

Descriptive Summary

Title

Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)

Collection Number

Pending

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Repository

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Abstract

These interviews were undertaken as part of a history master's thesis by Gail Gutierrez on the experiences of women who were members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) during WWII. WASP was an "experimental" program undertaken during the war to use women pilots for ferry work, flying planes from the factory to the airfield, and some testing that required a pilot, freeing up male pilots for combat. Including its predecessor programs Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTS), women were in flight service for the war effort from September 1942 to December 1944. After WASP was disbanded women would not be allowed to fly for the U.S. military again until 1977. During the WASP program's lifetime these female pilots amassed over 300,000 flying hours flying every kind of plane the army had. They flew as regularly and as long as male pilots in the same jobs and showed no apparent difference in physical, mental or psychological capabilities and their accident rate was comparable to that of the men. The women in these interviews explore Depression-era issues, their initial flight training and any difficulties they encountered due to their gender, training for and becoming WASPs, their memories and impressions of WASP leader Jacqueline Cochran, the death of fellow WASPs, the disbandment of the program and the employment environment for women in aviation after the war. These women were the unassuming pioneers in a part of the military that would not be opened to women for more than thirty years after their service.

Access

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[Format], [Name of Narrator] Oral History Interview [Interview Number], [Date of Interview], by [Name of Interviewer], [page number, if applicable]. [Collection Name], Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

Acquisitions Information

The interviews were created specifically for this project, that is, an oral history project, conducted as part of the Master's in History, completed by Gail Gutierrez, a student at California State University, Fullerton.

Processing Information

Marisa Burbidge

Completed December 13, 2007

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of six interviews conducted in 1989-1990 by Gail Gutierrez in partial fulfillment for her Master's in History at California State University, Fullerton. Each interview is considered a single file with its own designating number. The project file is separate and contains information and documents that belong to the project as a whole. Other documents may be associated with individual files when noted in the abstract. Each interview is available on cassette tape or CD and final, edited transcripts are bound into a volume titled *Forgotten Wings: An Oral History of Women Airforce*

Service Pilots, the WASPs. These oral histories are available in the project file or in the COPH reading room.

When interviewing Iris Critchell, it was discovered that she had participated in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany, and a second interview was conducted a month later relating specifically to her experiences during that time. That particular interview is OH 2177B.

Narrators

Brick, Katherine	(OH2176)
Critchell, Iris	(OH2177, 2177.1)
Desbrach, Marjorie	(OH2178)
Judd, Pearl	(OH2179)
London, Barbara	(OH2180)
Secciani, Joyce	(OH2181)

Interviewer

Gail Gutierrez

Series Descriptions

Series 1. Thesis. 0.04 linear feet.

This series includes papers Gail Gutierrez generated for her thesis project, *Forgotten Wings*. Included here are drafts of the introduction and bibliography of *Forgotten Wings* and a methodology paper which is not a part of the bound book.

Series 2. Sources. 0.08 linear feet.

This series includes some of the sources used in the research of this project. Included are a paper "Woman Pilots with the AAF, 1941-1944" from the *Army Air Force Historical Studies*, No. 55, *Prologue* Vol 23, No. 3 (Fall 1991), and excerpts from *Women and War* and *Warriors*.

Series 3. Newspaper and magazine clippings. 0.01 linear feet.

Included in this series is an article titled "Girl Pilots" (publication information unknown) and clippings describing the presentation of *Forgotten Wings* to the Narrators.

Series 4. WASP Reunion Memorabilia. 0.06 linear feet.

Included in this series is the 1980 roster of those associated with the WASPs and the program from the 1986 WASP Reunion in Sweetwater, Texas.

Series 5. Oral History Project, *Forgotten Wings*. 0.1 linear feet.

This series contains the bound copy of Gail Gutierrez's thesis, *Forgotten Wings: Women Airforce Service Pilots, the WASPs*.

ABSTRACTS

OH 2176

Narrator: Brick, Katherine (1910 – 1995)

Interviewer: Gutierrez, Gail

Title: "An Interview with Katherine Brick"

Date: November 12, 1989

Language: English

Location: Fallbrook, CA

Project: WASP

Realia: none

Format:

Status: edited transcript (47 pages)

Born in Maine, Brick received her pilot's license in 1941 and in 1943 joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Brick recounts training in the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPT); difficulties of women learning to fly; training at Howard Hughes Air Field, Houston, Texas, and Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas for the WASP program; recalls Jacqueline Cochran; types of aircraft flown, the Fourth tow-target squadron; discrimination; sabotage; Camp Davis, North Carolina; duties while in tow-target squadron; Officers Training School, Orlando, Florida; uniforms, wages and militarization, deaths of fellow WASPs; disbandment; and women in aviation since World War II.

