hesitance at joining after militarization, the women were greatly appreciated by the Army Air Forces in particular. The AAF utilized their skills to such an extent that prior to militarization the AAF asked for a separate WAAC group—called “Air Wacs”—that would answer to the AAF and receive militarization. The AAF was turned down but continued to use Wacs in almost all sectors of the AAF prior to and following the WAAC's militarization.²⁵ Like Britain, the United States Armed Forces soon put an end to civilian women in uniform, militarizing the WAAC and creating women's reserves in the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines by 1943.²⁶ The two countries seemed to agree on militarizing their female auxiliaries, and yet the pilots were left out of the plan.

²³ Boon, Cate, and Craven, “Women in the AAF,” in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 505.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 506.

²⁵ Boon, Cate, and Craven, “Women in the AAF,” in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 508.

²⁶ Thomas, “Women in the Military,” 25-26.

Both the United States and Great Britain militarized their main female auxiliary organizations within two years of declaring war, despite the difference in the way each country utilized womanpower in World War I. Great Britain passed the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations in April 1941 militarizing the ATS and WAAF officers; however, when women were considered for use as pilots, it was only by a civilian organization that thought of using them in conjunction with men not fit for RAF service. The United States began hiring women pilots through a military organization whose main assignment was ferrying planes, instead of creating a women's auxiliary and then militarizing it as had been done with the other female auxiliaries. Because of this decision, the States were forced to hire the women as civilians in order to bolster its pilot pool quickly, because the Ferrying Command needed pilots immediately—they planned instead to commission the women at a later date.

Air Transport Auxiliary and Air Transport Command

Both countries scrambled to bulk up their air forces with planes and pilots when they became active belligerents in 1939 and 1941. Air power was relatively new, as were the air forces in each country—while increasing plane production and turning vast numbers of civilians into military pilots, both countries were at work initiating programs to organize men and materiel. One new program that came as a result of the sudden mobilization were ferrying commands; someone needed to transport the planes from the factories to air force bases. In Britain, RAF Reserve Command performed the necessary ferrying as the country prepared for war and in the first few months, but it became too overwhelming of a task once the RAF needed its men for combat.²⁷ Ferrying in America began months before the country entered World War II as a result of the Lend-Lease Act. Those involved in organizing the transport of planes across the Atlantic began to have trouble finding pilots in early 1941, and so General Arnold of the

²⁷ E. C. Cheesman, *Brief Glory, the story of the A.T.A.*, (Leicester: Hraborough Pub. Co., 1946), 17.

Army Air Corps proposed that Air Corps pilots lend their skills to the ferrying command.²⁸ From here, the AAC, soon to be the Army Air Forces, moved toward the idea of using civilian pilots for its ferrying and so did the RAF. What set Britain and the States apart when women were given ferrying duties is the fact that ferrying became more militarized in the latter and remained civilian in the former.

In 1938, Gerard d'Erlanger, a World War I veteran pilot and a director of the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), thought of putting civilian pilots who had hundreds of flying hours to work for Britain. He wrote to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Air Harold Balfour, suggesting that the RAF make use of men who, like him, held 'A' licenses but were unfit for duty with the RAF directly.²⁹ D'Erlanger thought that male civilian pilots who could not fly for the RAF, like himself, were an untapped resource that could do a great deal to help the RAF.³⁰ A year later, he wrote to the Director-General of Civil Aviation, Sir Francis Shelmerdine, with a plan to employ such men and have them fly light aircraft. Shelmerdine wholeheartedly agreed with d'Erlanger's plan and put him in charge of overseeing the establishment of this civilian organization, with BOAC taking care of finances and initial administration.³¹ By the outbreak of war in 1939, d'Erlanger had his Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA).

Originally, the ATA was set up for communication purposes. During the 'Phoney War,' however, air raids did not disrupt communications to the extent that military planners thought they would, so the ATA men had little work to do. Rather than pay the men to sit and wait for a job to do, RAF Reserve Command borrowed some of the ATA pilots to help with ferrying

²⁸ John D. Carter, James Lea Cate, and Wesley Frank Craven, "Air Transport Command," in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 7.

²⁹ 'A' licenses in Britain were equivalent to a private pilot's license; 'B' licenses were commercial pilot's licenses.

³⁰ Cheesman, *Brief Glory*, 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

planes.³² Late in 1939, airplane production had reached a new high and d'Erlanger was called upon to create a civilian ferry Pool at White Waltham, further separating the ATA men from their original duties.³³ The RAF had a few ferrying pools at the start of the war, but once the Air Transport Auxiliary was up and running, RAF officials decided that the ATA was better suited to ferrying than the RAF men who were increasingly being sent away to combat. The RAF handed the controls over to Gerard d'Erlanger and the ATA. Ferrying Pools popped up all over Great Britain fairly quickly and an ATA flying school was established as the RAF's Central Flying School (CFS) could not take more than four pilots at a time for instruction.³⁴ Women pilots had applied to ATA but, according to future ATA pilot Lettice Curtis, they "would have been stunned with unbelief if they had known that they were being considered for CFS."³⁵ They sent in applications but never thought they would actually be hired. Director-General Shelmerdine did in fact consider women while thinking through what to do about CFS (this is before the ATA flying school). If the ATA planned on including women pilots, the women would have to go through training like the rest of the ATA pilots and at the time the training school was CFS—the problem was that CFS could not accommodate women. The women would have to stay in a nearby city during training, which brought up the question of how to transport women from the city to the school.³⁶ In the end, the problem was resolved by the creation of an ATA flying school.

Ferrying began in Britain under the RAF and moved to the ATA, a purely civilian organization, as the need for ferry pilots drastically increased while in the United States, the

³² Cheesman, *Brief Glory*, 17. The 'Phoney War' is a term used by the British to describe the first seven months of the war, and was marked by a lack of military operations against Nazi Germany. The country was at war and yet major offensives were not launched by either belligerent. It was not visibly a war yet, hence the word 'phoney.'

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Lettice Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots: a story of the Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939-45*, (Henley-on-Thames: Foulis, 1971), 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Army Air Forces took control of ferrying—this basic difference in who ferried sets up a main distinction between the women pilot groups. President Roosevelt endorsed General Arnold's proposal for the use of Air Corps pilots in ferrying, and so on May 29, 1941 the Air Corps Ferrying Command (ACFC) was born.³⁷ At first, many of the pilots ferrying lend-lease planes were airline pilots. It all changed when the United States entered the war. ACFC expanded and two new divisions were established, Domestic and Foreign.³⁸ Domestic soon became the Domestic Wing, with Colonel William Tunner in charge, an important figure in the creation of the American women's pilot auxiliary.

As the threat of war became more imminent, the Air Corps went through a period of reorganization. The Army Air Corps was renamed the US Army Air Forces on June 20, 1941.³⁹ The Domestic Wing of the Ferrying Command continued on as usual until the following spring, when Colonel Harold George relieved Colonel Robert Olds, commander of the Ferrying Command. With George came a more militarized service, according to the official Army Air Forces history.⁴⁰ Under George, Ferrying Command became the Air Transport Command exactly one year after the creation of the AAF, and was given responsibility for all ferrying within and to locations outside of the United States.⁴¹ ATC was the American equivalent to the British ATA, except the ATC militarized its pilots. This is the point on which the ATA and WASP came to differ: women in the ATA could not be militarized as the organization was for civilians and RAF cast-offs only, while WASP grew out of the WAFS and WFTD who initially had all of their women flying for the Ferrying Division within the ATC. American women pilots saw their militarized male colleagues and questioned why they did not receive the same benefits despite

³⁷ Carter, Cate, and Craven, "Air Transport Command," in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁹ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots*, 65.

⁴⁰ Cheesman, *Brief Glory*, 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

taking part in the same work (eventually). British women also pushed for equality, but with civilian male pilots—militarization was never in question. Militarization became a point on which the Atagirls and WASPs differed the most, and was a result of Britain's immediate need for women pilots as opposed to the United States' need to direct attention elsewhere.

Establishment of Women Pilot Programs: British

Women in Britain first gained admittance into the military flying world in October 1938, when the Civil Air Guard (CAG) came into being. The point of the CAG, according to Air Minister Sir Kingsley Wood who established the program, was to “[make] the British population more ‘air minded’ by subsidising [sic] pilot training for both men and women.”⁴² The British government knew something was coming and that the Germans had more pilots than Britain, so the CAG was an attempt to level out the situation.⁴³ Anyone aged 18 to 50 who could pass the ‘A’ license medical examination could be admitted to the CAG and learn to fly.⁴⁴ Because women had the option to join, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of the Air Ministry Harold Balfour chose a female Commissioner to serve on the board of the CAG. His choice was a Mrs. F.G. Miles, the Marquess of Londonderry and wife of Miles, the aircraft designer.⁴⁵ CAG successfully churned out a number of women pilots and by 1939 Lady Londonderry wanted a separate women pilot organization created with the CAG women at the core.⁴⁶ The Air Ministry, however, did not want to incorporate the CAG women pilots into the preexisting WAAF and were unsure as to whether or not the women could handle military planes, so for the time being

⁴² Michael Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, (Peterborough: GMS Enterprises, 1995), 135.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

the Air Member for Personnel simply stated that if they were to utilize women pilots they would have to remain civilian.⁴⁷

According to a minute written by Director General of Civil Aviation F. C. Shelmerdine, quoted in Lettice Curtis' memoir and history of the ATA, Pauline Gower went to see Shelmerdine in September 1939 about a women's Pool within the newly-created ATA.⁴⁸ Shelmerdine was ready at the time to create this Pool, but many senior members of the Air Ministry protested the attachment of a women's Pool to the RAF Ferry Pools.⁴⁹ The ATA male pilots ferrying with the RAF were still on loan; ATA had not yet taken over all ferrying duties in Britain. Once the ATA separated from RAF, the plan for women pilots in the ATA could, and did, move forward. Under-Secretary of State for Air Harold Balfour supported the incorporation of women into the ferry pools from almost the very beginning of World War II, and finally got approval to hire women pilots around November of 1939.⁵⁰ After Balfour gave him the green light, d'Erlanger chose Pauline Gower to head the women's chapter of the ATA in January 1940.⁵¹

Nine years earlier, at 21 years old, Miss Gower established her own joy-riding and air taxi service with her friend Dorothy Spicer, a pilot and ground engineer.⁵² Gower's father, a Conservative member of Parliament, helped pay for her first airplane which she used to start her business and earn a living through flight. With the war brewing, Gower turned her attention toward empowering girls and women, especially pilots. Through her father and her own work, she became well-known in political circles and honed her leadership skills. By 1939, she was

⁴⁷ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁰ Cheesman, *Brief Glory*, 14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵² Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 37.

both a proficient pilot and well-versed in politics and leadership, and on May 10, Gower was appointed Commissioner of the Civil Air Guard—the second woman on the board.⁵³ Gower supported Lady Londonderry’s idea of a women’s air force which in turn gave her Lord Londonderry’s approval and Captain Balfour as an ally.⁵⁴ Walking into Shelmerdine’s office with the assumed support of these three important figures, Gower asked about admitting women to the ATA and immediately won his support as well. It took a few months until the plan was approved by the Air Ministry because of the issues with the RAF and lack of facilities for women at the Central Flying School. When the Air Ministry finally approved the plan, Shelmerdine contacted Gower and gave her permission to recruit eight women pilots (the First Eight) to ferry de Havilland Tiger Moths from Hatfield Aerodrome in Hertfordshire.⁵⁵

Women were to have the same experience flying as their male counterparts, at least 250 hours, although the first ones chosen had over double the hours that the early male ATA pilots had in their logbooks.⁵⁶ The First Eight had on average 600 hours each while Commander Pauline Gower had over 2,000 hours logged.⁵⁷

Many of the men in the ATA were ex-servicemen who had flown in World War I, and so had over 20 years of flying under their belts. It was much more difficult for women to gain flying experience comparable to that of the ATA men, therefore the ones chosen were often wealthy (flight training was expensive), some had their own plane, many learned to fly at a young age, and more than a few were flight instructors or commercial pilots. Not many women fit into even one of those categories as few women had pilot’s licenses at this time, let alone 250 hours logged, which is why the number of ATA women involved over the course of the war barely

⁵³ Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 137.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵⁶ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 4.

⁵⁷ “A Brief History of the Air Transport Auxiliary.”

exceeded 150. Further limiting the number of women and men involved was the fact that the ATA's interest was in pilots, not people who wanted to become pilots. Those without pilot's licenses had the chance in 1943 to become ATA pilots, as a small school opened up that year to train those with no flying experience, because the ATA desperately needed pilots.⁵⁸ With the creation of this school, lower class women received employment in the ATA, most coming from the WAAF or the non-flying portion of the ATA.

Establishment of Women Pilot Programs: American

Since Britain implemented a program to employ women pilots first, the United States did not have to experiment with using women as ferry pilots, it could learn from the British. Famed aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran sent the Chief of the Army Air Forces General Arnold her plans for using women pilots during the war but he dismissed her plans until 1942, after the United States ended its isolationism and joined the conflict. Cochran and fellow experienced pilot Nancy Love were relentless in their attempts to get a female pilot program established, and both were successful by the fall of 1942.

Prior to this, in the summer of 1941, Cochran tried to work through Washington to receive permission to fly a bomber to England. She was waiting for a response when a close friend of her and her husband's from before the war, Lord Beaverbrook, became the new Head of Procurement in Britain. Cochran cabled him reasons why she should be allowed to make the flight, he quickly agreed to her proposal, and then set the plan in motion by contacting 'his people' in Washington.⁵⁹ When she finally arrived after fighting her way through a series of setbacks—male ferry pilots threatened to quit, important wrenches suddenly went missing, a window was broken in the plane—she gathered data to use later in her plan for a female pilot

⁵⁸ Cheesman, *Brief Glory*, 53.

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Cochran and Floyd B. Odum, *The Stars at Noon*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), 99.

organization in the United States military. Cochran spent her time in Britain observing the ATA's women pilots and took notes, researching how a similar program could be implemented in the United States.⁶⁰ She met with Pauline Gower and it was on this trip that Gower supposedly suggested that Cochran return with some American women pilots to fly for the ATA.⁶¹ Sources are unclear on this—for example, WASP Byrd Granger notes that it was instead General Arnold who suggested that Cochran take 25 highly qualified women to Britain.⁶² Either way, the idea was presented to Cochran and she ran with it. Once back in the States after her bomber flight, the First Lady called on Cochran and the two discussed American women pilots' potential for aiding in the war effort, winning over the President in the process.

Six months later, after drafting and presenting her plan to General Arnold, the general had a meeting with Air Marshall Arthur Harris of Great Britain. Harris confessed to Arnold how desperate the ATA was for qualified pilots, which the general then passed on to Cochran.⁶³ Cochran's priority was organizing a women's military pilot group in the United States, but seeing that she was not getting anywhere for the time being, Cochran agreed—with one stipulation. She required that if while she was away the time finally came for women to serve as pilots in the US, she would be allowed to break contract and return home to lead that organization. Arnold agreed to this, and on January 23, 1942, a telegram went out to all qualified women asking if they were willing to volunteer with the ATA.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 106.

⁶¹ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots*, 65.

⁶² Byrd H. Granger, *On Final Approach: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of W.W.II.*, (Scottsdale, AZ: Falconer Pub. Co., 1991), 11.

⁶³ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 97.

⁶⁴ Telegram from Jacqueline Cochran to Marjorie Hook, 23 January 1942, Marjorie E. Hook Papers, ATA Telegram Folder, Mss. 655c, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

Receiving 76 replies to her telegram in December 1941, Cochran selected the top 25 pilots who then began their 18 month contracts flying for the ATA in April 1942.⁶⁵ Back in the United States, Nancy Love, one of the top female pilots in the country and wife of Major Robert Love of the Air Transport Command, Ferrying Division (ATC/FD), suggested using qualified women pilots to ferry planes. She first worked with General Robert Olds, Commander of the Ferry Command, followed by the new head of the Domestic Command of ATC/FD, Colonel William Tunner, after Olds retired due to health issues. Tunner and Nancy Love devised a plan to hire women pilots with at least 500 flying hours.⁶⁶ When General Arnold caught wind of what Tunner was planning, he dismissed the concept. Some historians believe that Cochran forced the general to stop Love's plan because she wanted to be the one in charge of women pilots if a group was to ever be established, though Cochran herself states that the general promised her this leadership position.⁶⁷ In the end, Love and Tunner continued to work on a plan without Arnold's knowledge; the ATC desperately needed pilots, so they accepted the plan without the general's approval. Tunner required that the women be hired as second lieutenants, despite the fact that the Army's female auxiliary (WAAC) was not yet militarized. He worked with Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby on a plan to organize a group of women pilots within her WAAC.⁶⁸ The ATC needed pilots immediately, though, and could not wait for women to be militarized, so Tunner worked out a new plan with Love that would keep the women civilian while allowing them to fly military planes.

