

We were WASP



A scenario by Ann Eriksen
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We were WASP (Eriksen, 2014)

December 1944. A B-29 Superfortress bomber flies towards an air force base in Arizona. The plane's further destination is unknown to its pilots. Four women sit in the cockpit. For the last year and a half, they have sacrificed themselves for a nation at war.

August 1943. The same four women meet in a barrack in Texas. To the outside world, they are unknown, to the war, they are unwanted, and to the US army they are a necessary evil. They will each endure insults, distrust, and ridicule. Through the war, they will find kindred spirits in each other, and together they will be invincible. No matter what else might occur, they will always have their memories of the plane. The unfathomable, tactile sense of flying as the only refuge of absolute freedom. High-flying, anxiety provoking, discouraging, untamable, deepfelt, wild. Friends in arms, always. Resistance is something to overcome. Life is, until it ends.

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Introduction

We were WASP is a character drama about four women who volunteer as pilots for the WASP corps (Women Airforce Service Pilots) during World War II. It is the story about four very different people who come together around the common dream of flying.

The narrative has three acts. The first act follows the characters during basic training in Texas, where they put their internal relationships to the test. The second act describes their active service in Arizona. During a period where female pilots are even rarer than today, they face prejudice, discrimination, and contempt from the US army, forcing them to stand together against the pressure from their surroundings. In the third act, they are on a mission in England. Here they face the horrors of the war. A war they cannot assist in, barred from helping by their gender. The game ends with the disbanding of the corps, and the GM giving the graduation speech that General Arnold (Commanding General of the Army Air Forces) gave to the last graduating WASP class before disbanding the corps.

We were WASP is a linear game. All scenes play out in the order they appear in the scene overview. There are three types of scenes in the game: scenes on the ground, scenes in the planes, and interview scenes. The scenes on the ground drive the narrative, whereas the interview scenes allows the characters to

articulate their relations and personal development. The scenes in the planes are slightly different – they allow the characters to live out their dreams of flying, and use a specific narrative mechanic to support the physical, tactile aspect of flying.

The scenario is about how the characters' friendships, their unity, and personal relations evolve during the war. It is a bromance about how extraordinary circumstances shape profound friendships. But it is also a bromance about woman and their experiences during wartime. A bromance about the army's reluctance towards them and their fight to claim their place in history; about realizing your dreams only to have them taken from you again; about being on the sideline of a terrible war and not being allowed to help.

The characters and scenes are a mix of actual events and fiction. The obituaries of four WASP-pilots provide the basis for the characters, and their actual lives inspire a number of the scenes in the game. Other parts are pure fiction. Ultimately, I have chosen to weigh the good narrative above a precise reproduction of historical facts. However, I have tried to respect the historical context and the people I portray.





Themes

Friendship: The main theme of the game. The characters do not necessarily like each other at the beginning of the story, and the first part of the game deals with their differences and internal conflicts. As time passes, the world's unjust treatment of them forces them to bond together and find purpose in their friendships.

The aircraft: The aircraft is the dream. It is a space where the four WASPs, in their own unique ways, locate the possibilities of rebellion against the lives they live. The aircraft relates closely to each WASP's personality. They can be themselves when they are in the air. It is also a possibility for confronting each other and acting out their conflicts. However, it is just as much a place where they can support and help each other.

The war: The war is the grand backdrop of the game. The characters relate to it in different ways, but none of them can escape it. The story of the war is a dilemma for the characters. On the one hand, it gives them the possibility of flying. On the other hand, the war is a gruesome event that has placed their friends and loved ones in mortal peril.

Powerlessness: As WASP-members, the characters do not have the possibility of actively participating in the war. They are also unable to rebel against the everyday injustice they face. The only alternative is not to fly, and that is

Characters

Helen Wyatt Snapp: A scorned housewife, who used to have dreams, but now finds that her marriage has changed her.

Betty-Jane Williams: The beautiful daughter of a wealthy man, who insists on wearing masks and does not dare to show the world who she really is.

Patricia Chadwick: A very large and awkward girl from the countryside, who strenuously tries to accept that she does not fit in.

Violet Cowden: An OCD stricken schoolteacher, who tries to be helpful and pleasant, but who cannot control her dark sides.

worse than any injustice laid upon them. The players have to endure confrontation with the view on women of the time without the possibility of changing it or rebelling.

Change: It is important that the characters change during the game. They may change their view on the war, the way they fly, or their dream about flying. It is up to the players which direction they want to take their character. The only mandatory change is the characters have to bond during the second part of the game. The characters have to reach a point where they surrender themselves to the group.



The historical context

We were WASP does not require vast historical knowledge. You have to present the information mentioned below to the players, but thereafter it is entirely your game. Whatever the players establish in the fiction supersedes the historical reality. It is more important for the players to feel possession over the narrative than adhering to the historical facts.

The WASP corps

The WASP corps was formed in 1943, by Nancy Love Harkness and Jacqueline Cochran, two of the most prominent pilots of the time. The aim of the corps was to train female pilots to fly domestic military missions, thereby freeing up male pilots for active combat duty.

To enter WASP, a woman had to hold a certificate for a non-military plane already. 25,000 pilots applied to be a part of the corps, but only 1,900 were accepted, and 1,047 graduated. The accepted pilots received four months of military training, equal to what male pilots received. After finishing their training, pilots received a set of silver wings, symbolizing their membership of the WASP corps.

The military stationed the trained pilots on air bases across the US. From here, they carried out non-combat military duties, such as test flights and the transport of cargo, aircrafts, and personal. They also flew as target practice for

anti-aircraft crews. WASP was not a military organization, but neither was it a civilian one.

The women who served in WASP did so on a voluntary basis. They received only slight compensation, and none of the military benefits the male soldiers were eligible to receive. There was no compensation for injuries suffered during active service, and if they died in accidents, the army did not pay to have their remains shipped home. At the time of formation, the women paid their own travel costs to the training base, and they paid their own transportation home when the army disbanded the corps.

In 1977 the WASP archives were opened, and the corps' members given veteran status with eligibility for benefits. In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded them the Congressional Gold Medal.

Women in the 1940s

The characters live in a time with very clear restrictions on how women could act. It was a time with clearly defined gender roles. Women serving in the military was unheard of.

Both the historical WASPs and the characters in the game were middle or upper class women who could afford flying certificates. Society expected them to marry and become housewives or work in appropriate female professions.



The only reason the army allowed a female aviation corps to form was the war. It was, however, far from everyone who agreed on the decision to establish WASP, and society as a whole viewed the female pilots as odd and outlandish.

This is the context of the game. It is not possible for the WASPs to think beyond the view of women, and the players cannot impose their own view on gender on the characters.