OH 2177

Narrator: Critchell, Iris (b. 1921)

Interviewer: Gutierrez, Gail

Title: "An Oral History with Iris Critchell"

Date: August 2, 1990

Language: English

Location: Claremont, CA

Project: W.A.S.P.

Realia: none

Format: audio CD

Status:

An oral history with Iris Critchell, pilot, aviation instructor, swimming competitor in 1936 Olympic Games at the age of 15, and a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (W.A.S.P.) class W43-2.

Critchell describes her childhood in Los Angeles/Redondo Beach especially riding bicycles and swimming; her father's interest and appreciation of flying and her mother's support of her rigorous education and of her competitive swimming. She describes her swimming training and especially her trip to Germany for the 1936 Olympics, and then setting swimming aside in 1939 to pursue aviation. She discusses getting her license at 17, being the first woman in USC program as only woman of fifty students in Civilian Pilot Training (CPT), teaching aeronautics, 1941 graduation from USC, and preparation for W43-2 class.

OH 2177.1 (prev. 2177B)

Narrator: Critchell, Iris (b. 1921)

Interviewer: Gutierrez, Gail

Title: "An Oral History with Iris Critchell"

Date: September 2, 1990

Language: English

Location: Claremont, CA

Project: W.A.S.P.

Realia:

Format: audio CD

Status:

An oral history with Iris Critchell, pilot, aviation instructor, swimming competitor in 1936 Olympic Games at the age of 15, and a member of the WASP class W43-2. This interview begins with Critchell's recollections about her mother's experiences as a "canteen girl" in Paris and her father's involvement as a sports doctor for the AEF Games of 1919. Critchell discusses how her parents met, their education at Swarthmore and their early careers. She speaks of her mother's influence on her education, swimming, and interest in engineering and aviation. Critchell speaks of her love of flying and tells how her strong background in physical sciences, mathematics helped make her flight training easier.

Critchell relates her experiences in swimming training and competition in Los Angeles and nationally leading up to her participation in the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. She speaks of friendships made with other competitors, some women pilots, and of friendships made with other Olympians. She relates details of her voyage to Germany for the Games, training onboard the ship, and the atmosphere in Berlin as war was impending.

Critchell explains her flying training beginning in 1940, her training with CAA, then with the military pilot training program, teaching aviation and flight training at Santa Maria, Blythe in California, Carson City, NV, then Houston, TX for W3-42.

OH 2178**Narrator:** Dresbach, Marjorie (1917 – 1996)**Interviewer:** Gutierrez, Gail**Title:** “An Oral History with Marjorie Dresbach”**Date:** April 28, 1990**Language:** English**Location:** La Habra, CA**Project:** W.A.S.P.**Realia:** photocopies of newspaper clippings**Format:****Status:** edited transcript (34 pp)

Raised in Oklahoma, her love of flying began after a ride in a dirigible. She recalls receiving her pilot's license in September 1942; Tulsa, Oklahoma during the Great Depression; the beginning of World War II; her meeting and admiration for Jacqueline Cochran; cost and type of planes used in learning to fly; joining the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP); training at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas; recollections about training difficulties; deaths of WASPs; assignment to Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia; test-flight engineers, cross-country flying, wages, duties, and military life at Spence Field; weather during flights; problems encountered at other bases; disbandment of WASP program; militarization denied to WASPs; Army Air force Reserve.

OH 2179**Narrator:** Judd, Pearl (b. 1922)**Interviewer:** Gutierrez, Gail**Title:** “An Oral History with Pearl Judd”**Date:** May 19, 1989**Language:** English**Location:** Alta Loma, CA**Project:** W.A.S.P.**Realia:** photocopies of documents and photographs**Format:****Status:** edited transcript (48 pp)

A former member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) recalls requirements for obtaining a pilot's license in the 1930s, the expense of obtaining a pilot's license, requirements for WASPs, and training at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas; civilian and military instructors, activities for women on and off the field, social life, duties and dangers in the test-flight engineer squadron; uniforms, wages and military etiquette; cross-country solos; Minter Air Base, Bakersfield, California. Includes comments on disbandment, lack of militarization, Jacqueline Cochran, discrimination, deaths of fellow WASPs, and availability of women for work in aviation after World War II.