Luckily for the ATC/FD group, while all of this was going on in the spring of 1942, General Arnold was in the hospital with heart trouble in May, and his doctors did their best to

⁶⁵ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 143; Granger, *On Final Approach*, 11.

⁶⁶ Marianne Verges, *On Silver Wings: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 36.

⁶⁷ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 113.

⁶⁸ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 23.

keep him calm so he could recuperate, so he was unaware of what ATC was doing.⁶⁹ At the time, Cochran was in England with her 25 pilots and the ATA. Love's plan was moving along quickly, until recently-promoted Brigadier General Harold George, Commander of the Air Transport Command as of April 1942, conferred with Arnold.⁷⁰ Arnold had previously banned discussion of hiring women pilots until Cochran returned from England, which was to happen when he was finally ready to start employing them. WASP Byrd Granger in her detailed history of the American women pilots suggests that George was unaware of Arnold's ban and so helped Love work on her plan until it was time to implement it. At this time, Granger says that George was quite a busy man and so passed the plan over to the general, thinking he would know what to do.⁷¹ General Arnold halted the plan and rather than angrily repeat himself, he suggested they use all of the Civilian Air Patrol pilots first before considering women.⁷²

The First Lady's enthusiasm for the use of women pilots by the military may have been what pushed the AAF over the edge. Her "My Day" column (which was widely read) from September 1, 1942 focused solely on women pilots. She practically demanded that someone start using them soon—and at the time, it was considered unwise to displease the President's wife. Mrs. Roosevelt believed that women should have an "equal opportunity for noncombat service" in the Ferry Command, and that women should not be patient anymore: "Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used."⁷³ That same month that she published this article, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron and the Women's Flying Training Detachment were established.

⁶⁹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷³ Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, September 1, 1942," United Feature Syndicate, Inc., WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

In addition to the publication of Mrs. Roosevelt's support for a women's pilot program, the ATC's desperation became apparent by September 1942. The ATC needed pilots and were ready to start hiring women civilians. In the end, the night before Cochran was to return to the United States after working with the ATA, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson announced that a small group of women pilots would be formed in the Ferry Command, headed by Love.⁷⁴ Cochran was not pleased, General Arnold was confused as ATC had promised to go through him before hiring women, and it was now too late to stop the program. After being held up in England for a few days (which Cochran suspected was set up by ATC/FD to ensure that she would arrive after the Secretary of War's notice was released), Cochran was faced with a program antithetical to the one she hoped to establish.

Rather than start anew, Cochran decided to work with Love's group (the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, or WAFS).⁷⁵ She wanted to lead a training group, not just use women who had pilot's licenses as they were doing in Great Britain. Therefore, Cochran devised a plan to train women through the Training Command and then employ them in the Ferrying Command and other areas where pilots were needed once they graduated. This would keep her organization separate from Love's and would allow her to command a larger group of women pilots.

Cochran helped to establish the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) in September of 1942, shortly after the creation of WAFS. WFTD students flew with the Originals (the first WAFS) after graduation until the following summer, when the women pilots' assignments began to include positions other than ferrying. The WAFS and WFTD worked together, while somewhat detached, until about a year later when they were merged to form the

⁷⁴ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 117.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). In July 1943, control of all women pilots was vaguely given to Jacqueline Cochran, the Director of women pilots in the AAF; Nancy Love was named Executive for the WAFS in the Ferry Division.⁷⁶

Militarization was an issue for the WASPs from the very beginning, when Cochran and Love first presented their respective plans. A large portion of the issue of militarizing the WASPs was the fact that the Army and ATC wanted to do so through the Women's Army Corps. The pilots would come under control of Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby, the Commander of the WAC, who had no knowledge of flying; Jacqueline Cochran, the Director of Women Pilots, and other AAF officials required that the women have someone in command who actually understood pilots.⁷⁷ Cochran met with Hobby, and explained in her memoir that their discussion proceeded as such:

She opened the conversation by telling me she didn't know one end of a plane from another, but that if the pilots could be brought into the WAC, she would count on my direction of them. I told her that there was just about as much sense putting the women pilots under the WAC as putting the Air Force pilots back in the Army Signal Corps; that I was unalterably opposed to it and if the scheme were to mature, she would have to find another leader.⁷⁸

As with the creation of the WAAF when duties differed drastically from the ATS in Britain, the leader of the WAC knew nothing of flying, and duties of other women in the WAC were too different from what the WASPs were doing. Extremely opposed to the idea of militarization under WAC, Cochran noted in her WASP status report in August 1944 that the women should be treated like pilots, not Army women: "The WAC is a ground organization that infiltrates its work into all branches of the Army; the WASP is a flying organization confined in its activities to the

⁷⁶ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 102.

⁷⁷ Leni Leoti "Dedie" Deaton, Interview with Mary "Ziggy" Waurine Hunter, Oral history, (1975), Mss. 300, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection, 3.

⁷⁸ Cochran and Odum, *The Stars at Noon*, 121.

AAF.”⁷⁹ She went on to juxtapose the SPARS, WAVES, and Nurse’s Corps with the WASP, demonstrating that each of these groups received militarization separate from the WAC because of their specialized duties which suggests that the WASPs should have received the same treatment.⁸⁰ Debate over the best way to militarize the American women pilots stalled their militarization and factored into their program’s premature demise which will be explored in the next chapter. This was not an issue in Britain—pilots created the Air Transport Auxiliary under a civilian pilot organization and worked with the RAF, a purely aviation-oriented military service.

Women of the ATA

The first half of the 20th century was incredibly aviation-minded, therefore when Gerard d’Erlanger gave Pauline Gower permission to hire eight women pilots she was inundated with applications. She chose the top eight women pilots, most known by Gower prior to her country’s declaration of war. Her selection was limited to those that fit the following requirements, which were the same as those of the male ATA pool: minimum of 250 hours, passage of a flying test, aged 22 to 45. In fact, the women first chosen had between 600 and 2,000 hours of flying experience, and their ages ranged from 22 to 38.⁸¹ The First Eight were Winifred Crossley, Margaret Fairweather, Rosemary Rees, Marion Wilberforce, Margaret Cunnison, Gabrielle Patterson, Mona Friedlander and Joan Hughes. All were flight instructors, and the group included both the youngest woman to obtain a pilot’s license (Joan Hughes, at age 17) and the first woman to be appointed a flight instructor (Gabrielle Patterson), as well as the first woman to fly a Spitfire (Margaret Fairweather).⁸² This group of eight woman represented the best female

⁷⁹ Status report from Jacqueline Cochran to Gen. Henry Arnold, “WASP Status Report, August 1, 1944,” Caroline E. Shunn Papers, WASP-Military Forms, Correspondence Folder, Mss. 816c, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 9.

⁸⁰ Status report from Jacqueline Cochran to Gen. Henry Arnold, “WASP Status Report, August 1, 1944,” 9.

⁸¹ “‘ATA’ Girls,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 58, Jan-June 1940, 19 January 1940, 92.

⁸² “First Eight,” ATAHISTORY, <http://www.airtransportaux.com/firsteight.html>.

pilots of the time—nine, including their Commander, Pauline Gower. All were stationed at Hatfield initially, ferrying light training aircraft. The initial group of eight expanded to 26 by the end of 1940, with famed pilot Amy Johnson joining after some persuasion on Gower’s part, as well as Lettice Curtis whose memoir *The Forgotten Pilots* serves as the basis for a number of ATA histories today.⁸³

Approved to fly only Class 1 light training aircraft upon creation of the program as they were inexpensive to fix, the Air Ministry quickly revised its duties for the women pilots. Between the low numbers of planes damaged by the women, Pauline Gower’s vying for women’s equality, and the shortage of operational pilots, the Minister of Aircraft Production Lieutenant Colonel John Moore-Brabazon gave women permission to fly operational aircraft on March 1, 1941.⁸⁴ Soon, they transitioned to all classes of aircraft with the exception of Class 6 ‘flying boats.’⁸⁵ When flying all of the other Classes, including four-engine bombers, “the ferry pilots flew without radios, instrument training or weapons” despite being Luftwaffe targets and flying through Great Britain’s terrible weather patterns.⁸⁶

Each received training when moving up a Class, but they were often faced with a plane they had never flown before and yet were expected to ferry it. In such cases the women, and men, turned to their ATA Pilot’s Notes. There existed two forms: the Handling Notes, which contained information about only one type of plane and were made for pilots flying a plane for the first time, and the Ferry Pilots Notes, which contained a summary of all airplanes flown at the time.⁸⁷ ATA pilots depended on both sets of Notes as they would often fly multiple planes,

⁸³ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 37.

⁸⁴ Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 159.

⁸⁵ Only a small number of pilots were required to fly Class 6 planes and there were always enough men to fill those slots, so women were not necessary.

⁸⁶ Giles Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, (London: HarperPress, 2007), 194.

⁸⁷ “‘ATA Girls,’” *The Aeroplane*, 19 January 1940, 92.

and types, every single day. This made sense both economically and in terms of efficiency—rather than pick pilots up from the base they ferried a plane to and then return to base, they would ferry to one base, pick up another plane that had to be ferried elsewhere, and travel in this fashion until dusk, hopefully ferrying a plane at the end of the day back to their starting base. If far from home base, the women would take a train overnight sometimes traveling across the country, or if close a taxi Anson would pick them up along with other ferry pilots.

Gower's insistence on the women being equal to men in ATA spread from the type of planes flown to uniforms. Within the ATA, uniforms for men and women were practically the same, except the women had to purchase their own shirts and had skirts in addition to trousers. In *The Forgotten Pilots*, Lettice Curtis describes the women's uniform:

The Air Transport Auxiliary women's uniform consisted of a navy blue service type tunic with four large pockets, a belt with a large brass buckle and black composition buttons with a raised crown and the letters ATA. We were provided free with one skirt and one pair of slacks and when we went away we had to take the skirt, because, like the flying boots, we were only meant to wear our slacks on aerodromes. We were also provided with a great coat and a forage cap, thereafter the rest of the uniform consisting of black shoes and stockings, a black tie and RAF blue shirts we had to buy for ourselves.... The tunic carried one gold stripe on the shoulder for a second officer and two for a first and that, in the early days, was as far as the ranks went. For pilots there was also a pair of gold embroidered wings.⁸⁸

With these uniforms, the women and men of the ATA became part of the same quasi-military organization in terms of appearance rather than just on paper.

Equality spread from uniforms and planes to pay in 1943. When women were first incorporated into the ATA, their pay was 20 percent that of the male rate, partially because of the limited types of planes they flew.⁸⁹ In 1943 women received clearance to fly all types of planes, except Class 6, and so the question of a pay increase arose. Pauline Gower argued that women were finally performing the exact same job as men and so should receive the same pay; her

⁸⁸ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 44.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

argument convinced those in Parliament and as of June 1943 male and female salaries would be the same within ATA.⁹⁰

Women in the ATA flew from January 1, 1940 to the very end of the war, some exercising their power as a civilian to leave and get married or take part in some other work, but the majority continued flying until the end. Not all were British citizens—25 American women came to fly for the ATA in 1943, as over two dozen of their brothers did in previous years. In much smaller numbers came women pilots from all over the world, including two Polish women and one Argentinian, Maureen Dunlop, who graced the cover of *Picture Post* in 1942 advertising a story on the ATA women. No matter their nationality, each played a major part in the Allied war effort, giving up their time and health to ferry planes from maintenance units and factories to RAF bases. In the beginning they flew only open cockpit light trainers, often flying in freezing temperatures to Scotland and through terrible weather. In time they proved their abilities and transitioned on to Spitfires, Mosquitos, and Lancasters, performing extraordinarily well in areas previously barred to women—areas in which the public once thought women incapable of functioning.

The WASP

Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Love received a similar response from civilian women pilots to the establishment of the Women Airforce Service Pilots as Pauline Gower and her female ATA pool; the difference lay in the number of slots available. The ATA had 166 women flying by the end of the war. The WASP, on the other hand, accepted 1,830 into training and of that number 1,074 graduated. At first, those accepted had to have over 500 flying hours but once

⁹⁰ Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 178.

the WASP was established and intense training became part of the program, the time dropped to 35 hours—the hours required to obtain a private pilot's license.⁹¹

The first eleven American women pilots to fly military planes, called 'the Originals,' flew with the ATC and were sworn in on September 21, 1942. In doing so, they were told that there would be no distinction between them and the men flying for ATC.⁹² The Originals were 25 women strong, who averaged over 1,000 flying hours each.⁹³ The women in America were paid less than the men in ATC in the beginning as, like the Atagirls, they flew light aircraft. Although flying for the ATC, they officially belonged to the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), which consisted of only the most qualified women pilot applicants, similar to the ATA women's Pool.

When Jacqueline Cochran returned from England, she gained control of her own women pilots' organization, the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), which would train women with less experience to fly the Army way. Upon graduation, ATC would take a group from each class to join the WAFS and assist in ferrying. The first class in WFTD began their training on November 16, 1942. Colonel Tunner, Commanding Officer of the Ferrying Division, was wary of Cochran's graduates and so carefully chose new WAFS rather than accepting the entire batch of new WFTD graduates. Although he only wanted a few women at a time, Cochran announced in 1943 that she would be training 500 women pilots to fly for WAFS/ATC.⁹⁴ The two worked out a compromise: applicants had to have at least 200 flying hours, high school diplomas, be between 21 and 35 years old, and be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall.⁹⁵ This drastically reduced the applicant pool to a more acceptable number for Tunner, though applications still

⁹¹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, T-1.

⁹² Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

came in from women with less experience. As time went on, the requirements were lowered due to Cochran's dream of training all women to fly the Army way.

On August 5, 1943 all American women pilots came under the heading of Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP. Nancy Love continued to serve with The Originals, directing women flying for ATC, while Jacqueline Cochran became the Director of Women Pilots, acting as a liaison between the women and the Army Air Forces.⁹⁶ Soon after, the training center for women pilots was relocated to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas. Thanks to Nancy Love's push for transition prior to the renaming of women pilots, new WASPs could transition upon graduation, and actually had access to more than light trainers even in training.

At Avenger, the women learned to fly the Army way. They received the same training as male AAF cadets, except as they were not flying in combat they did not go through aerobatics or formation flying training. Their training flight time amounted to 210 hours and ground school eventually added up to 400 hours; these two measurements increased over the course of the program's existence as Tunner found many of the women unqualified for flying with ATC.⁹⁷ Once trainees completed their flight training, they had to pass a check ride with a civilian instructor and then with an AAF check pilot. These check pilots were tough, some infamous for washing women out of the program, but in the end over 1,000 passed.⁹⁸

Nancy Love had to create her own uniform for the WAFS and WFTD graduates as the AAF would not outfit them (they were a civilian flying corps). The uniform she devised was gray-green, with a belted jacket, pants, and an open-collared gray shirt.⁹⁹ Uniforms became an issue again when WAFS and WFTD consolidated to form WASP. As of August 21, 1943, when

⁹⁶ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 102.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁹ Sally Van Wagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines: the Unknown Heroines of World War II*, (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1979), 121.

the New York Times printed the article “Women War Pilots Named the WASPs,” noting that the women pilots would from that point on be called ‘WASPs,’ the women still did not have uniforms.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, Cochran won over General Arnold and got his approval to have her own design produced for all trainees—after turning down suggestions to use leftover Nurse’s Corps uniforms and extra material from the production of WAC uniforms to create the WASP uniform.¹⁰¹ In the end, the United States Armed Forces signed off on the now-famous Santiago Blue uniforms. WASPs were issued these well-cut uniforms along with berets, silver wings slightly more delicate and feminine than AAF pilot wings, a trench coat, and black calfskin gloves, in addition to the usual accessories like shoes.¹⁰² WASPs did not begin wearing the Santiago Blue uniforms until February 1944¹⁰³; prior to this, the WAFS continued to wear their gray-green uniforms while trainees wore whatever they had, some fashioning their own uniforms out of white shirts and khakis.

Once in WASP, having graduated from Avenger, American women pilots were sent to fly in ATC, if approved by Tunner, or participated in a number of experimental groups with the AAF. Cochran, among others in the AAF including General Arnold, hoped to experiment with women pilots to see just what positions women could take over in order to free up more men for combat.¹⁰⁴ She sent some to Camp Davis to try towing targets for antiaircraft artillery training; others went to South Plains AFB to be trained on C-60s to tow gliders; others still were sent to Camp Stewart on the top secret mission of learning to control radio-controlled drones from a

¹⁰⁰ “Women War Pilots Named the WASPs,” *New York Time*, 20 August 1943, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

¹⁰¹ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 123.

¹⁰² Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 167.

¹⁰³ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 296.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

mothership.¹⁰⁵ In fact, one of the reasons that WFTD and WAFS were combined was because of these duties given to women other than ferrying—General Arnold felt the women needed a new name that brought them all together hence the vague WASP, which does away with the “F” (ferrying).¹⁰⁶ Duties went beyond ferrying and even these three specialized areas of flying, and all were experimental yet the women performed as well as, if not better than, the men already working in those areas.