The narrative rules of the game

The game has three premises the players have to follow. The characters do not rebel, they evolve as individuals, and they become friends.

The characters do not rebel

The players do not have the option to rebel either against authorities or against the common gender norms. Their only possible revolt is when flying. They can think that the world treats them unfairly, and they can complain to supporting characters, but they cannot openly rebel. They cannot, for example, go on strike or give up flying and go home. The WASPs have to fulfill the WASP training program.

The characters have to navigate the military world to the best of their ability, and the players have to feel the powerlessness when others treat their characters unjustly. The focal point of the game is the meeting between the characters' dreams of flying and a world that think women should dream of children and housework.

It is important that the players stay true to the gender conventions of the game's period. It is a central premise, aimed at conveying the feeling of powerlessness essential to the game.

The characters evolve

The characters have to evolve in some way during the game. Either in their relationship to the war, their way of flying, or how they see themselves. The WASPs should not be the same when the game ends – something has to change them. The players themselves have to make this happen, so encourage and support them, and make sure to create possibilities for change.





The characters become friends

The characters have to give themselves up to the community and become friends with each other during the second part of the game. If the scenes provided in the catalogue are not enough for this to happen, it is possible for the player to set scenes.

All players can initiate one scene that has to be their character's turning point, where they become friends with the others. Please assist if a player wants such a scene, but has trouble coming up with one. You can also discuss it with the group and come up with something together.

At one play test, the players only set a single scene, but it served as a communal scene where everyone agreed that, at least, they had each other. This is also an option.





Characters and casting

Helen Wyatt Snapp

Helen is a woman who, in her marriage, lost the dreams she had as a youth. She still thinks about them, but fights fulfill her responsibilities as a good homemaker. When she gets out of the house and her role as a housewife, Helen tries to make others follow her lead. She is always sure that her way is the best way. As the most patriotic of the WASPs, Helen is proud of the fact that both she and her husband are doing their part.

The plane is where Helen rebels against her life as a housewife. When she flies, she is as much a machine as the plane is. She is precise and punctual, down to the smallest detail. However, she does not dare to take risks, and fears the day that she loses control of the plane.

Helen is the dominating and moralizing member of the group. She wants to take control and be in charge, and she tends to judge others. When Helen has to give herself over to the group, she has to let them take control away from her and she has to depend on them.

Cast a player who does not take up too much space, or a player who is good at restraining him- or herself, as Helen. Helen is a character who can become dominating and take up too much space, so make sure that there is room for the other players.

Betty-Jane Williams

Betty is a beautiful upper class girl whose life bores her. She is good at adapting to different social situations — either as the well-behaved feminine girl, or as the dangerous femme fatale. On the one hand, it tires Betty that people only see her as a beautiful body, when she has so many other aspects to her. On the other hand, she does not know how to behave differently when she wants to swing a situation to her favor. Betty is oblivious to the vast consequences of the war, and prefers not to think about it too much.

Betty flies because only in the plane can she prove that she is more than a dress up doll. She flies skillfully, but she is afraid of the day when flying becomes as trivial as the rest of her life. Therefore, she keeps pushing the limit in the skies to achieve an ever-larger rush.

Betty is the reckless and blunt member of the group. She is the one who offers up the unwanted truths about the others, and she often acts selfishly. When Betty has to give herself over to the group, the others have to poke at her guilty conscience that tells her she should treat other people better, and not only care about herself. Give Betty to a player you think is able to play a character that wears many masks. She is a character that could end up being played stereotypically, so consider casting somewhat who is a little quirky for the role.



Patricia Chadwick

Pat is the big, clumsy girl that does not fit in. She is always ready to offer up some banter, a joke, or a snide remark when people stare at her or offer hurtful remarks. On the one hand, Pat knows that she could do something about her appearance, but she just tries to make the best of things as they are. On the other hand, she sometimes wishes that she could just fit in. Pat is generally happy that the war has come, because it has given her new opportunities.

The plane is the only place where Pat feels elegant, almost beautiful. Her ambition is to fly for the rest of her life, and refine her flying to an art. Pat feels that the plane is the only place people regard her positively, and she fears that she one day will lose that elegance. Pat is the funny and abrasive person in the group. She is the one that bluntly states her opinion and who rebels against the authorities. When Pat has to give herself over to the group, the group has to place her in a position where it becomes evident that she does not fit in, and that there is no way for her to really rebel against it.

Pat is a straightforward character, and you can give it to a less experienced player. It is also a good match to a male player, who is insecure in portraying a female character. If you as the game master want to challenge the game a bit, then give the character to a traditionally feminine female player.

Violet Cowden

Violet is a neurotic with a Christian background. She wants to help others, but she has a repressed side that weighs on her and makes her act irrationally when under pressure. Violet is the character with the most realistic view on the war – she sees it as something horrible that changes people. But she is also convinced that the war in the long run will help a lot of people have better lives, and that is why she supports it.

When Violet flies, she is two distinct people: the calm one and the wild one. Most of the time, she flies the plane calmly according to the circumstances, but sometimes her wild side takes over. Then she flies without any fear at all. The wild side is both Violet's greatest fear and her greatest joy.

Violet is both the one who always helps the others, and the one whom the others never know how will react. She is the most spontaneous of the group, but also the one most concerned with everybody's well-being. When Violet has to give herself over to the group, they should confront her about her dark side and show her that they accept her anyway.

Violet can be a slightly difficult character to play, so give her to the most experienced or strongest of the players in the room.



Suggestions for scenes in Act Two

In the second part of the game, the WASPs have to surrender to the group. If the players do not feel that they have done so yet, they have the possibility to set a scene they think would be suitable. They can also ask you as game master to help. Here are some suggestions for scenes, suitable for the different characters.

Helen

Helen just landed from a mission, where something went wrong. Maybe an engine stalled or there were heavy winds that made it very difficult to land. The other WASPs receive her on the ground when she gets out of the plane.

Betty

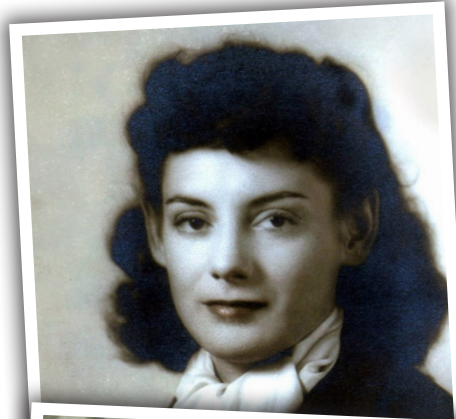
It has been a long day, and the four WASPs are sitting in their quarters. Someone has found a bottle of scotch and Betty has started to become too honest. The others confront her about her tone.