OH 2180**Narrator:** London, Barbara (b. 1920)**Interviewer:** Gutierrez, Gail**Title:** "An Oral History with Barbara London"**Date:** October 29, 1989**Language:** English**Location:** Long Beach, CA**Project:** W.A.S.P.**Realia:** military documents, copy of news clipping**Format:****Status:** edited transcript (41 pp), verbatim transcript (81 pp)

A native of Washington state and former Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) member during World War II, London began flying in 1939 through the Civilian Pilot training Program (CPT) and received her pilot's license in early 1940, her commercial license and instructor's license in 1941. She describes the training in the CPT for both her private and commercial licenses; introduction to Nancy Harkness Love, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS); being squadron commander while stationed at Long Beach Air Base, California; various aircraft ferried across the United States for delivery at Newcastle Air Base, Wilmington, Delaware; duties, training and being the first and only WASP to receive the Air Medal; transition from WAFS to WASPs; uniforms and hardships while delivering aircraft; disbandment of the WASP program; lack of militarization; availability of military status for women in the Air Force after the war; women in aviation since World War II; and notable aviatrix, Jacqueline Cochran.

OH 2181**Narrator:** Secciani, Joyce (b. 1921)**Interviewer:** Gutierrez, Gail**Title:** "An Oral History with Joyce Secciani"**Date:** October 22, 1990**Language:** English**Location:** El Cajon, CA**Project:** W.A.S.P.**Realia:** none**Format:****Status:** edited transcript (76 pp), verbatim transcript (119 pp)

A native of California describes experiences learning to fly in the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program at El Centro Junior College, California; flying in the desert and joining the Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) program; Jacqueline Cochran; training at Howard Hughes Air Field, Houston Texas and Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas. She recalls problems in training; assignment and duties in the tow-target squadron; discrimination at Camp Davis, North Carolina; requirements for joining the WASPs; radio control operation; uniforms, wages, military etiquette and militarization; March Air Force Base, Riverside, CA; Riverside during World War II; military life of a woman;

attitudes of male counterparts; disbandment; and opportunities for women in the Air Force after the war.

OH 3969

Narrator: Wood, Margaret Winifred (1919 - 2009)

Interviewer: Gutierrez, Gail

Title: "An Oral History with Winifred Wood"

Date: August 22, 1987

Language: English

Location: Narrator's home in San Marcos, CA

Project: W.A.S.P.

Realia: none

Format: audio CD

Status: not transcribed

Author and pilot. Served in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during World War II, graduated class of 43-W-7. Attended Mather Army Air Base (later Mather AFB) in Sacramento, CA, for B-25 training, then stationed at Biggs Army Air Field, El Paso, Texas. Author of "We Were WASPs," 1945.

This interview begins with Wood's background information – growing up in Coral Gables, Florida, her family, education (University of Miami and Columbia Law), and early flying experience in sea planes and Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program. Discusses being "around people who flew a lot," starting flying in 1942, soloing on 9-11-42, and obtaining license later that year, then teaching Link flight simulation training; makes frequent reference to and consultation with the log book she kept from beginning of training. Discusses her parent's concern about her flying, but support of her WASP duty. Discusses new Jacqueline Cochran book. Speaks of her own book as representing her best recollection of her WASP experience and her thoughts and feelings about WASP service and how the program "proved once and for all that women could fly and fly competently any plane the military had." Reported in May 1943 to Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas for five months of WASP training. Describes housing, zoot suits (men's coveralls), other uniforms; physical requirements, flight training and ground school (navigation, meteorology), calisthenics and marching drills, recreation in off hours, dearth of men, lack of alcohol in "dry" towns, elimination rides, washing out (failing test rides), check rides, love of flying B-25s, atmosphere on base. Wood describes training starting on PT-19 Fairchild, then BTs, AT-6, UC-78; trained in cross-country, acrobatics; excellent instruction; accidents, safety record, civilian instructors; recalls first cross-country flight; B-25 school in Nov. 1943. Wood describes feeling patriotic and contributing to war effort, and how this was an opportunity for women. Discusses militarization, disbandment of WASP program in 1944 a surprise and waste of training. Describes kinds of missions they flew, close feelings as a group, reunions of WASP pilots; her work at Palm Springs airport after the war; participation in all-women air show. Wood shares her thoughts about what if asked to fly in combat, about WAFs, and about discrimination against women then and now.