Conclusion

Taken separately, the WASP and ATA women pilots seem similar, performing many of the same functions, starting off with extremely experienced pilots, and dealing with some negative reactions from the public and members of the military. However, as the war progressed, the two programs grew farther and farther apart, with their growing number of differences exemplifying a major difference between their parent nations during the war which not only explains why the treatment of women differed, but how each country’s participation in World War II differed.

¹⁰⁵ For more information on each of these assignments, see Granger, *On Final Approach*, 152, 216, 211, respectively.

¹⁰⁶ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 147.

Chapter Two

Key Differences

Having presented the histories of women and war, and women pilots, in the last chapter, it is now possible to investigate the points in which the United States and Great Britain differed the most. The ways in which each treated and thought of its women pilots speak to greater overall differences between the two countries during World War II. Some have their base in World War I, others depend solely on the situation created by World War II and the country's readiness, and others still depend on the country's proximity to the fighting. These reasons for the differences will be explored further in the following chapter; first, a presentation of the differences themselves is necessary.

World War I and Gender Equality

World War I brought the first female military organizations into existence. Volunteer groups assisted their country's war effort before then and even during World War I, but for the first time military officials thought of women in terms of how they could contribute to the military instead of only through charity. Britain saw the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) arise in 1917, renamed the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1918 when the Queen took over as Commander-in-Chief, along with the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Although it entered the war years later than Britain, the United States also brought women's military organizations into being during World War I. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels found that no law stated that one had to be male to be in the Navy and so to free men to serve on the seas, he permitted women to enlist in

the Naval Reserve to work in secretarial work.¹ Women similarly enlisted in the Marines while others served with the American Expeditionary Force but could not commission into the AEF. Although assigned clerical duties for the most part, the fact that women were involved with the military in Great Britain and the United States broke down a gender barrier that had been in place for hundreds of years. In the States, women joined the Navy and Marines on par with male yeomen and marines. In Britain, women were given their own military auxiliaries. Both were breakthroughs in the history of women and war.

Women in the WRAF may have been placed in clerical positions but they had their own auxiliary and access to Britain's aeronautical sector; American women, on the other hand, could not participate in the US Aviation Section whatsoever. A women's air force was not created or even thought of; Professor Susan Zeiger asserts that the Wilson administration's "mobilization policy was intended to bring women into the war effort while minimizing the structural and ideological changes that enlisting women in the military would entail."² Women served with the AEF, in the Navy, and in the Marines but were kept as far from the actual military as possible. A woman's world was that of typing, dictation, and nursing not performing in combat roles, so even though women participated in the military their duties remained 'women's work.' Kimberly Jensen, a professor of history and gender studies at Western Oregon University, notes that "the primary purpose for military training and preparedness in the United States was the reinvigoration of manhood in the nation."³ Not a place to be used for invigorating womankind. Although gender equality was on its way to becoming attainable thanks to the enfranchisement

¹ Patricia J. Thomas, "Women in the Military; America and the British Commonwealth Historical Similarities," *Armed Forces & Society*, no. 4, (1978), 626.

² Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 11.

³ Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 38.

of women and the 'New Woman' that emerged in the 1920s, the 'women are homemakers' and 'men are protectors' stereotypes continued to pervade British and American society, and especially the armed forces. The military was a man's world, and although the Entente powers pushed against this in World War I by creating women's auxiliaries and dressing women in uniform, the military returned to being a man's world in both countries post-war.⁴

Great strides were taken in making women more equal to men when the Auxiliary Territorial Service and Women's Auxiliary Air Force were militarized, and even more so in the inclusion of women in the Air Transport Auxiliary. Militarizing British women ferry pilots never came into question even after the women had proved their flying prowess. The RAF passed ferrying duties over to the ATA, a purely civilian organization that employed men unfit for RAF duty. They could not join the military, therefore by flying for the ATA, women were deemed unfit for RAF duty as well. It can then be said that militarization would be the ultimate equalizer for women, in that women could hold rank over men, and they would receive the same benefits and be treated the same way. Unfortunately, militarizing the ATA was impossible because of the qualifications for men in the ATA. Instead, Commander Pauline Gower did her best to work with what she had by fighting for women's equality, a favorite cause of hers since before her appointment to the ATA. Because of her dedication to this issue, British women ferry pilots

⁴ A notable exception proving the rule: the Soviet Union. Neither the United States nor Great Britain was willing to permit its women to serve on the front lines or even within the military, unlike the Soviet Union where women fought as soldiers in the Women's Battalion of Death. Susan Zeiger asserts that the difference lies in the fact that the US and Great Britain were still sex-segregated societies. Women had not yet received the vote, though many believed they could through military service. Even while serving their assignments were 'women's work,' or so-called pink collar jobs, such as clerical duties, nursing, or telephone operations. To dissuade women from demanding military service, as the Soviet women soldiers were public knowledge, critics of female soldiers started rumors about the sexuality of the women soldiers, insinuating that they were lesbians--which was considered extremely immoral at the time. The stance taken in both the United States and Great Britain was that the military was for men, the purpose of men fighting was to protect women and children, and anything that went against this tradition was morally wrong. For more information on the Soviet female combat pilots, see Reina Pennington and John Erickson, *Wings Women and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

ended the war practically equal to their male counterparts. According to research performed by Gower's son Michael Fahie:

“By the middle of 1943, women were cleared to fly all types, with the exception, as previously mentioned, of flying boats. They worked alongside men, and did exactly the same work under the same conditions, so it was iniquitous that they should be paid twenty per cent less. ...It was arranged that Sir Stafford [Minister of Aircraft Production] would approach the Treasury, saying that he was likely to be asked in Parliament if women pilots doing exactly the same job as men were being paid less, and if so why? The ploy worked, and when Irene Ward, on the 18th of May, asked the Minister in the House of Commons about women pilots' conditions of pay, he was able to respond by saying that as from June, their salaries would be brought into line with the men.”⁵

And so they were. This is the only organization in which men and women received the same treatment during World War II.⁶

Americans experienced some of this equality in 1942 when Jacqueline Cochran brought 25 women pilots to Britain to serve in the ATA. Although the previously described level of equality had not yet been attained by the British women, the Americans worked on a much more even level with the men than any of the WASPs would back home. American ATA applicants received the same pay as men, an additional \$25 each week which was deposited in American bank accounts while the pilots were abroad, and a \$10,000 insurance policy.⁷ For whatever reason, none of this carried over into the planning of the WASPs. In fact, one of the main reasons women pilots called for militarization in the States was the promise of insurance. WASP women never received the same pay as their male counterparts. WAFS started out making \$50 less than men per month because they were permitted to fly only light trainers (and they were women)

⁵ Michael Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, (Peterborough: GMS Enterprises, 1995), 178.

⁶ Gower's son, Michael Fahie, states in his biography of Gower *A Harvest of Memories*: “As far as I am aware, the Air Transport Auxiliary was the first major organization or corporation to treat men and women equally as a matter of policy” (179). I have found this to be true of World War II, though in the United States in World War I men and women in the Navy were equals—because of this, I added a qualifier (World War II) to his statement.

⁷ Byrd H. Granger, *On Final Approach: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of W.W. II.*, (Scottsdale, AZ: Falconer Pub. Co., 1991), 12.

while the men were out flying larger, heavier aircraft.^{8 9} Questions arose about salary when the women began transitioning on to more powerful planes, but it was never increased.

The WAFS were closest to their male colleagues, in many ways similar to the ATA women: they had their own squadrons at a few AAF bases, as the ATA did with RAF bases, and after Nancy Love pushed for transition, the WAFS transitioned up the scale of airplanes just as the ATA did, soon flying the same planes as the men. Each squadron had a female in charge, and the overall group of women ferry pilots had a female commander (Nancy Love and Pauline Gower, respectively). WAFS worked within the Air Transport Command, under the direction of Nancy Love, who in turn answered to Colonel William Tunner, Commanding Officer of the Ferry Division of ATC.¹⁰ Women in the ATA also flew within an originally male organization, headed by Pauline Gower, with Gerard d'Erlanger in charge of the entire ATA. The difference lies in pay. WAFS continued to receive the same pay as when they began, back when they flew light trainers. Their pay did not increase as they transitioned on to more powerful aircraft, and the WAFS never received the same pay as their male colleagues. ATA women eventually were paid the same as the men, but they were by no means integrated, and neither were the WAFS.

While attaining some equality pay-wise, in terms of gender integration WASP trainees were kept completely separate from men. Nicknamed "Cochran's Convent" by outsiders and trainees, the training facilities at Avenger Field, after the transfer from Houston to their own base

⁸ Pay discrimination based on gender existed until the Equal Pay Act of 1963. During World War II, many of the positions women took on required less work on their part and so employers cited the discrepancy in type of work as the reason for the difference in pay.

⁹ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 73.

¹⁰ "Woman Flyers," *New York Times*, 11 July 1943, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

in Sweetwater, Texas, were restricted to women only.¹¹ A final group of male trainees were at Avenger when the women arrived, and other men repeatedly landed there when word spread that girls were there; however, once the last male trainees left, Cochran put an end to these “emergency landings” and men in general.¹² For a time, though, Avenger was a co-educational flight school.¹³

Dedie Deaton, Chief Establishment Officer of the WASP women while training in Sweetwater, noted that when the training school was co-ed, everything was very controlled. The men “were very conscious of the fact that if there was any incident whatsoever, those boys would either get busted out or moved out.”¹⁴ Everyone behaved, enjoyed their proximity to the opposite sex, and did not want to risk anything that would change their situation. These few months were as close to men as the women trainees would ever get in the United States. Once they left, “Cochran’s Convent” began and the women were labeled different and unequal, with their own separate flying group and lower wages all while being trained like Army Air Forces men. Cochran tried for ‘separate but equal’ in order to prove that women pilots were just as good as the men, but she instead reestablished the gender barrier. This is something Pauline Gower fought directly against in England.

ATA women moved away from their initial all-female pool at Hatfield in 1941 when the nearby De Havilland plant began to produce Spitfires rather than the Moths that women were cleared to fly. Another all-female pool was created at Cosford, and some women were assigned

¹¹ “Cochran’s Convent” was the name women trainees gave to their training base, Avenger Field, because of the fact that their leader Jacqueline Cochran ensured that the base was restricted to women only, with the exception of male instructors, though they did not live at Avenger like the trainees.

¹² Granger, *On Final Approach*, 228.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁴ Leni Leoti “Dedie” Deaton, Interview with Mary “Ziggy” Waurine Hunter, Oral history, (1975), Mss. 300, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 18.

to male-majority bases elsewhere.¹⁵ Sir Francis Shelmerdine, the Director-General of Civil Aviation, wrote back in 1939 that “It will be necessary for obvious reasons, to keep the women’s section separate from the men’s section of the ATA and to have a woman in administrative charge of it.”¹⁶ Shelmerdine did not outline those “obvious reasons,” though it can be assumed that he was referencing morality. Both the AAF and the ATA worried about morality and the women pilot’s innocence when they gave them permission to take on a very masculine position, one in which they would interact with men quite often and usually without a chaperone. To ‘protect’ the women, top brass kept them away from men as much as they could—not that this stopped many of the pilots from marrying AAF and RAF men both during and after the war.

Sir Shelmerdine also noted that the qualifications for British women pilots would be the exact same as those for the men, somewhat bridging the gap between men and women.¹⁷ Looking back, his orders might not seem very progressive; however, the women could not have had the same qualifications as healthy, young RAF pilots. It would not have been fair to the men in the ATA. The ATA was purposely set up to allow men unfit for RAF duty to fly and serve their country. They were experienced pilots nonetheless, and several had served as combat pilots in the First World War. To these men, ATA came to stand for “Ancient, Tattered Airmen,” as it was a true description of the majority of them.¹⁸ Therefore, if women were to be held to the same standards as RAF men, they could not possibly be part of the ATA as the men were not held to that high of standards. Even though gender equality within the ATA was limited to young women and older men unfit for RAF duty, the Atagirls did obtain equal pay for equal work by the end of the war.

¹⁵ Giles Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, (London: HarperPress, 2007), 174.

¹⁶ As quoted in Lettice Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots: a story of the Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939-1945*, (Henley-on-Thames: Foulis, 1971), 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, 10.

Commander Pauline Gower fought for equal pay and work within the ATA, following the parameters laid out before women gained admittance into the ATA, and so in fact fought for equality with ATA men, not men in general. Gower despised the ‘heroines of the air’ image the Atagirls were given by the press, as even that moniker separated them further from the men. She did not want them treated as exceptional because they were women, like Jacqueline Cochran treated the WASPs. As quoted by Sally Knapp in 1946, Gower stated that “Flying is a job, and like any other should be done by the people qualified to do it. Women in this service were treated exactly like the men, that’s one of the things I fought for from the beginning. I have no patience with the type of girl who asks for equal treatment with men, and then, when she gets it, expects special consideration because she is a woman.”¹⁹ One can see why she and Jacqueline Cochran did not get along too well—Cochran’s WASPs had special uniforms that purposely made the women look good, they were transferred to different bases if they did not like their current base, and Cochran basically catered to ‘her girls.’ Nancy Love, on the other hand, ran her WAFS like Gower ran her Atagirls: they wore plain gray uniforms “built for utility, not beauty,” and the women were to just do the job they were given, proving that women were equal to men in flying.²⁰ True equality between men and women, to Gower and Love, was being treated the exact same no matter what gender, what mattered was the pilot’s flying ability. Gower managed to achieve this by the end of the war. Cochran also met her goal of demonstrating that women could be trained like men and ‘fly the Army way,’ but the WASPs were never considered equal to their male counterparts in the AAF.

¹⁹ Sally Elizabeth Knapp, *New Wings for Women*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), 22.

²⁰ “Mrs. Love’s Flying Experience Dates Back to Schoolgirl Days,” *Good Housekeeping*, Series: Women’s Share in Aviation, No. 1, 22 November 1942, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

Uniforms were another point on which the ATA women were drawn closer to the men and the WASPs further isolated from AAF men. ATA men and women wore the same uniforms—dark blue, single-breasted, and similar to that of BOAC’s civil airline uniform but with special badges and buttons, and gold pilot’s wings.²¹ ATA pilot Lettice Curtis also remembered having to buy her own RAF blue shirt to wear under the ATA tunic.²² There existed a streamlined look that went for both male and female ATA pilots, similar to the military today, though of course women were issued skirts in addition to slacks. Uniforms were issued from the ATA’s inception in 1939, and to women pilots in 1940.

In the United States, it took months before uniforms were ready for the WASPs. These were very feminine uniforms, meant to make the women look like women, rather than the mass, faceless army that uniforms were intended to create. Additionally, and more significantly, the uniforms limited their connection with male pilots in the AAF. WASPs did not blend in with the AAF, rather they could not have stood out more. This is not to say that the ATA women looked dowdy, wearing a uniform not specially designed for them, but they did fit in more with their fellow pilots than the WASPs. The WASPs were again leaning more toward separate and unequal, rather than the intended separate but equal.

Female pilots on both sides of the Atlantic served in positions *alongside* rather than *in* the air force, which is a crucial distinction; these women dressed in military garb but were not enlisted soldiers. Military and government officials on both sides of the Atlantic assumed that the public was not yet ready to see women enlisted in the armed forces, although Great Britain was closer to enlisting women than the United States. Considering the fact that the US entered World War I three years after Britain, most of Great Britain’s manpower was used up by 1917, which is

²¹ E. C. Cheesman, *Brief Glory, the story of A.T.A.*, (Leicester: Harborough Pub. Co., 1946), 12.

²² Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 44.

most likely what caused the creation of women's auxiliaries. As noted earlier, overarching Victorian themes of the woman at home and the man out into the world, working and protecting his family, extended into the twentieth century especially in Britain. Historian Jenny Gould remarks in her essay "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain" that had the Army been able to secure all of the men it needed, it would not have turned to women and the auxiliaries would not have been created.²³ Nevertheless, there was a shortage and women were utilized, and proved that they were capable of work previously thought to be too much for a woman to handle.

Some of these differences created animosity on the side of the male pilots and soldiers toward women pilots in both the United States and Britain. On a case-to-case basis, it seems as if the Americans felt more hostility than the British, in part due to the short-lived manpower shortage and the fact that their country was not a war zone—basically, Britain needed to be behind its women workers and quasi-soldiers. The United States could instead experiment with women pilots because they were not quite necessary, leading male pilots to question why women were being used at all. WASPs dealt with possible sabotage, distrust, and attacks from the press; Atagirls faced similar attacks when women were first admitted to the ATA, but after the First Eight proved themselves, all were accepted and revered for the most part. A discussion of reactions from the public and from male pilots toward the women can be found later in this chapter.