Patricia

It is their night off and the WASPs are out on the town. They have had dinner and drinks, and have now gone dancing. Everybody else is dancing, but Pat stands alone in the bar uninvited. She is still there when the others return from the dance floor.

Violet

Violet thinks she is alone, and feels her dark side coming upon her. She starts maniacally to reorganize their quarters. The others return while she is in the midst of it.





The three types of scenes

There are three different types of scenes in the game. Scenes on the ground, interview scenes, and scenes in the plane.

Scenes on the ground

These scenes are the ones which predominantly drive the narrative, and the most locked. They are also the most traditional roleplaying scenes. Here the WASPs have to react to something, to take a stand, or come up with a solution. These scenes are either for two or four player characters. In several of these scenes, you will play supporting characters.

Because the game's narrative is fixed, it is important that you give the players room so they do not feel that they are standing passively on the sideline while the game railroads them through the narrative. They have to be involved, and if they cannot act then at least give them the possibility of reacting.

Interview scenes

The interview scenes are where the characters can talk about their expectations, joys, sorrows, and their dreams of flying. There are short interview scenes prior to each act to help set the mood. You pose a number of questions to each of the characters, with the aid of the other players. These can be questions about what the character thinks about the other WASPs, what

they fear the most when they are in the air, how they think they have changed by being in Texas, or something else entirely. In the end, it is up to you and the other players to decide what questions are asked.

Scenes in the plane

When the characters fly, you are mainly present as a radio voice from the control tower that can change the route or end the flight. The players use a special game mechanic presented on the next page. It is the players' responsibility to create drama in the scenes with the help of the mechanics. The WASPs' character traits intertwine with how they fly and what they fear about flying. For these reasons, the scenes in the plane are a good place to play out conflicts, cohesion, and reconciliation.

With the exception of the final scene in the plane, two characters always play out these scenes.





The flying technique

The players use the flying technique each time the characters are in a plane. The technique consists of the following steps: First, the first pilot narrates what happens and then narrates how she feels and how her body reacts. Then, it is the co-pilot's turn to do the same. It is always the first pilot that starts, because she is the main protagonist in that scene, so she gets to dictate what happens.

The technique has two uses:



1. It can be used to tell the other side of the story	2. It can change the narrative of the flight and add drama
First pilot -> Action: "I start the engine and take the plane out on the runway." -> Feeling/reaction: "I am excited and it tickles in my stomach."	First pilot -> Action: "I fly fast, but safe." -> Feeling/reaction: "I am completely calm."
Second pilot -> Action: "She takes the plane out on the runway, and we are off center." -> Feeling/reaction: "I am nervous about this flight."	Second pilot -> Action: "Suddenly the plane starts to loose speed and altitude." -> Feeling/reaction: "All the muscles in my body tense."
First pilot -> Action: "The plane drives down the runway with incredible speed and the wheels leave the ground." -> Feeling/reaction: "I am invincible."	First pilot -> Action: "I rip hard at the stick." -> Feeling/reaction: "I am afraid. Cold sweat breaks out."
Second pilot -> Action: "The plane sways quite a lot as it goes down the runway." -> Feeling/reaction: "My stomach turns in on itself, but it is an amazing rush as we finally take off."	Second pilot -> Action: "The plane levels out, and we just miss the control tower." -> Feeling/ reaction: "I let out a sigh of relief."



Conversation

The pilots should be able to have conversations during the flights. They can do this when they describe feelings or reactions, or it can be a “cut” scene only focusing on the conversation. It is up to you to get a feel for how tight you should game master these scenes. If the group is not very active or a bit unexperienced, it might be good to run these scenes very tight, while a more experienced group can have freer reign.

To give away control

The first pilot can choose to give away control of the plane at any given time during a flight. Normally a plane has two pilots, so the second pilot can take over, should something happen to the first pilot. During the game, it is completely up to the first pilot if, and when, she gives away control. The second pilot can put as much pressure on the first pilot as she likes, but only the first pilot can relinquish control.

If the first pilot relinquishes control, then the second pilot becomes the main protagonist in the scene.

The radio

When the characters are flying, you are only present in the scene as a voice on the radio. You can, at any time, call the plane and ask them to change course or perform a certain maneuver. Most importantly, the radio is there so you can signal the players that they should wrap up the scene.





Before the game

Before the game starts, you should do some warm up exercises. Start by playing an informal game. For example, let the players stand in a circle and greet each other. Let them shake hands formally, then like old friends, best friends, etc.

Then it is time to start a fight. Choose two players and set a scene where they get into a verbal fight. Cut the scene at the height of the fight. Then let them repeat the scene, but with new information. During a playtest, we played a scene where a couple first fought about the dishes. Then we replayed it, where one of them had secretly gone through the other's phone and found a number of incriminating texts.

Make sure that all players get to fight.

Eventually, you can ask the players to tell about a time when they felt powerless and could do nothing about it. If you choose to do this exercise, start by telling a story about yourself. Then it is time to practice the flying technique. Instruct the players, and let them try it out in a scene. It is important that all players get to try it.

Then hand out the characters.

Info for the players

Before the game starts, there is some information you need to give the players.

The game's overall narrative

A story about friendship, planes, war, and being powerless

The historical context

The history of the WASP corps (in short)

The historical role of women

The player's cannot impose their own view on gender on the characters

The themes of the three acts, and the goals the players should have in mind

First act: relations and conflicts

Second act: the world is against them, forcing the characters to give themselves over to the group

Third act: The horrors of the war, and the WASPs' position somewhere between the military and civilian life.

(repeat the different themes before each act)

Change

Tell the players that their characters have to change in some way during the game.

They have to reach a point where they give themselves over to the group.

In the second act, they each have to reach a point where this happens (you or they can set a scene where this happens).

Any questions from the players

Let the players then introduce their characters, and then the game can start.



When the game ends

First, read General Arnold's speech aloud. It is a speech filled with praise for the WASPs' ability and their contribution to the war effort. The speech makes the story even more bittersweet. Historically, because Arnold gave it shortly before the corps disbanded. With regard to the narrative, because it in no way reflects the way the US army treated the women of the WASP corps.

The game material contains four obituaries of real WASPs. When the game ends, ask the players if they want to read them. It is voluntary.





Prologue

The prologue is the first interview scene.

Act One

THEME

The theme for the first part is establishing conflicts and personal relations. It is important to give the players the possibility to play out their characters' personalities to the max. Please sum up the theme of the act before you start the act.

SCENE 1.1: THE TRAINING BASE IN SWEETWATER, TEXAS

Purpose: To establish the mood surrounding the base, to let the characters present themselves to each other, and to let them talk about the expectations of the program.

Characters in focus: All four of them.

Location: The base in Sweetwater and the mess hall.

September 1943. 34 young women arrive at the base in Sweetwater. The soldiers stationed at the base have gathered to watch the women arriving by bus and cars. The soldiers wave their arms and catcall after the new arrivals. The dust hangs thick in the air. All the barracks look alike. Grey with small windows, with stars and stripes waving in front of each of them. Behind the barracks lie the runways, where the large machines loom.

The wasps have gathered in the mess hall, waiting for someone to welcome them. The four protagonists sit at the same table. Let the characters present themselves to each other.

Nancy Love Harkness enters and welcomes them. The game master plays her. Most of the women in the room already know her as a pioneer in aviation. She is the one who will lead the WASP corps. Harkness welcomes the wasps – let her be a little emotional. Feel free to improvise more of the speech or to reshape it as you see fit, but keep the last sentence as it is.

“For the next four months, you’re undertaking the best pilot training in the world. You are women pioneers, and you will fly military aircraft as the first women ever in this country. I know you will meet the high standards of the training. I have handpicked every one of you, and I know you will not disappoint. It will be tough, but I know that every one of you (like me) is filled with love for our country, and that the love will see you through. You are dutiful women who will do your duty for America, and America will never forget you.”



What do the characters talk about after the introduction? Their expectations for the training, the aircraft, things back home, or something else? Keep this part of the scene short, but let everyone speak.

SCENE 1.2: BETTY AND VIOLET – TOP BUNK

Purpose: To create conflict and a relationship between Betty and Violet, and allow their differences to come into play.

Characters in focus: Betty and Violet.

Location: Sleeping quarters.

First day at the base. Betty wants to sleep in a top bunk, but none are available, so she has moved Violet's things into the lower bunk. Violet walks in on Betty while she is moving her stuff. Play out the confrontation between Betty and Violet. Betty can act on her inconsiderateness, Violet on her neuroses. Cut the scene fast and on the apogee of the conflict.

SCENE 1.3: VIOLET AND PAT – FIRST FLYING LESSON

Purpose: To establish conflict and a relationship between Violet and Pat, and to let them express their relationships to aircrafts.

Characters in focus: Pat and Violet.

Location: The hangar and the aircraft.

It is the second day at the base, and the wasps have their first flying lesson. Pat and Violet meet each other in the hangar, while they are waiting for the instructor. They have been teamed up for the training sessions. They are flying a flimsy disused two-propellor plane.

First, the characters have to establish who is going to be first pilot. Cut the scene when they have agreed.

Then play the flying scene – cut the scene when they land.





SCENE 1.4: PAT AND HELEN — BEFORE DINNER

Purpose: To establish conflict between Pat and Helen, and to make their differences apparent.

Characters in focus: Pat and Helen.

Location: Sleeping quarters.

They have been in Sweetwater for a week, and the officers at the base have invited the women to a formal dinner to welcome them. Everyone is getting ready, putting on their best dresses. Except Pat, who intends to show up in her normal clothes. Play out the scene where Helen confronts Pat. Helen can act on her ideas about how real women should behave, and Pat can act on her tendency to be defiant against conventional ideals. Cut the scene fast and at the apogee of the conflict.

SCENE 1.5: HELEN AND BETTY — FLYING LESSON

Purpose: To establish conflict and a relationship between Helen and Betty, and to let them express their relationships to aircraft.

Characters in focus: Betty and Helen.

Location: The hangar and the aircraft.

October 1943. Betty and Helen are due for a lesson. Helen is waiting for Betty, who is late. When Betty finally shows, the characters have to establish who is going to be first pilot. Cut the scene when they have agreed. Then play out the flying scene – cut it when they land.

SCENE 1.6: HELEN AND VIOLET — MORNING

Purpose: To create conflict and personal relationships.

Characters in focus: Helen and Violet

Location: Showers.

November 1943. They have learned the rules, regulations, and routines of the army. They present themselves each morning at 0700 for inspection. They have learned how their quarters must be in order, and how their clothes have to lie in their closets.

Even if they are not regular army, they still have to present themselves properly. This morning Betty has not complied with regulations, and her things are all over her bunk. Instead of punishing her, their NCOs have chosen collective punishment. Everyone in the barrack gets extra cleaning duty. Just like you would punish regular soldiers.

Helen and Betty have been assigned the showers. Play out the scene where Helen and Betty receive the order to scrub the shower floors. Allow them to discuss the order with the officer who gave it. As an option, you can cut to the when they are on their knees, scrubbing.





SCENE 1.7: THE JOURNALIST

Purpose: To give the wasps a glimpse of the world's view of them.

Characters in focus: All, but mainly Pat and Betty.

Location: Outside, at the base.

November 1943. They are having lunch in the mess hall. An officer approaches them and informs them that there is a journalist waiting outside. The officer asks Betty, Violet, Pat, and Helen to go out and give the journalist an interview. The journalist wants to make a picture spread for a local paper. The officer tells them that it is important for morale that they portray themselves and the base in a positive light.

The gamemaster plays the journalist. Start by asking them a few questions about their motivations for joining the WASP corps. Then ask them a handful of awkward questions about base life as a woman. Is there a queue in front of the mirror in the morning? Can you fly and apply mascara at the same time? Is the army a good place to meet a future husband, etc? Then have them line up for a photo shoot, both one by one and in a group. Ask them to push out their chests, pout their lips, etc. Give extra attention to Pat and Betty. Pat because she is not a conventional beauty. Let the journalist give her a hard time. Do the opposite with Betty.

Flirt with her and take your time taking her picture. You can also let the journalist give her a pat on the buttocks after the shoot.

SCENE 1.8: PAT AND BETTY – SHOWING OFF

Purpose: To create conflict between Pat and Betty.

Characters in focus: Pat and Betty.

Location: The hangar and the aircraft.

December 1943. Betty and Pat are flying a small plane - a maneuverable two-seat fighter - for the first time. The only thing the instructor has told them is to take the plane up and show him what they can do with it.

First, the characters have to decide who is going to fly first pilot. Cut when they have decided. Then play the flying scene - cut the scene when they have landed.





SCENE 1.9: AFTER THE MOVIES

Purpose: To let them voice their opinion about the war.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: At a bar.