Social Class

A common theory about war and class holds that the gulf between classes narrowed during World War I and II, with the widening of work opportunities and increased participation

²³ Jenny Gould and Margaret R. Higonnet, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 123.

in politics as the cause. In some cases this may be true, as for an example the WASP did indeed bring together a variety of female pilots from all over the country, but it does not hold true for the ATA. The well-respected women and war historians Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield attack this theory head-on, noting that Britain used the theory as a form of propaganda, a “‘national togetherness’ campaign,” yet classes remained segregated.²⁴ The women did meet women of other circles that they would not have met under other circumstances, so some social mixing occurred but Braybon and Summerfield assert that it was not to any great extent. An issue with the women pilots in particular when it came to class was the cost of flying. A certain type of woman flew for the ATA, often as a result of the flying hours required to apply. Because of this, even the WASP was not as socioeconomically diverse as other organizations that women participated in during the war. Learning to fly was not cheap. Marianne Verges, WASP historian, writes that “flying was for the privileged few” as the training required to obtain a private pilot’s license in 1938 cost about one-fourth of an average person’s yearly income.²⁵ Flying was attainable by a certain class, but it is the way in which each woman arrived in this class that separates the British from the American pilots.

Women in the ATA did not come from a range of backgrounds like the WASPs, mostly because of the required flying hours. Pauline Gower drew her chosen First Eight from a handful of the best female pilots in Britain—to be included in this group, one had to have an extraordinary number of flying hours logged. To have this many hours, a woman almost certainly had to belong to the upper class which gave women pilots in Britain particularly a snobbish air—the public and newspapers pigeonholed the First Eight as society girls. Note,

²⁴ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London: Pandora Press, 1987) 197.

²⁵ Marianne Verges, *On Silver Wings: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 7.

however, that upper class in Britain was not equivalent to the upper class in the United States. It brought with it wealth as well as connections and power, some of which had been within a family for hundreds of years. As much as they protested that label, though, when the ATA women landed at the grounds of one of Britain's stately homes or castles that had been converted into landing strips, many recognized the lawns from weekend parties they had attended before the war.²⁶ Gower made certain that they were not thought of as snobs, however, despite the fact that even Amy Johnson was practically considered "blue collar" in their circle.²⁷ Commander Pauline Gower herself was the daughter of an MP, Sir Robert Gower, and despite doing her best to work for a living by flying rather than using her family's wealth, her father did purchase Gower her first airplane.²⁸

As a result of this class distinction, the ATA women had higher hours than the WASPs. By the end of the war, the WASP hired women under 21 with only 35 hours of flying time, while all of the British ATA pilots were older than 21 with often over 500 hours logged.²⁹ This caused a discrepancy in the way each country viewed its women pilots—the younger, less experienced Americans were seen as reckless, the British as experienced pilots and rule-followers. It did not help that the first image the British had of Americans were young male soldiers, barely eighteen and "ill-mannered."³⁰ Additionally, the female that the British expected was the Hollywood version—the only American women most had ever seen.³¹ Because of these images and stereotypes, the American women arriving in Britain in 1942 with Jacqueline Cochran to fly for the ATA did not exactly receive a warm welcoming. These women were among the group of

²⁶ Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ Alison King, *Golden Wings: the story of some of the women ferry pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary*, (London: White Lion Publishers, 1975), 58.

American pilots most similar to ATA female pilots, in terms of experience and age, and so the Atagirls soon tolerated them. The greatest differences between American and British women pilots were observed later, when WASP was formed and fresh-faced young pilots were accepted to the program.

In the States, the WASP attracted women from at least the middle class, but quite often they had worked to pay for their flight training—they definitely were not ‘noblewomen’ like those in Britain. For comparison’s sake, WASP leader Jacqueline Cochran was very wealthy, but only after being born in Pensacola, working since age 11, and eventually working her way up to a position in a New York-based hair salon that brought her together with Floyd Odlum, her millionaire future-husband.³² Historians often criticize Jacqueline Cochran for the way she acted in Britain, however they fail to consider the possibility that she was doing precisely what needed to be done in order for her to attain her goal of establishing a women pilot’s organization in America. Of course, the mink coat she wore and the fancy meals she was served seemed extravagant and disrespectful to a country entrenched in war and rationing, which she continues to be criticized for, but she was in Britain on a mission. Rather than offering her services to the ATA as her recruits did, she never flew in Britain and instead spent her time networking and observing. Her assistance in setting up the Eighth Air Force often goes unrecognized in WASP histories while her maintenance of a flat in London for the American pilots is typically criticized, despite her intentions of simply keeping a nice space available for “her girls” to relax in on days off.³³ She was new money, used to a certain lifestyle, and looking to gain respect from higher-ups in Britain in order to pave the way for the creation of a respected female pilot group in the United States.

³² Elizabeth R. Valentine, “No. 1 Woman Flier,” *New York Times Magazine*, 13 July 1941, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971. Mss. 250. Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 11.

³³ Jacqueline Cochran and Floyd B. Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), 111.

Nancy Love, the head of the WAFS, resembled Pauline Gower in terms of upbringing, having attended an East Coast boarding school and Vassar, and was the daughter of a doctor in Northern Michigan, although her family was still by no means ‘privileged’ in the British sense. Love’s mother may have been, coming from a prominent Boston family, but in the stock market crash of 1929 the family lost so much Nancy had to drop out of Vassar after attending for only three semesters.³⁴ From that point on, she, like other future WASPs, took on jobs she was not particularly interested in solely to earn money to pay for flight lessons. Like Cochran, Love also chose well in the husband department: Robert Love, who she met while working for his Inner City Aviation, was a major in the Air Corps Reserve and friendly with Lt. Col. Robert Olds, who in World War II established the Air Corps Ferrying Division.

Love and Cochran epitomized the American Dream: Love’s father worked to bring the family into prominence and even when they fell on hard times, she continued to work hard herself to get into flying, and Cochran dragged herself up by her bootstraps ending up very wealthy thanks to her cosmetics business and marriage. Although WASP historian Sarah Byrn Rickman’s subject is Nancy Love and her husband in this excerpt, her statement is applicable to Love and Cochran as well: “They were the products of capitalism, free enterprise, and prosperity, and the lack of the caste system that kept the people of Europe bound tightly in their class-consciousness.”³⁵ And luck, in the case of their husbands. These upbringings carry with them a certain mentality, one which distinctly separated the Americans from the British.

Women hired to fly with the WAFS (the Originals) had to have a very high number of hours like the Atagirls, and therefore often came from more upper-class backgrounds, again similar to the ATA. Once Jacqueline Cochran set the WFTD in motion and the number of hours

³⁴ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

required dropped, a wider range of women joined the WFTD and WASP. Because of the interview process for WASP, applications from lower-class girls were tossed aside as Cochran wanted a certain look for 'her' organization, but the level of class diversity within the WASP was certainly higher than that of the ATA. As mentioned previously, war is considered a mixer, something that brings people together across a wide variety of social classes and income levels-- this held true in the United States as the war progressed, but it did not in Britain. Women came to join WASP from all over the country; the British Atagirls also came from all over and even from other nations, but most had been part of a small network of pilots from before the war, often wealthy and most certainly with ties to military and political top brass. These differences between the two countries in terms of the class of its women military pilots exemplify very basic social differences between the United States and Great Britain during World War II and led to a difference in their acceptance by British males. The upper-class atmosphere of the women's portion of the ATA resulted in a certain reaction from their male colleagues and the British public, one completely opposite that of the American male pilots with regard to the WASP.

Society's Attitudes toward Women

Although eventually praised for their contribution to the war effort, Atagirls note a few instances in their memoirs when they were treated differently based solely on their gender. Generally, male pilots in the ATA and officials leading the organization respected the women; the majority of the backlash came from the public, not those associated with the ATA. *The Aeroplane*, an air-minded publication in Britain founded in 1911, ran a series of articles and letters from readers regarding women pilots, particularly focused on the creation of the women's pool of the ATA. Readers wrote in complaining that the women were taking over jobs that men needed and that their service was not patriotic, but publicity-seeking. In an article from January

1940, written just days after the First Eight began flying for the ATA, *The Aeroplane* editor-in-chief C. G. Grey states that he does not overall object to women pilots, but does when there is a shortage of male pilots.³⁶

This is a common theme throughout the articles and letters to the editor, questioning why women were hired to fly when “there are thousands of competent male pilots walking about with their hands in their pockets.”³⁷ At the time, only eight women pilots flew for the ATA, and yet the public acted as if hundreds had been hired. They believed the Air Ministry was purposely choosing women over men, when in reality the ATA had to choose those with the most flying experience and those who could not fly for the RAF. Many of those men with their hands in their pockets did not have enough hours to qualify for the ATA. One such man wrote *The Aeroplane* and had his letter printed in the May 10, 1940 issue. This ‘Lancelot Smith’ asserted that the women were “unscrupulous and incompetent girls” and that men like him should be hired—the problem is, which another reader comments on a few weeks later, that Smith had only 20 hours and 55 minutes of solo flying time.^{38 39} The ATA required 250 hours for both male and female applicants. If anyone was ‘incompetent’ and should not be ferrying, it would be Smith and his fellow male pilots with flying experience under 250 hours. At the time, finding pilots with that many hours was extraordinarily difficult, and is one of the reasons why women were accepted into the ATA, as there were not enough men to take care of all of the ferrying jobs. Perhaps the public was unaware of the ATA’s requirements which led to these misinformed comments—as time went on, the articles began to clarify exactly how much the women were paid, what the requirements were for each gender, and moved toward the facts rather than wild speculation as in

³⁶ C. G. Grey, “A Rank Scandal,” *The Aeroplane* v.58, Jan-June 1940, 5 January 1940, 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Lancelot Smith to Editor, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 58, Jan-June 1940, 10 May 1940, 662.

³⁹ F. D. P. to Lancelot Smith, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 58, Jan-June 1940, 31 May 1940, 745.

the early days of the ATA. With this came a decrease in printed letters to the editor regarding the women pilots.

ATA pilot Lettice Curtis states that she and her fellow pilots were finally accepted by 1943, the year in which women “had proved themselves capable of flying all types of aircraft including four-engined [sic] bombers...”⁴⁰ In Britain it seems as if the public willingly accepted women pilots once they understood the ATA program and saw that women could safely and skillfully fly every plane that men flew. Some criticism was evident when the program began, as with any new program that goes against tradition, but it dwindled as time went on. When the magazine ran a notice under its “News of the Week” section for vacancies in the ATA that would be filled by WAAFs, women without flying experience, the only flak it received came from an experienced woman pilot above the age requirement, who asked that women like her be chosen first before the WAAFs.⁴¹ By the ATA’s fifth anniversary, even *The Aeroplane* spoke of women and men pilots together, as one flying force, and mentioned their feats and talent rather than their gender and encroachment on men’s jobs.⁴²

Interestingly, the United States may have supported women pilots entering the military before the First Eight gained admittance to the ATA. In an article from *The American Weekly*, dated November 12, 1939, a reporter spotlighted Miss Mona Friedlander, the “human target” from Britain.⁴³ At the time, Friedlander offered her services to anti-aircraft units and flew as a target—something that Cochran would for WASPs to take part in years later. The most surprising bit comes at the end of the article, where the reporter quips that Friedlander would

⁴⁰ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 20.

⁴¹ Lady Joan Hoare, “The Age Limit,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 65, July-Dec 1943, 3 September 1943, 284.

⁴² “Air Transport Auxiliary,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 67, July-Dec 1944, September 11, 1944, 329.

⁴³ “A Charming Target for British Soldiers,” *The American Weekly Sun*, 12 November 1939, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

gladly join the Royal Air Force “but John Bull doesn’t want women for such jobs.”⁴⁴ This offhanded comment suggests that perhaps he, assuming the reporter is male, disapproved of Britain’s stance at the time which was to keep women out of combat. The same is true of the United States however, if not more so, considering that Britain permitted women to fly military planes beginning in 1940 when General Arnold of the AAF would not even think about using women pilots until 1942, and that was only after Jacqueline Cochran’s hounding.

Despite the cases of discrimination in the ATA, the Women Airforce Service Pilots had a much harder time dealing with their male counterparts than the Atagirls. Even British historian and reporter Giles Whittell acknowledges this: “[Cochran] knew at firsthand how women pilots were regarded on both sides of the Atlantic, and on the American side sabotage seemed all too plausible.”⁴⁵ He suggests that the misogyny in the United States did not extend to Britain because its situation demanded acceptance of the women—they would gladly take pilots of either gender as the pilot shortage was so dire. The following chapter will further explore this as a reason for the difference in acceptance of women pilots between the two nations. Perhaps outspokenness and disrespect factored into cultural differences as well, so this difference was not solely based on need. Either way, despite a series of popular articles including a large spread in *Life* magazine, American servicemen quite often discriminated against the women pilots, condemning them near the end of the war for supposedly taking jobs from them, and believing that women were not meant to fly.⁴⁶ Some bases in particular terribly mistreated the women pilots stationed there, possibly causing a few deaths and generally making their lives difficult.

⁴⁴ “A Charming Target for British Soldiers,” *The American Weekly Sun*, 12 November 1939.

⁴⁵ Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, 129.

⁴⁶ Since the time of the first woman pilot, there was a belief that women were biologically incapable of flying, that “women were especially fragile, and worse yet, unreliable during their periods.” This continued into the 1940s, but when the American women pilot programs began, Jacqueline Cochran decided to put an end to the rumor. She selected Dr. Monserud to research the connection (or lack thereof) between menstruation and a woman’s ability to fly. In the end, the doctor found that the women’s “overall performance was actually better around the first day of

In the United States, the bases that felt the most extreme male disapproval were Camp Davis and Romulus.⁴⁷ March 1943 marked the point at which women were restricted from flying copilot with male pilots on bombers, but at Romulus the restrictions ventured into more extreme territory.⁴⁸ Women were not permitted to fly anything but light training aircraft, often with open cockpits which were terrible to fly in Michigan winters, could not transition on any high-powered single or twin-engine planes, were forced to alternate days with men, and if they had to fly on the same day as a man, the two were sent in opposite directions if at all possible.⁴⁹ Needless to say, WAFS leader Nancy Love was not happy with this situation—according to WASP historian Marianne Verges, she “hit the roof” when she heard what was going on at Romulus.⁵⁰ The situation was eventually remedied, but men at Romulus for whatever reason appeared to be more against women pilots than many of the other bases, with the exception of Camp Davis.

Romulus was a ferrying base for women beginning with the WAFS—women were not sent to Camp Davis for ferrying, rather it was used experimentally by Jacqueline Cochran to test whether or not women could take over flying jobs other than ferrying. New graduates were sent to Camp Davis to tow targets so that anti-aircraft units could get in some practice before going overseas while other women engaged in top-secret drone experiments.⁵¹ Women were successful in both of these functions, but only after Cochran was forced to fly to the base to reprimand the major in charge for assigning them to administrative duties.⁵² Sadly, problems between men and women on base did not disappear after Cochran intervened; in September 1943, a pilot, Betty

their periods and that they lost less time per month due to physiological reasons, both during training and operational flying, than men,” which put the rumors to rest. From Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 158.

⁴⁷ Today, Romulus Army Air Force base is known as Detroit Metro Airport.

⁴⁸ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 122.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁵⁰ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 90.

⁵¹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 160.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 152.

Taylor Wood, died when her plane crashed while towing targets.⁵³ Her A-24 had issues with the throttle, marked by another WASP on the plane's service record, but somehow that note disappeared and the plane was not repaired—the record, in effect, showed that the plane was in good shape. Furthermore, the fuel tanks had not exploded when the plane rolled and, upon investigation, Cochran found sugar in them. She considered this an act of sabotage but it is possible, as Giles Whittell suggests in *Spitfire Women of World War II*, that the sugar story was really just the maintenance staff looking for a way out. Cochran never reported her findings.^{54 55} Sabotage was highly likely, however, in light of how misogynistic many Army Air Force bases were as well as the animosity Cochran encountered back in 1941 when she flew a bomber to England. The cause of this incident remains a mystery.

The very first death of an American female pilot on active duty can also be attributed to men not taking the women pilots seriously. Cornelia Fort, a flight instructor before joining the WAFS and a witness to the attacks on Pearl Harbor, died on March 21, 1943. Flying out of Long Beach, a male pilot nearby decided to try to scare her, according to WASP Byrd Granger, and performed a slow roll around her. He miscalculated his distance from her and one of his wings cut through her plane's canopy, killing her almost instantly.⁵⁶ This incident, along with the death of Betty Taylor Wood were labeled 'accidents' and promptly forgotten.⁵⁷ One of the reasons for

⁵³ Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, 128.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Cornelsen, "Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II: Exploring Military Aviation, Encountering Discrimination, and Exchanging Traditional Roles in Service to America," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 4 (2005), 114.

⁵⁵ Interestingly, there is some proof that the women in WASP knew about Cochran's discovery despite the fact that she never reported the sugar. Betty Strohfus, one of the last WASP still alive today, noted in an article from Fox 11 News in Wisconsin this past March that "'A lot of the men did not want women there flying, but some of them put sugar in our girls' gas tanks and they had accidents and some of them were killed. And we went to Jacqueline Cochran and we said, 'we can't let this happen to our women.' They said that if we go and complain about what's happening, they'll shut the program down.'" From Kelly Schlicht, "Female pilot shares WWII stories," FOX 11 Online—WKLUKTV, created 6 March 2014, <http://fox11online.com/2014/03/06/female-pilot-shares-wwii-stories/>.