They see them marching as one on the silver screen. Thousands of Germans. They extend their right arms in salute towards the balcony where the small man with the moustache stands. The Germans cheer maniacally, some of them even cry. They appear exuberantly happy, while Adolf Hitler addresses them in a passionate speech. The wasps do not understand what he is saying. It is in German. The scene on the screen ends. Voiceover tells them about the brave Americans who have just shipped out towards England. The camera pans across a large ship, with hundreds of soldiers waving. While the ship leaves the harbor, the crowd of onlookers comes into view. There are big smiles and tears of joy as both parties wave goodbye to each other.

December 1943. The wasps have been in Sweetwater for almost four months. It is their night off, and they have been at the movies. The four of them are now sharing a table and talk about the war. Play out a scene where they get to talk about their opinions about the war. Is it good, bad, or just necessary? Optionally, you can start the scene with someone giving a toast for the boys over there, shouting “Down with Hitler!” or something else.

Interview scene II

Play out the second interview scene after the first act has ended. Here it is important to get the wasps to talk about their internal relationships and their expectations about what is going to come next. You can also ask them a bit about the war.

Between the acts

The wasps have undergone their four months of training. They have flown an array of planes, received navigation training, learned aviation strategy, emergency landings, and much more. The four characters have gone to a base in Arizona, where the army has sent them for an undisclosed amount of time. They are the only wasps at that base.

On the war front, the US is still mainly recruiting, and so far, there is no sign of when they will deploy troops into combat on a massive scale.

Act Two

THEME

The theme of this act is friendship and the pressure from outside. This is the act where the characters have to play towards a change, culminating in all of them giving themselves over to the group and their shared friendship. It is also in this act that the players have the option of setting a scene, or you can set it. Please sum up the theme for the players before the act starts.



SCENE 2.1: THE MOOD IN ARIZONA AND SIGNING OF CONTRACTS

Purpose: The wasps have entered the real world, and the real world has prejudices towards them. The scene highlights the animosity surrounding the fact that they are women.

Characters in focus: All.

Location: The base in Arizona, Colonel Clarke's office.

January 1944. The wasps arrive at the base in Arizona. It looks a lot like Sweetwater, but there are no catcalls or shouts. Only the four of them surrounded by a bunch of busy soldiers.

The commander is Colonel Clarke and the wasps are in his office for a briefing. The gamemaster plays the colonel. Make sure to play up the colonel's resentment. Just do not make him into a caricature.

He tells the wasps that they are only there because there is a war on, and they should not think of themselves as anything but civilians. He does not want them to stir up any trouble. If there are any complaints about them, he will ship them home. He expects them to follow orders at all times, and act appropriately. In no way are they to turn the heads of his men around, or expect any form of preferential treatment. He does not want any "women problems" at his base. The colonel presents them with four contracts.

When they sign them, they relinquish the right to any claims against the US army, should anything happen to them.

Let the characters discuss it, preferably also with the colonel. In the end, let him make it clear for them that he will ship them home if they do not sign. The characters have no choice but to sign. Cut the scene when everyone has signed.

SCENE 2.2: UNDERWEAR

Purpose: To expose Pat.

Characters in focus: Helen and Pat, but mainly Pat.

Location: Mess hall.

It is the morning after the wasps signed their contracts. Pat and Helen are in the mess having their breakfast together with the other soldiers. A couple of soldiers come running into the mess hall, having stolen a pair of Pat's underpants.

One of them has either put them on his head or is waving them around. They potentially make snide remarks about the size of the pants. Everyone in the mess hall is laughing.

How does Pat react to the situation?

Pat can complain to the colonel, but if she does, he will tell her to suck it up or go home.



If it turns into a scuffle, then let colonel Clarke walk in and break it up at the worst possible time. He can threaten them with a discharge, or give them punishment, such as dishwashing, cleaning, or kitchen duty – preferably something traditionally female.

Optionally, set a short scene of them doing the punishment together.



SCENE 2.3: HELEN AND VIOLET – TEST FLYING

Purpose: To place the wasps in an exposed position, where they are being used to threaten the other pilots.

Characters in focus: Betty and Violet.

Location: The hangar.

February 1944. The base has received a bomber that all the pilots are to be trained in using. The plane has not been thoroughly tested, and the factory has rushed it of the assembly line. Therefore, the male pilots have gone on strike and refuse to fly the plane because they think it is too dangerous. Betty and Violet have therefore received orders to take the plane up to show that it is safe to fly.

To nag them a bit more, the gamemaster can play either an officer who oversees the takeoff, or a group of pilots who have huddled together to observe.

First, the characters have to establish who is going to be first pilot. Cut the scene when they have agreed.

Then play out the flying scene. When they land again, you can optionally let Colonel Clarke drop a comment to the other pilots that if a bunch of hags can fly the plane, so can they.



SCENE 2.4: DINNER WITH IRA

Purpose: To play on Helen's divide between being the dutiful wife and an independent woman.

Characters in focus: All, but mostly Helen.

Location: At a restaurant.

March 1944. Ira is on leave before shipping out, and he has gone to Arizona to visit his wife. He has invited Helen out for dinner, and she has asked the other wasps to come along.

Ira is in a bad mood, and does not talk much. When he speaks, he nags at Helen. She does everything wrong. She talks too loud, interrupts him, or does not give him enough attention.

Maybe the others tagging along annoys him, maybe he finds his wife changed, or maybe they only talk about flying and does not give Ira any attention. After all, he is the real soldier, who is on his way to fight for the country, while she is playing pilot. The gamemaster plays Ira.

Let Ira leave to use the restroom or to settle the bill at some point. This gives the others a possibility to confront Helen. Cut the scene when Ira gets tired and wants to go home.

Optionally, you can set a short scene the day after, when the others see Helen again.

SCENE 2.5: ANTI-AIRCRAFT BARRAGE

Purpose: A scene where the wasps really feel the pressure.

Characters in focus: Pat and Helen.

Location: The hangar.

April 1944. New soldiers have arrived at the base, and with them anti-aircraft guns. They are to receive training in anti-aircraft barrage, and the wasps are to act as targets. They are to attach a target to the end of their plane. The soldiers will use it for target practice. With live ammo. Pat and Helent have been tasked with taking the plane up and letting the untrained soldiers shoot at the target.

First, let the characters decide who flies first pilot. Cut the scene when they have agreed. Then play out the flying scene.





SCENE 2.6: CASUALTY LISTS

Purpose: To introduce the war for real.

Characters in focus: All, but mainly Violet.

Location: Mess hall.

June 1944. D-day was three days ago. There have been many casualties, too many. Someone has hung the casualty lists in the mess hall. Everyone has gathered, and are pushing in to look if their friends or family members are on the lists.

If the wasps consult the list, they will find that Violet's friend Jeremy is missing in action.

Interview scene III

After the second act the players play out interview scene III. Here, it is important to get the wasps to talk about their experiences in the previous act. Make them talk about their different flights, and about how people on the base have treated them. They can also talk about the war.

Between the acts

The wasps have spent six months in Arizona. They have tested different planes, flown cargo cross-country, and trained anti-aircraft crews. They have now received orders to fly a mission to England.

On the war front, the allies are pushing further into France. But casualties remain high, and lines of communication are spread out too thin. No one knows if it is even possible to beat the enemy.

Act Three

THEME

This act's theme is the horrors of war, and the wasps' vulnerable situation. They are not military personal, but also not civilians.

No matter what they do, they remain on the sideline of the war. Please sum up the theme of the act for the players.



SCENE 3.1: BETTY AND HELEN – CAN WE LAND?

Purpose: To highlight the discrimination the wasps face.

Characters in focus: Betty and Helen.

Location: The aircraft.

September 1944. Their mission is to transport wounded soldiers back from England. First, the characters have to establish who is flying first pilot. Cut the scene when they have agreed.

Betty and Helen fly the lead plane, and behind them are Violet and Pat in the second plane. They have flown for 15 hours, and are almost at their destination. Play out a short flying scene that is not overly dramatic.

When they contact the control tower, the air traffic controller does not believe that they are pilots. He thinks they are a bunch of crazy ladies who have gotten hold of a radio and tuned it to the tower's frequency as a bad joke.

Let the wasps discuss with the man in the control tower. Either they can sway his mind and he can allow them to land, or they can make an emergency landing at a field close by.

Cut the scene when they have landed.

SCENE 3.2: THE WOUNDED

Purpose: The scene shows the wasps what the war also entails.

Characters in focus: All, but mainly Violet.

Location: An old hangar converted into a hospital, somewhere in England.

They have landed in England and are standing in front of a large hall. There is hectic activity surrounding the entrance. People carry stretchers in and out. Exhausted nurses and doctors drag themselves through the hall called to their shift. One of the nurses who flew to England with them joins them. She gives the wasps cigarettes and chocolate to distribute among the wounded.

Inside soldiers lie shoulder to shoulder. White cloth hangs on the wall to dampen the sounds. The hangar smell of disinfectant and old blood. Some soldiers talk among themselves and play cards. Other lie still. The ones talking try to drown out the ones moaning.

When they enter, Violet realizes that her friend Jeremy lies in one of the beds. His body is in traction in a large metal aggregate, and his many bandages are bloody. If Violet talks to him, she realizes he does not remember who she is. Cut the scene when a nurse approaches them and asks them to give the patient some peace and quiet.



SCENE 3.3: A DRUNK SOLDIER

Purpose: To focus on the role of the women in the war.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: A pub near the airbase.

The four wasps have gone to a local pub after visiting the wounded. They sit in a corner, just the four of them.

What are they talking about? The war? The wounded? Or do they not want to think about the day's experiences? Let them talk for a few minutes. A soldier joins them and presents himself as Sergeant Edwards. He is also a pilot. He is drunk and wants to talk. He buys them drinks, and offers cigarettes around.

The gamemaster plays Edwards. He is interested in the wasps, and very intrusive. Be both flirtatious and unpleasant. At some point during the conversation Edwards turns mean and threatening. It is obvious for the shift to occur, if they reject his advances. If not, then find a good time.

Sergeant Edwards starts to blame the wasps. It is their fault that he has been sent to war. If they had not started flying, then he would still be flying cargo back home with no one shooting at him. Let the sergeant give them a hard time, and let him especially go after Pat.

SCENE 3.4: THE DESERTER

Purpose: To let the wasps jointly make a hard decision.

Characters in focus: Mostly Violet.

Location: A deserted street somewhere in England.

They are on their way home from the pub. It is dark and they walk by themselves. They can sense that someone follows them. It is sergeant Edwards, who they met earlier in the evening. He grabs hold of Violet and begs her to smuggle him back home. Look directly at her, and tell her about the horrible things he has seen. For example, tell her about the time he crashed behind enemy lines and the enemy captured him.

The gamemaster plays Edwards. He is not threatening any more, just a sad, broken shell of a man, destroyed by the war. Let the wasps discuss whether to smuggle him home or not. It is either or. Either they stand together and smuggle him home, otherwise they all agree on letting him remain behind. Cut the scene as soon as they have reached an agreement. Let them describe how they hide him if they decide to smuggle him home.

(Sergeant Edwards will not be found if they decide to smuggle him home, but feel free to add an element of excitement and camaraderie).



SCENE 3.5: THE DEAD WASP

Purpose: To show the limbo that the wasps exist in. They are neither civilians nor army personnel.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: The morgue.

It is the day, where they leave England. While the nurses help the wounded onboard, the wasps have been summoned to the morgue. The doctor in charge, Dr. Crawford, awaits them. The gamemaster plays the doctor.

Around them lie dead soldiers. There is a sickening sweet smell in the room. The doctor needs their help identifying a dead wasp. Her plane crashed as she was transporting it to England. On the one hand, because WASP is not officially part of the US army, they cannot bring her home with them. The army will not pay for it. On the other hand, the doctor emphasizes that they army will not keep her body.

The army has talked with her family, and they do not have the funds to ship her remains home. The wasps get to see the body. The do not know her, but they recognize the uniform and the wings on her chest. If they do not do anything, the army will destroy the remains. Play out the scene where the wasps decide what to do.

You can always help them when you play the doctor. During one playtest, the doctor gave them her ashes in a bag to take home. In a second test, the doctor got very unpleasant and gave them the wasp's body in return for seeing Betty naked. It is of course also possible to leave without the body.

SCENE 3.6: PAT AND VIOLET – FLYING HOME

Purpose: To make the wasps think about the return trip, and give them a glimmer of hope.

Characters in focus: Pat and Violet.

Location: The aircraft and the runway.

The wasps fly the wounded soldiers home. First, let the characters establish who flies first pilot. Cut the scene when they agree.

We follow Pat and Violet's plane. They have flown for 15 hours and are almost at their destination. First, let the characters talk a bit about their experiences in England.

Play out a short flying scene while they land. Standing on the runway, watching the wounded exit the plane, one of the wounded approaches them. He takes Pat's hand and gives her a heartfelt thank you for bringing him home. Then cut the scene.



SCENE 3.7: THE TELEGRAM

Purpose: To tell the wasps that the corps is being disbanded.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: The base in Arizona. Colonel Clarke's office.

December 1944. Colonel Clarke have summoned the wasps to his office. He has just received a telegram from General Arnold's staff. On December 20, 1944, the US army officially disbands the WASP corps, and the wasps will be sent home. The gamemaster plays Colonel Clarke.