⁵⁶ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 67.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 439-440. Another case of possible sabotage: WASP Byrd Granger, author of *On Final Approach*, had problems in late 1944 with a P-51 she was ferrying, managed to land, and then found that the oil lines were crossed

this and Cochran's initial denial of sabotage, is that, as Deborah Douglas, curator of science and technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Museum, states: "This information had been suppressed for fear that adverse publicity would end the entire women's program."⁵⁸ The fear that Cochran, Love, and all of the people wishing for WAFS/WASP to succeed felt did result in good press for the women pilots on the whole, which kept the programs going strong through 1944. That is, until editorials and letters came flowing in from disgruntled and out of work ex-combat pilots, flight instructors, and civilian pilots associated with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

A vocal minority of American men were just not accepting of women as pilots; they did not feel it was right that women were flying the same planes that they so heroically flew in combat. In the end, it was this thinking that killed the WASP organization. Women were necessary, at first, in a wide variety of positions in the armed forces as "the growing shortage of skilled men created an urgent need for women to become fully skilled aircraft fitters, mechanics, searchlight operators and so on..." along with ferry pilots.⁵⁹ Still, as Penny Summerfield and Gail Braybon assert, a shortage did not yield acceptance; men still did not believe women should be employed in the armed forces. This became especially true as men returned from the theaters of war after fulfilling their duty as combat pilots.⁶⁰ These men, along with unemployed, yet

with the coolant and hydraulic lines. The seals were blown and the engine seized. Something like this would not have gone unnoticed by the flight crew before takeoff. Granger lists another example of a WASP ferrying a PQ target drone that would not level off while in flight; it continued to fall (gliding) and hit the ground where one wheel dropped down but the other did not. The pilot was hospitalized for days. The drone's problem: it ran out of fuel because the flight line crew left one of the wing tanks empty.

⁵⁸ Deborah G. Douglas and Amy E. Foster, *American Women and Flight since 1940*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 98.

⁵⁹ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 172.

⁶⁰ Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: the Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 22-23. Often, pilots stationed in the United States expressed the most resentment, according to Merryman, as the combat pilots overseas saw the shortage of combat pilots firsthand. As quoted by Merryman, Captain Bob Morgan, retired, stated that "The importance [of WASP] was that it relieved us to go off to do our combat duties and not have to ferry airplanes all over the country or test them after they were

lesser experienced, civilian pilots and instructors, seem to have felt threatened by the women pilots, as if they were “usurpers who held jobs rightly belonging to breadwinners.”⁶¹ Once the men publicly protested their unemployment at a time of relatively high female employment, the public caught on and began to denounce the work the women pilots were doing. Rather than providing a much-needed service to their nation at war, they labeled the women unpatriotic, taking jobs from breadwinners, and only flying for the fun of it (implying that the women did not need the work). To support their claim, the men twisted facts around, saying, for example, that women with under 35 hours were flying for WAFS, when actually the ATC required 1000 hours of experience in addition to a 200 horsepower rating or better at the time.⁶² They asserted that WASPs were keeping ‘qualified’ men from flying for the ATC when most had too few hours and were not physically or academically fit for ferrying.⁶³ Many of the instructors could have chosen from a variety of positions within the ATC, same with students, but what they wanted, for whatever reason, were the ferrying positions that women just so happened to hold. All of their bellyaching found its way into popular magazines and media sources, turning the public against the WASPs as they accepted the instructors and students’ claims as fact.⁶⁴

In the end, the problem was not that women were taking men’s jobs, but that the jobs open to men were those in the infantry, not in the cockpit of an airplane. The Army desperately needed soldiers—remember that mid-1944 was the invasion of Europe and the United States saw an increase in the death toll—not pilots.⁶⁵ The war had expanded into Europe and the Pacific, and so men were needed overseas, not ferrying planes within the United States. But, as with any

repaired—and that was very important because we were short of pilots, and we needed all the combat pilots we could possibly have, and these gals could fly anything we could fly.”

⁶¹ Dean Jaros, *Heroes Without Legacy: American Airwomen, 1912-1944*, (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 65.

⁶² Granger, *On Final Approach*, 334.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁶⁵ Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 44.

war, many of the men knew that leaving the country put their life on the line and some were scared to do so. Many were only 18, after all. There were other positions open for these men, especially instructors, within the ATC but not in the Ferrying Division. They overlooked this fact in order to continue campaigning against the WASPs.

Militarization dramatically impacted the already negative opinion of WASPs in the United States as it added fuel to the civilian instructors' and students' fire. The men complained that women were taking their jobs, add on top of this the fact that women had been attending Officer Training School in Florida in preparation for militarization, and the men had all they needed to shut down WASP entirely. The public could handle women in 'pink collar' jobs, sitting at a typewriter in uniform, but a woman pilot flying on the same level as a male hot-shot AAF pilot was unthinkable. Unemployed instructors and pilot-students themselves could use the issue of militarization to garner more support for their cause from the public, while increasing their own rage. From their position, it was bad enough that women had 'taken' jobs they should have, and even worse if these women came to be equal to AAF pilots—the hotshots of the era. And, in the end, this thinking is exactly what led to the end of the WASPs.

How was it possible, then, for the ATA women to fly until the end of the war without much resistance? Male pilots appreciated and respected their fellow ATA pilots, and though the public at first gave the women a lot of flak, believing they were taking over men's jobs, once the women proved themselves they found acceptance. They felt the disapproval that American women felt, but not to such an extent. As time went on, however, the British public became complacent—the women became just another fixture in a war that depended on the skills of women in general. A full exploration of how this difference was possible can be found in the final chapter.

Quest for Insurance

One of the reasons why the Americans pushed for militarization while the British did not is the issue of insurance. As mentioned previously, the American women flying in ATA received insurance but Jacqueline Cochran did not carry this over into the creation of the American women pilot's programs. The ATA telegram she sent out to prospective American ATA pilots raises important distinctions between the ATA and the soon-to-be-formed WAFS/WFTD: American women serving in Britain would be paid the same as British women plus "additional accumulation" in dollars, they would have insurance, and had their transportation to and from their home paid for.⁶⁶ At the time, Atagirls received pay about 20 percent less than that of male ATA pilots, as dictated by the Treasury, although by the end of the war they had equal pay with men of the same rank.⁶⁷ In comparison, future American women ferry pilots were paid less than men, had to pay their way through training and transportation to the training base and home once the program was disbanded, and they never had insurance unless they paid for it themselves. They also never received pay increases as they transitioned onto more advanced aircraft as the men did. However, many of the women assert that they would have flown for free, they jumped at the chance to fly military planes and just generally loved to fly. The main issue, and most important distinction between the two countries, was the problem of insurance.

WASPs and Atagirls put their lives at risk daily, often flying in planes just released from flight mechanics to check that everything was in working order—they needed insurance. But those in the WASP were hesitant at first about militarization—they were worried, for example, about the fact that if they wanted to quit they could, but if they were in the military it was not

⁶⁶ Telegram from Jacqueline Cochran to Marjorie Hook, 23 January 1942, Marjorie E. Hook Papers, ATA Telegram Folder, Mss. 655c, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

⁶⁷ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 16.

that easy.⁶⁸ In 1943 a series of accidents led to three deaths in the WASP within a few weeks, and WASP Byrd Granger notes that feelings on militarization suddenly began to change: if the WASPs were in the military they would have insurance and death benefits, neither of which they had.⁶⁹ By 1944, 38 American women had died.⁷⁰ These women were not even provided an escort—women in the WFTD set up a fund for this and each class following added what little money they had to spare to it.⁷¹ Jackie Cochran paid for some of the funeral escorts as well.⁷² The women flew and died for their country; they felt they deserved death benefits and a military funeral, but for this to happen they would have to be militarized.

Many were hospitalized throughout the war as well from various flight accidents and the heavy stress resulting from flying almost constantly. Dedie Deaton, the Chief Establishment Officer of the WASP, had to make a deal with local hospitals and doctors so that they would accept the women. Occasionally, doctors would come over from Ellington Air Force base when the trainees were flying, but they could not treat anything other than flying injuries. In an interview from 1995, Deaton relayed the fact that when several girls were stricken with pneumonia, she had to personally pay their admittance fee and guarantee their bills—later, the girls themselves would have to pay the hospitals back.⁷³ Women in the ATA were protected by the National Health Insurance Act as were all recruits in the female military and quasi-military organizations. Whether killed or injured, they received compensation if the cause was war service.⁷⁴ The United States did not provide its women pilots with insurance, and would not unless they were in the military.

⁶⁸ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 70.

⁶⁹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 255.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, A-104/Q to 105/Q.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁷² Deaton, Interview with “Ziggy” Hunter, 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Information, Great Britain, *British Women at War*, (London, 1944), 17.

In fact, much of the fight for militarization of the WASPs was centered on insurance. Plans were drawn up that would bring the WASPs under control of the WAC, but AAF leaders and Jacqueline Cochran were unwilling to have them trained like Army women rather than the pilots that they were. In her WASP status report from August 1944, Cochran said that “The WAC is a ground organization that infiltrates its work into all branches of the Army; the WASP is a flying organization confined in its activities to the AAF” and so joining the two would be ludicrous.⁷⁵ It just so happens that at the same time, General Arnold of the AAF was slowly trying to separate the Air Forces from the Army, so placing most pilots under the Army’s control would be detrimental to his plan.⁷⁶ Although militarizing the women through the WAC would have been easier and would have provided them with the insurance they so desperately needed, AAF officials required that it occur through a separate women’s pilot program.

The situation was entirely different in Britain, which serves to explain one reason for why militarization was not much of an issue. According to the Ministry of Information in 1944, “All recruits are compulsorily insurable under *National Health Insurance* and *Unemployment Insurance Acts*,” and “*Compensation* in respect of injury due to war service is paid, according to the degree of disability.”⁷⁷ In other words, women in the ATA were guaranteed insurance and compensation for injury, neither of which the WASPs had. The Atagirls, if they thought like the WASPs and wanted militarization just to secure benefits, did not need militarization.

⁷⁵ Status report from Jacqueline Cochran to General Henry H. Arnold, “WASP Status Report, August 1, 1944,” Caroline E. Shunn Papers, WASP-Military Forms, Correspondence Folder, Mss. 816c, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 9.

⁷⁶ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 45. General ‘Hap’ Arnold opposed choosing WASP trainees from the WAAC or militarizing the WASP through the WAAC (once it was militarized). The Air Transport Command, who put forth either option as it was desperate for pilots, may have questioned Arnold’s opposition but, according to WASP Byrd Granger, it “[had] a basis no one in Air Transport Command could possibly be aware of.” He kept his plan for the future of the AAF under wraps as he was aware “that achieving an independent Air Force is out of the question in the midst of a global war.”

⁷⁷ Ministry of Information, *British Women at War*, 17. Italics original.

In Britain, women in the ATA only ferried planes. Although antiaircraft (AA) sites experimented with hiring women, they were not pilots and were already part of a military service (the ATS). Their duties were the same as those of men in the ATA, and since the men were not being militarized (as they were unfit for RAF service; the sole reason why they were in ATA) the women did not need to change status either.

Conclusion

On both sides of the Atlantic, womanpower was harnessed in ways other than nursing in World War I, and again in World War II to a much greater extent. Precedence was not as large of a factor in the trajectory of women's military organizations as one would expect. Great Britain was first in creating women's auxiliary, due to their major manpower shortage in World War I, and though it lacked as intense a shortage due to its later declaration of war, the United States armed forces employed women as well. These women were relegated to 'pink collar' jobs, the same as they would find open to them in peacetime, but for the first time they were permitted to wear uniforms and hold rank (in the United States, at least).

After the experience of World War I, one would expect that Great Britain would again take a gamble with World War II and perhaps include women in a wider array of positions within the military. This was not the case: only two organizations were militarized by the end of the war and yet Britain was the first to make use of women pilots. On the other hand, the United States established then quickly militarized all of its women's auxiliaries, while incorporating women pilots into the war effort years after Britain. However, the States did take steps to make them a separate group within the Army Air Forces and even submitted a bill to Congress for their militarization. These American women were trained like AAF male pilots, and over one hundred went to Officer Training School to prepare for their impending militarization. It may not have

happened, but the United States was closer to militarizing its women pilots than Great Britain in World War II. Great Britain had a leg up on the United States, however, as its female pilots finished out their war service on a much more even footing with their male counterparts, and the British male pilots accepted the women for the most part, while the WASPs encountered dramatic forms of discrimination.

In sum, both countries' women pilot organizations had positive and negative qualities which drove the groups to opposite ends of the spectrum. Atagirls were respected, equal to their male counterparts, and strictly civilian yet they had access to insurance. WASPs faced a lot of negativity from male pilots especially, they remained subordinate to male pilots for the entire length of their program, and although they were civilian, they pushed for militarization and in many ways were military, just without the name. How was it possible for two groups so similar on the surface to be so different? As will be explained in the next chapter, Britain felt a greater sense of urgency than the United States which trickled down into the way each woman pilot program was set up and how they changed over the course of the war.

Chapter Three

Need and Experimentation

Looking from World War I up to, and through, World War II, it is evident that the military called on womanpower only when absolutely necessary. Both countries utilized women in the First World War only when the shortage of men became acute as can be inferred from the fact that the women's auxiliaries were created late in the war. Again, in World War II the military considered women once it ran out of manpower—the women pilots in America, for example, had been trying to get a paramilitary group set up years prior to the creation of WAFS. It took so long because General Arnold of the AAF did not yet see the need for women pilots as he had enough male pilots to take care of the ferrying at first. Even when he allowed them to ferry places, it was only as a result of an acute shortage of pilots in the ATC and the need at the time to send male pilots overseas. The ATA, too, was created out of need and because of its extremely high requirements, it started to run out of qualified male pilots so women were then considered.

The difference lies in the fact that the purpose of creating the WASP, for Director Jacqueline Cochran, was partially to explore which positions women could take over in future wars—in basic terms, it was an experiment. Britain, on the other hand, had Germany as an immediate threat based on proximity and so was forced to call up anyone available to serve, including women. The British may have questioned women pilots early on, but the nation needed them because the entire country was at war and considered a war zone, therefore the women quickly gained the acceptance and respect of their nation. The experimental nature of the women pilots in the States on the other hand led to extensive questioning of their abilities, a restriction in their duties at certain bases, and possible sabotage. Newspaper and magazine articles as well as

statements from AAF officials (later in the war) lauded the American women pilots' achievements and abilities, but we cannot ignore the backlash they received when male pilots returned from war and male instructor employment decreased. The dramatic shift from acceptance to severe contempt of the WASP is what ultimately led to their downfall. At the same time, the relative lack of resistance against British women pilots allowed some of them to fly from 1940 straight through the end of the war as they were both necessary and highly qualified pilots—they were not taking jobs from men.

Mobilization of Women

In 1939 as in 1914, Britain had a world war right on its doorstep. People across the country dealt with severe rationing and faced the constant fear of invasion and bombings daily. Air raid sirens quickly became a normal sound. In the First World War it was zeppelins, in the Second it was the Blitzkrieg and the Luftwaffe. People were scared of going outside, while others did so despite warnings because of a morbid interest in watching man-manuevered objects fly through the sky carrying bombs.¹ The entire country was reduced to a dark mass at night when every window was blacked out to confuse foreign aircraft. Even during the 'Phoney War,' the British felt the threat of invasion and attack as the Wehrmacht advanced west. During the First World War, women could do their part to fend off the enemy but not until the latter stages of the war; with the Second World War, women were given the opportunity to do something about the war that was taking over their homeland.

In World War II, women were given the chance to become more than just victims to aerial bombing and the overall war—they could finally help. The Auxiliary Territorial Service hired women to work at anti-aircraft batteries, for example, and although they could not actually

¹ Susan R. Grayzel, *At home and under fire: air raids and culture in Britain from the Great Ware to the Blitz*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59.

fire one of the guns at an incoming enemy plane, they did assist the men who were permitted to pull the trigger.² One woman who went on to join the Air Transport Auxiliary as one of the First Eight got her start by flying for these so-called ‘ack-ack’ stations.³ Called a “Charming Target for British Soldiers,” Miss Mona Friedlander flew at night for anti-aircraft batteries so the men there could practice focusing searchlights and aiming their guns at planes.⁴ If working alongside the Army or at anti-aircraft stations was not of interest, women could participate in the war and work to protect their homes by joining one of the other women’s auxiliaries or volunteer organizations. The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS), and the Women’s Land Army were just a few of the options available to women—although they did not remain optional for long.

Parliament passed the National Service (No. 2) Act in December 1941, essentially drafting women into the war effort. Unmarried women (to start) between the ages of 20 and 30 years old were required to join one of the auxiliary services or the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS) or the Women’s Land Army.⁵ Later, married women without young children were called up to participate in a similar fashion. Conscripted women could not join the ATA because of its strict requirements, so most went to the ATS. By mid-1943, partially as a result of the Act, close to 90 percent of single women and 80 percent of married women were engaged in essential war

² G. J. Degroot, “Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo,” *War in History* 4, no. 4 (1997), 436.

³ Abbreviation of ‘anti-aircraft artillery,’ from the spelling alphabet the British military used for radio transmission of ‘AA.’ Women were officially integrated into AA units in April 1941, and eventually 70 percent of ATS recruits were employed in mixed batteries. These women performed all AA work except that involved in loading, maneuvering, and firing the guns—because women could not pull the trigger, “British society pretended that no moral threshold had been crossed. A male gunner was a combatant, the woman next to him was not.” From Degroot, “Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo,” 436.

⁴ “A Charming Target for British Soldiers,” *The American Weekly Sun*, 12 November 1939, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

⁵ Ministry of Information, Great Britain, *British Women at War*, (London, 1944), 7.

work.⁶ Over the three years that the Act was enforced, 125,000 women were inducted into the military and 430,000 volunteered for service, comprising about 12 percent of the British military force at the peak of mobilization.⁷

The British government took into account the “usefulness” of women in World War I and expected that the country would encounter “extensive devastation” during World War II, and so considered employing women from the beginning of its war preparations.⁸ With so many women participating in the war effort from the onset of war, prior to the female draft, almost every available woman in Britain was actively engaged. Britain did not have a large home front with women serving in unofficial capacities to help ‘their men’ who went away to war. British men and women served in equal capacities, with the exception of combat positions, and everyone did their duty to help Britain win the war.

In fact, when planning out his auxiliary, the ATA, Gerard d’Erlanger hoped to use female pilots which led to the early creation of a women’s pool on the first day of 1940.⁹ Women became even more essential to the workforce and military when the Phoney War ended and hundreds of thousands of men were sent overseas. As men died in combat, the armed services were forced to find replacements immediately in order to retain their strength. Recruitment was an ongoing process. Combat positions, however, were not the only ones required for the services to run efficiently; a number of ground positions such as those in administration, clerical work, or, in the case of the ATA, ferrying planes could not be left open as the men were called into

⁶ Carol Harris, “Women Under Fire in World War II,” BBC British History, last modified 6 March 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/women_at_war_01.shtml.

⁷ Patricia J. Thomas, “Women in the Military; America and the British Commonwealth Historical Similarities,” *Armed Forces & Society*, no. 4 (1978), 629.

⁸ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London: Pandora Press, 1987), 152.

⁹ As evident from Lt. Col. Sir Francis Shelmerdine’s, Director-General of Civil Aviation, letter to Director of Civil Aviation Finance from September 23, 1939 quoted in Michael Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, (Peterborough: GMS Enterprises, 1995), 138.

combat. Women could instead fill those positions, and did to a dramatic degree. At first, they were allowed to volunteer for the services or for wartime production, but demands were not met. By the end of 1941, therefore, the National Service (No. 2) Act was instituted and conscription of women enforced.

With war service a necessity, seeing women in uniform became normal. For some it may have been a necessary evil, as not all of Britain's population supported women working for the military, but uniformed women quickly gained acceptance, or at least indifference. As recounted in the previous chapter, the Atagirls met with some resistance at the time of the female ATA Pool's creation. After proving their abilities, and after the public came to understand the qualifications required to join ATA, they received some level of acceptance. Other male civilian pilots and students soon understood that RAF pilots could not "be spared for anything but combat. And no RAF commander who objected to women ferrying his aircraft could look anything but foolish," so they relented.¹⁰ Britain needed people, period, because of the shortage of men ready for combat (women participating in combat was unfathomable). So, men were sent away to war and women replaced them in military jobs based in Britain. The British public knew the situation at hand and aligned their attitudes with what was best for their country during a time of crisis.

Women of all classes volunteered their efforts, which demonstrates the patriotic fervor in Britain at the time and is exemplified by the Atagirls. Noted women-and-war historians Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield suggest that the main reason why women flocked to factories to work during the war was money. The second reason, or the first for middle- and upper-class women who did not need the money, was patriotism. Britain called for mobilization of its men and women, and thousands of women returned the call, doing what they could with the skills

¹⁰ Giles Whittell, *Spitfire Women of World War II*, (London: HarperPress, 2007), 97.

they had. There was a “mood which gripped the country in the first few months of war” that drove women out of the home and into factories and military auxiliaries.¹¹ And, for those qualified, Royal Air Force airplanes. Initially, many of the women pilots were society girls who offered their flying abilities to help Britain succeed in the war instead of escaping to the countryside to wait out the war. The ATA did not stop with these upper class women, however. Many were upper class, of course, because of the cost of flying lessons, but the ATA took anyone who was qualified, no matter their class. Proximity to war promoted the patriotism that drew so many British women into working for their country, across all socioeconomic levels. It also led to a greater sense of acceptance among British men toward these uniformed and working women, and women pilots in particular. With the war knocking down front doors, the public could not help but do everything in their power to end the fighting—which included accepting women into the workforce and military in droves.

Across the Atlantic from the European Theater of war, and across the Pacific from the Pacific Theater, was the United States. Despite rumors of threats to U. S. soil and the attack on Pearl Harbor, the country was separated from the action by two oceans. The country did not feel the threat of invasion as Britain did—and partially because of this, it was able to enter the war over two years after Great Britain. Women still felt the call to support the Allies but often took on jobs redefined as female, like sales, clerical government work, and waitressing. The Rosie the Riveter phenomenon did push women into a traditionally male atmosphere, although they were often given the jobs that required less of the worker. And, quite often, these positions were relabeled ‘female’ anyway.¹² According to WASP historian Sarah Byrn Rickman, articles about women’s wartime service showed the women working “on the sidelines and in support of their

¹¹ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, 57, 61.

¹² Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, “The Double Helix,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 35.

men...because that is what the U. S. public expected.”¹³ Women in the United States left the home to work in factories and military auxiliaries in support of their country, but not to the same extent as the British women.

Thousands of women joined auxiliaries as volunteers and enlisted after they were militarized, but in general American women did not feel the call to join the military as women in Britain did. Although rationing, propaganda, and the rampant building or transformation of factories demonstrated to the American public on the home front that their country was at war, they did not see any action. Neither the Germans nor the Japanese launched full-scale attacks against United States cities; the Japanese did attack Pearl Harbor, but Hawaii was not yet part of the union in 1941. Many Americans believed some sort of infiltration by the enemy was possible, but it never occurred. Women did not see bombs drop on large cities, they had rationing but again, not to the extent of Britain, and they did not feel the need to send their children away to live in the countryside away from the invading Luftwaffe as the British did. They most definitely were not forced to leave their homes like British women were because of the National Service (No. 2) Act; the United States Armed Forces considered a draft for women but did not want to risk it as they anticipated an intense backlash from the public.¹⁴ This fear of public reaction, in addition to the tendency toward haste when at war, also led to the Army Air Forces decision to keep the WASPs paid volunteers, and the program experimental overall.

¹³ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 180.

¹⁴ According to Gallup polls conducted in late 1943, these worries were unwarranted. At the time, the military needed men and had already run out of pools of single men, so they were forced to turn to fathers. But, seventy-eight percent of the public was more willing to accept a draft of single women rather than draft fathers. Furthermore, of those single women that could be drafted, 75 percent supported such a draft but said they also would not volunteer as long as the government felt it did not need to draft them. Holm states that despite these facts, conscription of women would not have happened anyway because Congress was so opposed to it. From Major General Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: an Unfinished Revolution*, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 57

Like women in Britain, American women functioned as replacements in non-combat positions for men so the armed services could send more men into combat. This provoked more animosity toward women like the WASPs as many men were reluctant to go into combat, which is not unwarranted considering the number of casualties especially following D-Day (around the time when out-of-work civilian instructors and student pilots dragged the WASPs into a public battle over jobs). Women pilots released men to fly in combat, as in Britain, but those in America came to be seen as “replacing men, period” once male pilots retired from active combat.¹⁵ The difference in feeling toward support of one’s country during the war is at fault here; the British accepted female ATA pilots because most felt that their country demanded it while Americans did not feel a similar compulsion, at least not in terms of women taking over ‘male’ jobs in the name of patriotism.

Some of this criticism also came as a result of the WASP program being labeled an experiment. From the start, the Army Air Forces had considered militarizing women pilots through the Women’s Army Corps but because of red tape and the issue of age discrepancies between the WASP plans and the WAC it would have taken too long so Nancy Love and Colonel Tunner reworked their plan for the WAFS. Tunner and his Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command required the immediate employment of women pilots so as to keep up with ferrying demands from the Army Air Forces, so they hired them as civilians and assumed that they would eventually be militarized. In the end, the WAFS along with the WASPs were kept civilian which worked to the AAF’s advantage: if something went wrong, as was possible with

¹⁵ Drew Pearson, “Arnold Faces Congress Uproar Over His Continued Use of WASPS,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 5 August 1944, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection. According to WASP historian Marianne Verges, Pearson was “one of the most vehement critics of the AAF’s women pilots” and Dedie Deaton, CEO responsible for female trainees, stated in her oral history: “I hope he turns over in his grave, the way I think about him.” From Sally Van Wagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines: the Unknown Heroines of World War II*, (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1979), 6; Leni Leoti “Dedie” Clark Deaton, Interview with Mary “Ziggy” Waurine Hunter, Oral history, 1975, Mss. 300, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 33.

the duties they were assigned besides ferrying, the women could easily be sent home and the whole program abandoned.¹⁶ WASP could be considered an AAF ‘special project,’ using an untapped resource (women pilots) in brand-new ways, some of which were experimental even when men were the ones flying (using drones for towing targets).¹⁷ Naming WASP experimental or special may have had its benefits in allowing for a margin of error when assigning women and working out the kinks in such a new program, but it was not without its downsides. One of which was the retaliation from unemployed civilian male pilots and instructors, along with men who retired from combat duty. This, as explained in Chapter Two, is what led to the program’s downfall.

British women did not feel much (if any) hatred from the public because everyone in Britain knew that to fight, citizens had to do what was asked of them. RAF men required that planes be waiting for them at their base, and so someone needed to ferry them there from the various factories all over the country. The ATA assisted in that respect and eventually took over all ferrying duties, and hired women because they needed competent pilots, no matter their gender. The British public recognized this need and accepted the women. American women pilots, on the other hand, felt a higher level of animosity as the AAF made it clear that their program was experimental in nature, not completely necessary. Believing that something is necessary, especially during a full-blown world war, causes people to accept it no matter how new or untraditional it is, as was the case with Britain’s women pilots flying for the ATA. Knowing that something is experimental, again especially during a world war, leads to questioning and the search for alternatives, which is what occurred in the United States. Once the information about women towing targets and working with drones was released (in addition to

¹⁶ Byrd H. Granger, *On Final Approach: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of W.W.II.*, (Scottsdale, AZ: Falconer Pub. Co., 1991), 49.

¹⁷ See Granger, *On Final Approach*, 211 for more information about use of drones.

other factors to be discussed later in this chapter), unemployed male pilots retaliated. Witnessing attacks to a country forces its citizens to accept programs that they might otherwise question, and as the majority of Americans experienced war only through its effects on the home front and in newsreels, many thought employing women pilots was a step too far.

Training

As a result of entering the war earlier than the United States and the consistent bombing by Germany, Britain needed men. America was a country at war; Britain was a war zone. It can be assumed that the military was far more willing to accept women as they needed whoever was available; they did go so far as to draft women into factories and the women's services through the National Service (No. 2) Act. As a result of the immediate danger Britain faced, the military did not have time to play around with training women, they needed pilots immediately. Time was also not to be wasted on deciding whether or not to militarize women pilots and where to put them if they did (Create a new program? Enlist them through the RAF or ATC?). The RAF was short on time and pilots and so rather than create another problem while the entire country was at war and facing the threat of German invasion, officials decided to integrate the ATA and hire women with a copious amount of flying experience. Later on, women without pilot's licenses were given the opportunity to ferry for the ATA after going through training at the ATA pilot school, but this was only out of necessity and the women chosen to participate were already in the WAAF or ATA.

Hiring only the most experienced women pilots partially led to their general acceptance in Britain. This level of experience had been attained by only a small number of pilots, both male and female, which kept the size of ATA and its women's Pool to a small enough level that the public was barely disturbed. Only 166 women flew for ATA by the end of the war, compared to

the 1,074 in the United States.¹⁸ Women could not receive extensive training, so those with fewer hours had to look elsewhere for war work. Some did write in to magazines like *The Aeroplane* and complained about its high requirements, but in wartime Britain internal crises were to be kept to a minimum, so those who wrote in mostly went unheard. Because of the lack of training, ATA was not considered experimental, it simply filled a void. The ATA drew as many male qualified pilots as it could out of the British population, but by accepting only those with over 250 hours logged, ATA needed more pilots than there were available from the male population so it turned to female pilots. It was out of necessity that women were hired, and that the ATA was given ferrying duties in the first place.

The United States started its first female pilot program (WAFS) by following the British example and hired only experienced pilots, but soon enough, the country began to accept women with just 35 hours (the amount required for a private pilot's license) and trained them through the WFTD. As in Britain, the pool to draw from was relatively small, with 25 of the possible pilots already flying for the ATA at this time. Therefore, the WAFS remained small, like ATA, until some of Jacqueline Cochran's WFTD graduates could supplement the force. Herein lies the difference between Britain and the United States: the ATA trained only minimal numbers of women under 250 hours of flying time, while the United States trained over 1,000.¹⁹ Although it is true that the British mobilized on a grander scale than the United States, in terms of percentage of the population, it is also true that fewer women were employed by ATA than by WASP. Over

¹⁸ Kathleen Williams Boon, James Lea Cate, and Wesley Frank Craven, "Women in the AAF," in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 530.

¹⁹ Both countries were required to provide some training even to the most experienced pilots so they knew how to fly each type of plane the air force required of them. ATA pilots were trained at the Central Flying School to start, and then by the ATA's own training school, and they received training only on how to ferry military planes, not instrument training or aerobatics as they were not flying in combat. WAFS received one month of training through ATC's training school, learning to fly the Army way and how to deal with Army paperwork. Additionally, ATC, which hired WAFS/WASPs to ferry planes, continued to hire only women with high flying hours (over 500) in addition to several other requirements such as a 200 horsepower rating.

25,000 women applied to WASP, 1,830 were admitted, and 1,074 graduated.²⁰ ATA was something of an elite in comparison, sometimes receiving hundreds of applications daily from a variety of countries, but hired only 1,152 men and 166 women by the end of the war.²¹ Certainly, fewer than 1,000 women actually ferried planes in the United States, but even then the smallest number of women ferry pilots was 113.²² The female ATA pool by the end of the war was just under 20 percent the total size of the WASP, and it was all because the United States was willing and able to train women with relatively little flying abilities.

Jacqueline Cochran's primary motive in establishing a women's pilot program in the States was to train women pilots the way that Army male pilots were trained, and see whether or not they could handle the training along with a variety of male-dominated flying roles. This is why when she returned from her trip to England with the American women ATA pilots and found Nancy Love's WAFS in existence, she was upset. Her plan since before the war was to demonstrate that women could take on the same flying jobs as men, and someday have their own division with the AAF.²³ WFTD pilots and WASPs went through months of training, both in the air and on the ground in order to prepare for taking over such non-combatant flying duties.²⁴

²⁰ Boon, Cate, and Craven, "Women in the AAF," in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 530.

²¹ Alison King, *Golden Wings: the story of some of the women ferry pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary*, (London: White Lion Publishers, 1975), 26.

²² Marianne Verges, *On Silver Wings: the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 182, 184. To attend pursuit training, a WASP was required to have at least 500 hours in Class I planes (lighter aircraft) before moving to Class II, and then an additional 50 hours in Class II. Of those that attended (153 women), they had a higher elimination rate than male AAF pilots, with only 96 graduating. The women proved to have trouble flying fighter aircraft, and many women in fact chose not to attend pursuit training. Near the end of 1944, ATC ferried more pursuit aircraft than ever before and so required that the women serving with them from WASP be able to fly such planes. This change caused transfers out of ATC, despite the need for ferry pilots, and in the end only 113 WASPs could continue flying for ATC (all were pursuit pilots).

²³ Sally Van Wagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines: the Unknown Heroines of World War II*, (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1979), 98.

²⁴ "Girl Pilots: Air Force Trains Them at Avenger Field, Texas," *Life Magazine*, 19 July 1943, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection, 75. According to the article, the training lasted approximately twenty-two and a half weeks. The women were "On the go from 6:15 in the morning till 10 at night, they follow a stepped-up version of the nine-month course developed for male aviation cadets, learning everything that regular Army pilots master except gunnery and formation flying."