Feel free to portray him as kinder than previous. Either he feels sorry for them, or he has found a measure of respect for them. Either way, he salutes them when they leave his office. Outside there is clear skies and hard frost. They can see an aircraft approaching for a landing. They can hear the noise from the hangars. On the parade grounds, stars and stripes flies in the wind.

What are they talking about? Give the players some time to play out the scene and react to the news.



SCENE 3.8: FINAL FLIGHT

Purpose: To make the characters reflect upon their time together. The scene should be melancholy or nostalgic.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: B-29 Flying Superfortress from a base in Florida to Arizona.

December 1944. The Superfortress is the largest and heaviest bomber ever built. During normal operations, it takes 11 men to operate it, but now there is only the four of them to transport it.

First Betty and Pat fly the plane. Let them establish who is first and second pilot.

Then play out a short flying scene, when the plane takes off. Then cut to the middle of the flight. This part is not a flying scene. They have sat quietly for a while.

Who is the first to speak, and what are they talking about? About the experiences together, or about their future? Let this part last a couple of minutes. Preferably, cut the scene on a nostalgic note.

Then it is Violet and Helen's turn to establish who is first and second pilot. Play out a short flying scene while they land. Cut the scene when the plane lands.



SCENE 3.9: SAYING GOODBYE

Purpose: To let the wasps say goodbye to the plane and the dream.

Characters in focus: All of them.

Location: The Arizona runway.

They have just landed, and the four of them stand outside the plane. This was their final mission together. None of them can stand to say goodbye to each other, so instead they say goodbye to the plane. It is dark, but floodlights light the runway. The plane throws shadows on the tarmac. Let each of them say goodbye to the plane, and cut the scene when they are done.



GENERAL ARNOLD'S SPEECH

General Arnold gave a speech to the final graduating WASP class. The general was the commander of the Army Air Force during the war. This is a short version of that speech. Deliver the speech to the players:

You, and more than nine hundred of your sisters, have shown that you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. If ever there was a doubt in anyone's mind that women can become skillful pilots, the WASP have dispelled that doubt. I want to stress how valuable I believe this whole WASP program has been for the country. If another national emergency arises--let us hope it does not, but let us this time face the possibility--if it does, we will not again look upon a women's flying organization as experimental. We will know that they can handle our fastest fighters, our heaviest bombers; we will know that they are capable of activities, which you have proved you can do. So, on this last graduation day, I salute you and all WASP. We of the AAF are proud of you; we will never forget our debt to you.

After that, the scenario ends.



Betty Jane Williams



She lets him light her cigarette. Then she blows the smoke in his face. God. He is boring. A fat-head who thinks he's God's gift to women. She nods and smiles at his forgettable comment. "That's right Bett, smile -- just smile and laugh." She runs the little spiel in her head, while she casually laughs at a not-really-funny comment. She looks him in the eyes and wets her lips. He wants her. She can see it in his eyes. He starts to stutter, talks too much. It's not the drinks. It's her. She could make him drop his threads and dive off the balcony. But she can't bear it tonight. Doesn't have the energy to play. Geez, life is boring and the world is full of morons.

Betty Jane is 24 and lives in Charleston, South Carolina. In the summer of 1943 she arrives at the airbase in Sweetwater, Texas. It is here that she is going to spend the next four months learning to fly military aircraft.

Betty is a classic Southern Belle, whose kind is otherwise only found on the silver screen. Her grandparents owned a plantation, and the main building is still in the family. As the daughter of a wealthy family, luxury and privilege has always marked her upbringing.

She grew up in a place where money was not something you talked about - it was just something you had. The young women in her social circles were raised to be nice girls, and for Betty it was no different. Don't talk too loud, don't draw attention to yourself,

keep your legs crossed when you sit, say your evening prayers. And Betty is really good at pretending to be the nice girl when necessary. Elegant, virtuous, and charming. But when the night falls she sneaks out to dance, drink bourbon, and smoke cigarettes. Then she's the femme fatale. The temptress. The one who can make every man's wildest dreams come true. The one that makes them drop to their knees and propose, while she turns around and walks away. Both lives are equally boring and equally necessary. If you want to make it as a woman in this world, you have to know how to play your role. And if you're smart enough, you come out on top.

Luckily, Betty is smarter than the rest. Women are too stupid and shallow. Men are too selfish and too full of themselves. No one gets

to meet the real Betty - she wont allow that. Instead, she lets them think she naïve. They wouldn't understand anyway. They wouldn't appreciate the Betty who reads classics under the covers. The Betty who can do advanced algebra better than anyone she knows. Had she been a man, she would have been a professor.

But she's not a man. Instead of going to college she goes to tea. Instead of being encouraged to seek employment, she's encouraged to find a husband. Her life is like a paper doll's. The only thing she can show off is herself. That's what they've told her, her entire life. Can you ever set a paper doll free? Can it ever becoming something more than a decoration?

But Betty plays the game in her favor. You have to use the talents you got, and Betty does. People want to be around her. They want to look at her and hear her talk. From time to time she can be uncomfortably direct towards others, and sometimes even ruthless. She can say anything, and they still think she's beautiful. When people are too stupid to understand what you're telling them, you're allowed to tell them anything you want. Yet, occasionally, she feels ashamed of how she treats other people. She covers her ears and sings loudly to drown out the voices in her head. The voices telling her what a terrible human being she is.

For Betty, flying started out as a bet. The neighbor's son had taken a pilot's license, and claimed obstinately that girls couldn't cut it as pilots. Betty wagered him 15 packs of Lucky Strike and snuck down to the airfield the next day -

without her parents consent. It only took one time in the air. Then she couldn't imagine living without.

The aeroplane is where Betty doesn't have to be the nice girl. It is the doll's rebellion. Here she is wild, skillful, tactical, and impressive. No false smiles or politely crossed legs. She pulled off advanced maneuvers not many others could do. She is fearless and loves doing stunts -- it makes her feel alive. Flying is sensual. The engine's vibrations, the control stick in your hands, and the sun in your eyes. The body and the machine become one. And she loves the look in the guys' faces when she exits the aeroplane's cabin dragging her parachute. It is so unexpected, and it provokes them wonderfully. The only thing she fears in the aeroplane is the day it should become trivial. One day should never be allowed to look like the next, and it should always be exciting.

The war ended all private aviation. She misses flying so very much, but besides that, the war has never really entered her world.

It was Nancy Love Harknes that contacted her. The founder of WASP herself, and a pioneer in aviation told her that Betty's old flying instructor had recommended her. It flattered Betty. The only thing she had to do was apply. She did it right away. A chance for adventures. A chance to meet new people. Exciting people.