After some experimenting with the training program, eventually the women received the same training as male AAF cadets with the exception of aerobatic and formation flying which were only required for combat.^{25 26} In the end, training consisted of 400 hours of ground school and 210 hours of flight instruction.²⁷ Some WASPs, due to the forward-looking Cochran and her goal of a militarized group of female pilots, even attended Officer Training School after their initial period of training.²⁸

The ATA, a completely civilian organization, set apart from the RAF, never considered militarization and required that its pilots know only how to ferry RAF planes. It trained its male and female pilots to do just that and nothing more. As stated in the previous subsection, Britain during World War II was concerned with what was best for the country and how to best use its resources to win the war; again, it did not have the time or resources to set up a training program solely for women and test them out in a variety of non-combatant flying jobs. It also could not do so, as women pilots were hired from the start through a civilian organization that had no hope of being militarized, as it only hired those unqualified for military service. Militarizing British women pilots was not a necessity, and so the armed services barely gave it a thought.

The United States had the ability to create such an organization as WASP because of the fact that it had AAF leaders and women like Jacqueline Cochran who wanted women pilots militarized as well as time and space to experiment. Women joined the ATA out of necessity; women were employed by the AAF because a group of influential people wanted to see what

²⁵ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 110.

²⁶ Marie Mountain Clark, *Dear Mother and Daddy: World War II letters home from a WASP, an autobiography*, (Livonia, MI: First Page Publications, 2005), 50. Not that this stopped many of the American women from trying aerobatics. Marie Mountain Clark, in her collection of letters to her parents from her time in WASP, writes “One day last week my instructor said if I did some nice chandelles and lazy 8s, we would do other acrobatics. (Secret!) So we did a loop, half roll, slow roll, snap roll, vertical reverse. I got to do all of them but snap roll and vertical reverse, but I followed him through on them.”

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 189.

women pilots could do. General Arnold himself stated in a memo to General Yount, the man responsible for all AAF training, in November 1942 that “The Air Forces objective is to provide at the earliest possible date a sufficient number of women pilots to replace men in every non-combatant flying duty in which it is feasible to employ women.”²⁹ The ATA’s objective was the complete opposite as it hired pilots to take care of ferrying only, a duty that the RAF no longer used its pilots for and so the women were not freeing men to fight, they were filling vacant positions. Additionally, training was kept apart from the ferrying organization in the United States, unlike the ATA. Cochran and the AAF had freedom to experiment with training and assignments because of this set up and difference in priorities from that of the ATA and British armed forces.

Effects of World War I

Visibly, the difference in uniforms distinguishes the Atagirls from the WASPs, symbolizing the different priorities of each country’s leaders, which come as a result of their respective aviation histories. Men and women in the ATA were provided with uniforms from the time that they signed their contracts, which, as noted in Chapter One, resembled the RAF pattern and that of the Civil Airways. Following their official acceptance test with the ATA Chief Instructor, women ATA pilots could retire their civilian clothing and get fitted for a uniform.³⁰ American WASPs, however, did not receive their uniforms until February 1944, with some still not outfitted until later in the year; prior to this, they often flew in a uniform assembled from civilian clothing, extra men’s sized ‘zootsuits,’ and white turbans (for their hair).^{31 32} WAFS had

²⁹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 38.

³⁰ Lettice Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots: a story of the Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939-45*, (Henley-on-Thames: Foulis, 1971), 43.

³¹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 296.

³² Anne Noggle, *For God, country, and the thrill of it: Women Airforce Service Pilots in World War II: photographic portraits and text*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 8. Zootsuits were left-over

their own uniforms much sooner but also had to wear civilian clothing until Nancy Love put together their own grey-green uniform, which they then had to swap for the Santiago blue WASP uniform in 1944. Note the time difference: Atagirls wore uniforms immediately following their entry into the ATA, while some American women pilots received uniforms relatively soon after joining WAFS and the rest had to fashion their own uniforms out of khaki pants and white shirts until 1944. On the surface, it seems as if the British were more prepared for the incoming women pilots than the Americans. This is true, but there is a reason behind it which has to do with each country's air force's history.

As discussed in Chapter One, the British formed the Royal Air Force in 1918, and experimented with women pilots at the same time, creating the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Once World War II began, the British already had an air force in existence that it could rely on for various flying tasks, hence the RAF taking care of ferrying at first before ferrying and combat became too much for the service and ATA took over ferrying. Uniforms were designed in 1918 as well and simply changed a bit over time, and were easily transformed into the ATA uniforms that men and women pilots wore in 1939/1940. In fact, one of the main distinguishing characteristics between women serving in the WAAC in the First World War and those serving in the WRAF was the difference in the color of their uniforms. WRAF women wore blue while the WAAC women, like the men in the Army, wore khaki. The color difference signified a distinction between branches of the military, and brought the WRAF women onto the RAF's side, just as it did with the ATA and the RAF in World War II. Not only in terms of uniforms was the early creation of an independent air force in Britain beneficial—by 1939 the RAF had finished experimenting and was its own 'adult' service with its own traditions and routes of

Army-issued coveralls that were often too large for the women, but were required of trainees to wear when they were 'on duty.'

communication. It dealt solely in aircraft and aerial warfare, making it more efficient than the Army-regulated air force in the United States.

Across the Atlantic, the air force was not yet independent by World War II. During the war, General Arnold took over the aviation arm of the U.S. Army and used this chance to push forward the idea of an independent air force. Simultaneously, he worked with Jacqueline Cochran to establish the WASPs. These two factors—an independent air force and the creation of WASP—came together in the WASP uniform. Part of the reason why they took so long to be designed was because of the need to separate the WASP (and future air force) from the Army. To do so, a different color had to be chosen for the uniforms—that color was Santiago Blue. Arnold was partial to the Santiago Blue material that ended up making its way into the WASP design, which was similar in color to the present U.S. Air Force uniforms, hence the term ‘blues’ used today to describe the USAF uniform. Before selecting a uniform, Cochran had it suggested to her that she use leftover women’s auxiliary which she could then change but like Arnold, she wanted the WASPs to have their own particular uniform.³³ The difference in color and need for distinction from the Army mirrored the choices Britain made during World War I—it took the United States over 20 years to get to the same point with its air force.

Giving the WASPs true military-style uniforms also gave them an air of seriousness and legitimacy, which prior to 1944 they did not have. Walking around in civilian clothing, flying in oversized flight suits, the women looked like a gaggle of immature girls that were flying for their country for fun, not to help win the war. As an article from the New York Times in August 1943 stated, “The women pilots have never had an official uniform, since they serve the Army Air

³³ Jacqueline Cochran and Floyd B. Odum, *The Stars at Noon*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), 123.

Forces in civilian status and are not members of the armed services.”³⁴ This implies that because the women were not servicewomen, they should not (and did not) have uniforms. And yet, without them many of the women were not taken seriously, adding fuel to the already present criticism from male pilots and American citizens.

Atagirls had an air of legitimacy since 1940, thanks to both uniforms that had their base in two well-recognized aviation organizations, the RAF and BOAC, and the fact that they joined the Air Transport Auxiliary. Instead of starting from nothing, the women could rely on the legacy of aviation in Britain, joining up with past combat flying aces in an auxiliary that came as a result of over 25 years of military aviation. The WASPs, on the other hand, formed their own organization within the Army Air Forces which were beginning to separate from the Army and come into their own. The United States did have a lengthy history of aviation, but still did not have an organized military air force like the British until after World War II. It is yet another extension of the need versus experimentation theory that separated the British from the Americans during World War II: women pilots in Britain were just another group of pilots that could be utilized in the war effort, in the country’s time of need, while the Americans were experimenting with an independent air force as reflected in the creation of WASP uniforms and the attempt to separate them from the Army.

Militarization and Government Opinion

As mentioned at the end of the last chapter, the United States militarized more women’s auxiliaries than Great Britain, and considered militarizing its female pilots while such an idea never came up with respect to the ATA. The theme of need versus experimentation continues to factor into this difference between the countries and their women pilot programs, but in a slightly

³⁴ “Women War Pilots Named the WASPs,” *New York Times*, 20 August 1943, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

different form from the other cases set up in this chapter. The WASP leaders' main reason for wanting militarization (beyond the fact that officials planned for it since the program's inception) was insurance—which the women did not have because they were labeled an experiment. Those in the ATA had insurance and could not be militarized anyway, as the organization was not run by the RAF and all male pilots had to be ineligible for service with the RAF to be considered for the ATA.³⁵ Ferry pilots in Britain, male or female, were viewed as a necessity and an integral part of the war effort, so their lives were to be protected with insurance; for some reason, this thinking did not carry over into the United States. Similar to the difference in public attitudes toward women pilots was this difference in the governments' ways of thinking about the services provided by women pilots during the war.

Women in the WASP were paid and employed by the Civil Service, as it was a civilian organization, and so when the Service launched a committee to investigate the use of public funds in general in 1944, WASP came under scrutiny.³⁶ The Ramspeck Committee which spearheaded the investigation recommended that WASP halt its expansion and continue to be utilized by the Civil Service (not militarized).³⁷ As of January of the same year, the male pilots and instructors who soon after began to attack the WASP through the press were released from the civilian training programs set up by the AAF because of a surplus of pilots.³⁸ By spring of 1944, the WASPs were under attack by both their financial-backer and the previously-supportive public.

³⁵ Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots*, 91.

³⁶ Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 182.

³⁷ Status report from Jacqueline Cochran to General Henry H. Arnold, "WASP Status Report, August 1, 1944," Caroline E. Shunn Papers, WASP-Military Forms, Correspondence Folder, Mss. 816c, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection, 3.

³⁸ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 284.

The Costello Bill, as the WASP militarization bill was known, came to a vote soon after, in June 1944, and was killed after one House representative “denounced it as ‘society legislation’” and another “questioned the need for women pilots as long as instructors and trainees of the discontinued Civilian Pilot Training Program were denied opportunities to fly as officers in the Air Forces.”³⁹ The government had given into the shouting that a relatively small sector of the male pilot population turned into a country-wide disapproval of the WASPs. To them, women should not receive jobs like ferrying for the military when there are jobless male pilots ready and willing to serve in their place. It did not matter that many of these men were not qualified and that it would have been costly to train them to fly the bombers and pursuit planes that many of the women flew. The War Department announced the deactivation of WASP on December 20, 1944, citing the assumption that by that date, the number of available male pilots would be sufficient for all flying assignments both non-combatative and overseas.⁴⁰

The women were experimental and no longer necessary because of the favorable direction the war had taken and a lower than expected attrition rate, so their program was cancelled.⁴¹ Fewer pilots than expected had died following the invasion of Normandy which meant that, once their combat tours ended, the men returned to the States looking for flying work. WASPs had never really been considered necessary, though. When Nancy Love’s plan was set in action, the ATC did need ferry pilots, and so the WAFS could be considered necessary despite being labeled experimental; the ATC’s need actually helped push the Secretary of War over the edge, resulting in the creation of the first American women’s military pilot auxiliary.⁴² It

³⁹ “Wasp Head Asks Army Status or Disbandment,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1944, WASP Collection, News Clippings, 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

⁴⁰ War Department News Release, *AAF to Inactivate WASP on December 20*, 3 October 1944, Florence Knight Papers, Folder A94, Mss. 326c, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection.

⁴¹ Boon, Cate, and Craven, “Women in the AAF,” in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 535.

⁴² Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 117-18.

helped that these women resembled the Atagirls in terms of age and experience (older, over 250 hours logged). Jacqueline Cochran's WFTD may have provided for a constant inflow of ferry pilots, but the time came (rather quickly) when the number of graduates exceeded the number that ATC could use, rendering the excess pilots unnecessary.⁴³ Once WASP was created, some graduates continued to be assigned to ATC though only a fraction were needed to ferry planes, while the rest were sent around the United States to see just which flying assignments women could take over for men. The government quickly threw together two women pilot groups when the ATC was desperate for pilots, and then when men returned from combat and the AAF ended its civilian pilot programs it completely changed its view and decided to shut down the WASP program. Evidently, what was important to the United States government when the country was at war was immediate need and public opinion.

Britain was not opposed to militarizing women nor to employing women in auxiliary services, but the country refrained from creating a separate women's pilot organization and never considered militarizing these women who performed such a dangerous job for their country. As compared to the United States, there was no immediate need. Everyone in the ATA received insurance, pay equivalent to that of their ability (thanks to Commander Gower's persistence), and were entitled to the exact same opportunities as men by the end of the war. Same pay for the same work was the greatest equalizer, which the Atagirls attained in 1943.⁴⁴ Because of these benefits, Britain did not have to think about militarizing women pilots at all—indeed it could not, as stated previously, women were first hired by the ATA and with the country in a war zone, creating a brand new organization for women pilots when they already had an auxiliary to serve with was redundant.

⁴³ Verges, *On Silver Wings*, 62.

⁴⁴ Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 179.

Numbers also come into play: with fewer women flying for the ATA, the country did not need to militarize the women, nor could men truly get upset about women ‘taking their jobs,’ because only 166 jobs would have been in question. According to *The Aeroplane*, in September 1944 the ratio of men to women in the ATA was approximately 7:1.⁴⁵ ATA refused to accept inexperienced pilots which automatically limited its size and the amount of squawking about jobs. Its requirements set in place the fact that everyone available should work elsewhere—for the RAF, who desperately needed pilots like the AAF did, and for the ATS, who took the bulk of conscripted women, for example—and only those left who are also the most proficient pilots should apply to the ATA. The low acceptance rate in combination with the ATA’s strict rules and limited duties meant that the organization was simply filling a void, unlike the American women pilots once they became WASP and grew in duties and numbers.

American women pilots were volunteers, not unlike the Atagirls, but the way their country treated them differed drastically from how the British treated their women pilots. The WASPs fought for militarization because they wanted the treatment that the Atagirls received, although they did not realize this at the time. When asked by the Ramspeck Committee why the women wanted to be militarized, Nancy Love responded “for recognition and protection. A civilian girl going into a modification center to pick up an airplane is open to suspicion as a spy. Also, compensation and insurance for the families would then be available to them.”⁴⁶ The ATA women had all of this already, in addition to the legitimacy provided them by official uniforms and their country’s belief in the mobilization of its citizens as discussed earlier. Of course, British women pilots felt some of the same apprehension toward hiring women pilots when male pilots were available, but this was limited to the early days of ATA and it practically disappeared

⁴⁵ “Air Transport Auxiliary,” *The Aeroplane*, v. 67, July-Dec 1944, 11 September 1944, 329.

⁴⁶ As cited in Rickman, *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II*, 182.

as British citizens came to understand the purpose of the highly experienced women pilots and the need for everyone to do their duty.

Condescension and Aggression

Perhaps the fact that British women pilots could not be militarized explains why the public did not retaliate as the American public did; or perhaps the reason resides in the difference in each society's beliefs about women in general. Thus far, it has been suggested that the difference in women pilot programs, specifically on the issues of proximity to war, training, aviation and war history, and militarization, is due to Britain operating based on need and the United States being able to experiment. The public's reaction to each program during World War II weaves its way through each of these issues and can also be explained by the difference between need and experimentation—but underneath this, there exists another dichotomy. In general, negative feelings about women (or any group) can come in two forms, either condescension or aggression. The prior refers to a sense of superiority; a general internal feeling that may be exhibited through dialogue or every day actions but does not intend to do harm. The latter does intend to harm. One would expect that those in the military, at the time, would have felt the need to protect the women and if anything they slightly resented the women pilots because women were inferior, but this was not the case. As for the women pilots in World War II, the United States seem to have been on the side of aggression while Britain started out believing that women pilots were inferior and gradually came to accept them.

Back in 1941 Jacqueline Cochran, future Director of Women Pilots, came up against American aggression toward women, and it only progressed as her program evolved. The “No. 1 Woman Flier” decided against mentioning this in the article from the New York Times magazine written about her flight to Britain, but instead listed the male hostility toward women in her

memoir *The Stars at Noon*.⁴⁷ As noted in Chapter One, an important wrench for the oxygen system repeatedly went missing, even after she replaced it, and a window in the pilot's cabin was broken, among other obstacles. After Cochran received authorization to make the flight, she writes that "hell broke loose. The pilots called a mass meeting and threatened to strike," and that some believed their jobs were "belittled by letting a woman do the same thing."⁴⁸ She suggests that the reason they acted this way was because they wanted raises, despite already being paid well. Almost the exact same situation came up time and time again throughout the WASP's existence: male pilots upset over their own jobs taking it out on women pilots.

Again, hostilities arose when WASP assignments took the women to AAF bases, with some bases (like Romulus and Camp Davis, see Chapter Two) working out their own specific rules for women pilots and limiting their flight time. It was also at bases such as these, when the men were especially hostile, that women pilots sometimes died as a result. Even when they were not at an AAF base and were only in contact with male instructors, such as at Avenger during training, the women still felt borderline-hatred from the men. Trainees would often write to Cochran with their problems, and in July 1943—just prior to the renaming of WAFS/WFTD to WASP—she received an overwhelming number of letters about how "nasty and uncooperative" some of the male instructors were in the air.⁴⁹

As if sugar in fuel tanks and 'forgetting' to fill up the second fuel tank were not terrible enough, the civilian instructors chose to attack the WASP for taking jobs from them and got much of the American public and government on their side. According to Dedie Deaton, the Chief Establishment Officer of women trainees, "they gave the blackest picture that you possibly

⁴⁷ Elizabeth R. Valentine, "No. 1 Woman Flier," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 July 1941, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

⁴⁸ Cochran and Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, 101.

⁴⁹ Granger, *On Final Approach*, 247.

could get. Because they were mad, they were mad. They hated Jackie to where they would have cut her throat, if they could have got her.”⁵⁰ An article from *Time* magazine, published around the time that the Ramspeck Committee was investigating the program and the Costello Bill was introduced in Congress, called the women “unnecessary and undesirable.”⁵¹ The article went on to quote the Ramspeck report, which said “the need ‘to recruit teen-aged schoolgirls, stenographers, clerks, beauticians, housewives and factory workers to pilot the military planes of this Government is as startling as it is invalid.”⁵² It fails to note what jobs the male pilots who should supposedly have had the women’s flying jobs had prior to their time in the service. The slander campaign, bolstered by the Ramspeck report, viciously attacked women performing important duties that many of those same men could not have done at the time without extensive (and expensive) training. Male instructors and returned combat pilots may have wanted jobs, as Jacqueline Cochran states in her memoir, but their pointed aggression toward all women in the WASP, at a time when the women were trying to be commissioned into the AAF, suggests that their target was women, not jobs.

The cases of sabotage in the United States and hostility from specific bases, along with the laid-off civilian pilot and instructor verbal war against the WASP, display a form of aggression toward women not seen in Britain at the time—at least, not against its women pilots. Lower in number and higher in experience, British women pilots could not have been targeted using the same arguments American male pilots used against the WASP, but that does not mean that some men might not have turned against them anyway. However, that did not happen. At first, the public was anxious about women pilots but this soon gave way to appreciation. In fact,

⁵⁰ Leni Leoti “Dedie” Clark Deaton, Interview with Mary “Ziggy” Waurine Hunter, Oral history, 1975, Mss. 300, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 34.

⁵¹ “Women, Unnecessary and Undesirable?” *Time Magazine*, 29 May 1944, WASP Collection, News Clippings 1939-1971, Mss. 250, Texas Woman’s University Woman’s Collection, 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Jacqueline Cochran herself relayed to the *New York Times Magazine* upon her return to the US in 1941 that she was most impressed by the attitude of the men toward the women war workers in Britain:

She says the men speak of them almost with reverence, because, apparently, the women are doing a great deal of dull dirty work and doing it with incredible efficiency. In the last war the work done by women was largely within their normal province. In this war, as members of a civilian population that is virtually in the front line of combat, they do jobs irrespective of their sex. By doing all the dull jobs and sticking to them they release the men for the brain work and for fighting. As a result there is no feeling of women as being frail, gallant dependents who must be looked after, but simply one of relief, gratitude and deep admiration.⁵³

The men needed to accept the women, no matter what job they were performing, because it was a job that had to be done and if a woman could do it instead of a man then that was better for the country, as it allowed that man to instead fight in combat. Although this is an overgeneralization, what Cochran saw was true when compared to the hostility of some Americans.⁵⁴ If men did oppose the Atagirls, they stayed quiet and kept it to themselves, whereas those in opposition to the WASP sometimes took drastic measures to show their hatred for the program.

Historian Helena Schrader succinctly states the difference in attitudes toward women between the two countries in this way: “The American women who joined the WFTD and WASP encountered consistent and pervasive hostility of a significantly more profound nature than the scepticism [*sic*] the ATA women faced.”⁵⁵ The hostility came as a consequence of the United States’ ability to experiment with women on all sorts of non-combatant flying jobs, which itself was a result of the country’s distance from the war, its insistence on labeling the women experimental so as to have the option to cancel the program if necessary, and its goal of militarizing the women following the creation of the program. Because the American women were experimental, the governing forces could do with them what they wanted, which included

⁵³ Valentine, “No. 1 Woman Flier,” *New York Times Magazine*, 13 July 1941.

⁵⁴ See Chapter Two, discussion of *The Aeroplane*.

⁵⁵ Helena Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2006), 177.

exploring female aptitude for different flying jobs, experimenting with training, and testing their ability to conform to military standards. However, this left officials and the women open to criticism as the government spent a great deal of money on the program which raised questions as to whether this expenditure was necessary. Many thought that the funding would be better spent on training the head of the household.

At the exact same time, Britain did not have such problems even though the overall belief that men were superior to women was not limited to the United States. What the public felt in Britain was indeed skepticism, as Schrader astutely points out. The Atagirls rid the public of their worries through their command of the aircraft and low death and injury rate, while at the same time the effect of a war close to home forced them to grudgingly accept the women. The both knew what they were doing, and the public had to accept their existence, as the women provided a great service to the country's armed forces.

Conclusion

The entire country of Great Britain saw the war first-hand and therefore needed pilots (and war workers) no matter the gender, all that mattered was experience. America was not a war zone and did not feel the immediacy of war, so it had time to train women pilots and experiment with them in a variety of sectors in aviation. It is these factors which differentiate the women pilots in America from those in Great Britain during World War II and exemplify a large difference between these two Allied nations.

Conclusion

The WASP was dismantled in December 1944, while the women in the ATA continued flying for almost another full year before the program was disbanded in November 1944. Immediately afterward, most of the women were unsure as to what to do next. They had just spent years flying military planes with rarely a day off, so many could not imagine having to sit in an office all day, or go back to being a housewife, or really do anything but fly planes. Staying on in the military and flying was not an option, however. Just as at the conclusion of World War I, both countries called for a return to normalcy, which again included sending women home. And yet, many of the women on both sides of the Atlantic did their best to continue flying, some creating their own flying organizations, some breaking records, and others still just flying for fun.

Lettice Curtis, whose memoir and ATA history *The Forgotten Pilots* factored heavily into research for this thesis, was one of the women who managed to continue working in the aviation industry following the war. She worked in engineering and at the A&AEE military aircraft test center, then later worked as a senior flight development engineer. She also became an air racer and in the 1990s, a helicopter pilot. Another remarkable ATA pilot, Diana Barnato Walker, became the first British woman to break the sound barrier, flying an English Electric Lightning T4 in 1963. Ex-Commander Pauline Gower, somewhat surprisingly, left the ATA on its last day rather than staying to help “wind up” the organization in order to start a family.¹ She married RAF Wing Commander Bill Fahie in 1944 and gave birth to twin boys in 1947, but

¹ Michael Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, (Peterborough: GMS Enterprises, 1995), 192.

sadly died from heart failure the same day.² Many other British female pilots also returned to their homes, like Gower, and some continued to fly privately while others became mothers or continued their pre-war lives as mothers or wives.

Ex-WASPs in the United States held incredible positions post-war as well, but many seem to have been more willing to return to the home than the British women pilots. Betty Gillies, part of WASP since the WAFS existed as a separate entity, left the WASP and had three children after the war, but also became a ham radio operator and connected ships in the Pacific to callers and maintained contact with Navy personnel in Antarctica during Operation Deep Freeze. Director of Women Pilots Jacqueline Cochran continued her aviation career after the end of the WASP, returning to air racing and record-breaking. She began by flying the brand-new jet aircraft and became the first woman pilot to break the sound barrier, encouraged by her friend Major Chuck Yeager (the first person to go supersonic). Additionally, Cochran became the first woman to land and take off from an aircraft carrier, and became a sponsor of the Mercury 13 program.³ Unfortunately, many of the flying jobs were no longer available to women pilots in the United States following the war so they were forced into white collar aviation jobs.⁴

Some women did try to find work flying planes for the military but to no avail for the most part. In Britain, letters to the editor piled up at the offices of *The Aeroplane* calling for government-subsidized pilot training through local civilian flying clubs, but these schemes often

² Fahie, *A Harvest of Memories: the Life of Pauline Gower M.B.E.*, 198.

³ Mercury 13 was the Woman in Space Program which set out to test “women pilots for astronaut fitness” in the 1960s. The women are recognized as trailblazers, although nothing came of the program, as during the course of the program their ambition took them to the cockpit of the newest aircraft and were among the first women to participate in aerospace medical tests. Jacqueline Cochran was a friend of Dr. William Lovelace II who established the program, and she joined the program as an advisor and paid for the women’s testing costs. By the end of the program, 19 women pilots, mostly from the women pilot’s organization the Ninety-Nines, participated in astronaut fitness exams at the Lovelace Clinic and 13 had passed (hence the title ‘Mercury 13’). From Margaret A. Weitekamp, “Lovelace’s Women in Space Program,” NASA, last modified 28 January 2010, <http://history.nasa.gov/printFriendly/flats.html>.

⁴ Deborah G. Douglas and Amy E. Foster, *American Women and Flight since 1940*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 110.

neglected to incorporate women into their post-war pilot training plans.⁵ According to Alison King, the Operations Officer of women in the ATA, when the ATA ended the women had a “‘going away party’ of sorts” and then just dispersed.⁶ The Women’s Royal Air Force was reborn in 1949, allowing women to join the air force in times of peace and war for the first time, but the trades open to them did not include flying. Women in the ‘new’ WRAF were to be as integrated as possible with the RAF but could not serve in combat positions; often, they found themselves in driving, ground signaling, clerical work, and catering positions.⁷ Over the years, the WRAF and RAF grew closer and women began to be recognized as aircrew (new positions were open to them). In 1994, the RAF and WRAF finally merged, fully integrating women into the air force, and that same year Flight Lieutenant Jo Salter became the first female operational fast jet pilot.

WASPs looked for opportunities in the AAF following the deactivation of their program, but had to wait two years before the newly formed United States Air Force could use their services. As of November 1944, one month before the end of the WASP, the women sent letters to Jacqueline Cochran hoping for pilot work in the Allied countries. Cochran responded in a letter sent to all WASPs, advising that “If a sufficient number of girls are interested in foreign service, I shall be glad to get in touch with the various embassies and legations to determine whether any such need exists and if so, whether they would be interested in using WASPs,” but it would require a lot of administrative work and so would have to be postponed until after the

⁵ Lettice Curtis, *The Forgotten Pilots: a story of the Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939-1945*, (Henley-on-Thames: Foulis, 1971), 279.

⁶ Alison King, *Golden Wings: the story of some of the women ferry pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary*, (London: White Lion Publishers, 1975), 181.

⁷ “Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF) 1949-1994,” RAF Museum in London & RAF Museum Cosford, accessed March 15, 2014, <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/women-of-the-air-force/womens-royal-air-force-wraf-1949-1994.aspx>.

deactivation of the WASP.⁸ The women pilots luckily had First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on their side whose persistence was key, according to Deborah Douglass, in changing the debate from the above to *how* women could participate.⁹ In the end, the Women in the Air Force (WAF) was born alongside the Women's Armed Services Act in 1948 and it allowed women back into the military, in positions like those described for the WRAF in Britain—again, women were excluded from flying positions.¹⁰ In essence, the WAF (not to be confused with WAFS) was a reformation of the Air WAC, the women who initially provided services to the AAF, and who the AAF originally hoped to draw pilots out of to create the women pilot program. It existed until 1976, when the USAF accepted women on an equal basis with men. In 1993, Jeannie Leavitt became the first American woman fighter pilot in the USAF.

With such a turbulent history both in civilian life and associated with the military in Great Britain and the United States, one would think that the women pilots of World War II, being the first to fly military planes, would be well-recognized. Despite their almost century-long fight to be accepted as pilots, the women are barely remembered today. There have been a few surges of interest in the WASPs and ATA over the past 70 years, but they quickly rise and fall, leaving behind museum exhibits and books that unfortunately do not carry into the next generation. Lately, though, we have been in the midst of a surge that will hopefully keep these incredible women in the minds of Americans and the British alike, inspiring generations of young women to strive to be trailblazers in their own century.

⁸ Jacqueline Cochran, letter to WASP re: flying in Allied countries following WASP deactivation, 3 November 1944, Florence Knight Papers, Folder A94, Mss. 326c, Texas Woman's University Woman's Collection.

⁹ Douglass and Foster, *American Women and Flight since 1940*, 124.

¹⁰ The Women's Armed Services Integration Act was enacted in June 1948 and allowed women into the military, rather than into auxiliaries, for the first time in the United States. Women, post-1948, could serve as permanent members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force. They could not, however, serve on aircraft or Navy vessels that engaged in combat.

In the past, during the surges of interest in the women pilots of World War II, memoirs from the women involved were published, they held interviews and gatherings, and donated their collections related to the war and flying to museums and library collections. Notice that all of this includes the women pilots themselves. We are now coming upon a time in which relatively few World War II veterans are still alive, and a majority of the WASPs and Atagirls have passed away. This new interest has therefore taken a different shape, one which luckily aspires to inform both the young and the old through a variety of mediums, thereby passing along knowledge of the WASPs and ATA to a wider base than ever before.

Great Britain has, of late, taken the lead in informing its citizens of the women of the ATA, creating a museum dedicated to the ATA in Maidenhead along with a number of fictional books, documentaries, and popular histories. At Maidenhead, there is a permanent exhibit titled “Grandma Flew Spitfires” which teaches museum-goers of the ATA women in particular and includes a Spitfire simulator that allows the public to transport themselves back to World War II. Great Britain has, like past surges, taken the women themselves into account and in 2010 aired the documentary *Spitfire Women* on the BBC. It contains interviews with the few surviving women along with archival footage and dramatic reconstruction. Two other documentaries, *Spitfire Sisters* and *Air Transport Auxiliary*, have also been recently produced in Britain. In addition to museums and television, a number of books have been published within the last decade about the Atagirls. One such semi-popular history, *Spitfire Women of World War II* by Giles Whittell, was an important source of information to this thesis as it included information from interviews between the author and the ATA pilots. *The Female Few: Spitfire Heroines of the Air Transport Auxiliary* by Jacky Hyams is yet another popular history of the Atagirls and was published in 2012. Perhaps this new surge has been created by the 70th anniversary of World

War II and the fact that few survivors of the war (and women pilot programs) are still alive today. Or, it has come as a result of Britain's willingness to speak about war on a more complex level than the United States, taking women and minorities into consideration for example. One thing is certain: the Atagirls have a much larger spotlight on them lately than the WASPs.

An American-born England-residing author, Elizabeth Wein, has published two books within the past two years which relate to the Air Transport Auxiliary women that have both won awards, and have drawn the Atagirls even more into the spotlight. *Code Name Verity*, a young-adult historical novel published in 2012, is the first to have revived the Atagirls for future generations. While focusing on the friendship of a British spy and the female pilot who took her to Nazi-occupied France, in a plane that the two were forced to crash-land causing the spy to be arrested by the Gestapo, *Code Name Verity* offers to young and old readers the fact that women did serve in both such positions as the two main characters. Wein took the historical narrative one step further in her next book, *Rose Under Fire*, published in 2013, writing the story of a fictional American ATA pilot who is captured by the Nazis and sent to Ravensbrück, the largest women's concentration camp.

Both novels, being so visible in Britain and the United States, have created an interest in the women of the ATA, something which the WASP have yet to see. After having their fair share of newspaper articles and movies made about them during the 1940s, the WASPs have rarely seen their program in headlines. Part of this is due to the fact that all government records related to the WASP were sealed for 35 years following the program's termination. In 2009, the women were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Barack Obama and in May 2010, 300 surviving WASP traveled to the US Capitol to accept their medals from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and yet neither event received much publicity. The 2014 Rose Bowl Parade contained a

float for the WASP, with eight WASPs riding on it, yet again unbeknownst to the American public. PBS put out a documentary entitled *Fly Girls* in 2006 that attempted to bring the WASP back into public view, similar to the BBC and its *Spitfire Women* documentary, yet it is not often aired on television. For Veteran's Day 2013, *We Served Too: The Story of the Women Airforce Service Pilots* premiered on PBS and at several large screenings around the country which were attended by WASP who answered questions after the film. The United States has a museum dedicated to the WASP located in Sweetwater, Texas (at the site of Avenger Field), but it is not well-publicized, and most Americans are only be aware of the traveling WASP exhibit. The documentaries and the exhibit have contributed to the American public's knowledge of the WASP, but they do not begin to come close to the widespread awareness of the ATA in Britain.

Similar to the difference in acceptance of the women pilots during World War II, we now see a difference in the extent to which each country remembers its female military pilots. Just as Great Britain was more willing to accept the Atagirls (especially as the war went on), the country is now working to remember their stories. And, just as the United States leaned toward misogyny in its view of women pilots (especially as men returned from war or were released), today the WASPs are relatively unknown. The fact that attitudes from over 70 years ago have affected the way two extraordinary groups of women have been remembered today is not an uncommon phenomenon. History affects the present, which is the reason many historians give today for studying history in the first place, but that does not mean we cannot fight against past attitudes and change the way these women are remembered in the future.

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