BETTY IN SUMMARY

Betty lives a privileged life, but it bores her. She knows that people seldom look at her as anything other than a beautiful object, so

she's decided to play along and make the best of it. She wants to live, so she manipulates the game. Sometimes she's unpleasantly honest to other people and she often doesn't think to put herself in their place. It is a way to survive.

But can you ever really be happy when you are always wearing a mask?

When Betty flies she rebels against the many roles she plays on the ground. She flies because it's the only place she doesn't have to assume a role. Here she's as free as she can be. If it wasn't for this, she would drown in false smiles and conversations with men who think her only conversational topic is the weather. The war is not something she's considered yet. And so far, all it means is an opportunity to fly.

BETTY'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Helen: Betty's flying partner. She is stubborn and wants to decide everything. Helen is always so serious about everything. She never seems satisfied or happy about anything. Betty is tired of listening to Helen go on about duty, and Helen always acts as if she's older than she is. For God's sake, they're the same age.

Betty always gets a little impatient when she's flying with Helen. Helen flies fine and doesn't mind pushing the throttle, but she

never does anything unexpected. Everything is just by the book. Betty is itching to take over the stick and do something crazy.

Violet: A sweet oddball, but she should learn to relax a bit and enjoy life. Her mood is volatile. She can be gloomy, furious, or manic, and you never know why.

Violet always flies in one of two modes. There is the calm, boring Violet, and there is the wild, chaotic Violet. Sometimes flying with Violet is like eating unsalted food, and other times it seems like she dropped the pepper mill in the cooking pot. Completely out of control, even Betty can't control her when she's like that..

Patricia: A large, rough girl who dresses like a yokel and won't stop talking. She doesn't look like any woman Betty has ever seen before. It's fun to tease Pat. With her clumsy body and enormous feet, she makes an easy target.

However, when you watch her flying, from the ground, it's impossible to imagine that it's Pat behind the stick. She flies elegantly and navigates like it's the easiest thing in the world. How can you fly so beautifully and look so clumsy? Whenever Betty flies with Pat, she always tries to show Pat that she can fly just as beautifully.

Helen Wyatt Snapp



A word she'd sworn never to say out loud crosses Helen's lips. She catches herself apologizing though no one is within earshot. The shop is closed and the refrigerator's empty. She's late. Again. She should have landed an hour ago but she forget the time. Ira comes home in an hour, and there's no dinner. He's going to be angry. Again. "Relax Helen, mistakes happen. You're only human." But not for her. Helen Wyatt Snapp has everything under control. Always. Sweat breaks out on her forehead, while she tries to remember whether there are any leftovers in the freezer. If this is her life's mission, she has to do it right. Take pride in refrigerating, dishwashing, and cooking. This time she failed. And Ira is going to be angry - again.

In the summer of 1943 Helen arrives at the airbase in Sweetwater, Texas. It is here that she is going to spend the next four months learning to fly military aircraft.

Helen is 24 years old and lives in Clarksville, Tennessee. She lives with her husband Ira, who courted her through an entire year and who flattered her with his proposal. When they married she was uncertain if she loved him. She is still uncertain. She actually wonders if she is even capable of having close connections to other people. The thought terrifies her. She has never been able to develop close relationships, and she has never really cared about her family. Maybe that was why it was so convenient to get married and get away from home. You have to marry someone, and Ira is a good man, even though he has become less and

less thrilled about her flying over time. Helen knows that as Ira's wife it's her duty to obey him and follow his lead, but this is the one thing she has to have as her own. If she can't fly -- she can't live. Not in this life anyway. She's proud of her home, she's proud of her husband, and she's proud of their family. She was taught that she should feel that way. She knows her place in the world, and she knows how real women behave.

But, she knows that she's more often right than not, and that things would go much smoother if she was in charge. If she was in charge, everything would be in its rightful place and nothing, not even people, would be where they shouldn't. And when she gets to be in charge, there will be no reprieve for outliers. Everything

should be in its place, otherwise things fall apart. Had it been a younger Helen who spoke, she might have said that what people do is their own business. Younger Helen would probably say that dinner is not that important, and that Ira can get his own beer. But now it's married Helen who sets the tone. The one who whispers across the dinner table about Mrs. Next Door's dirty laundry, and the one who dutifully vacuums under the couch even though no one ever looks there.

She is the monster of marriage and she knows it. What happened to her? She used to dream. Dreamed of flying to Paris and paint by the Seine. Dreamed of improving at the piano. Dreamed of making her own way.

No family, no freezer, and no Ira. When Helen flies, she wants there to be stakes. Something that's lacking in her everyday life. She tries to relinquish control and dream of a world where she is at the center, and she, and only she, is the hero. She just doesn't always succeed. Helen flies like she's the machine. Always on time, always proper, and only when the circumstances are optimal. Her biggest fear when flying is that she might lose the firm grip she has on everything. The aeroplane does unexpected things, and you never know what might happen. It's dangerous to lose control. When push comes to shove, she might not dare to take the risks that it requires.

Ira joined the army when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor in '41. They agreed that it was the right thing to do, and that Helen should also do her part. The nation must stand

together in wartime, and as a true patriot she had to lead by example.

Suddenly her duty was not in the home, but out where she could replace a young man off to war. Thinking about it makes her proud. Secretly she enjoys being out of the house. When Ira is not at home, Helen can take responsibility and decide what to do. Then she does things her way, and maybe she can rekindle the old dreams that drowned in everyday life.

Thousand of newspaper ads requested women to join the war efforts, but the only place Helen wanted to serve was in WASP. Maybe because she couldn't stand that the war put an end to all private aviation. Maybe because Ira didn't like her flying. Maybe, because for once, she wanted to push her limits.

Ira was sent of to basic training in Utah in February, '43. She gave him a polite kiss on the mouth and promised to write once a week. That same day she sent her application to WASP.

HELEN IN SUMMARY

Marriage changed Helen. She became conservative, but often thought of the younger Helen as the girl with dreams she would never have again.

Helen wants things in a certain way, and everything in its proper place. She has never felt that she could really bond with other people and it scares her. In everyday life she is the dutiful wife who has learned to take pride in her place in the home. Especially when Ira is around. When he is not there, she can be incredibly stubborn and assertive.

The aeroplane allows her to escape the daily grind, and she feels that she can let go. It is her rebellion

against the boring housewife she faces everyday in the mirror. But it is still the controlling Helen who pilots the aeroplane.

The war makes her proud. It protects America and its value and it is the worthiest of causes. Without these values her life is wasted, and she knows it. She takes pride in her efforts, and pride in Ira's as well.

HELEN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER CHARACTERS:

Betty: A spoiled brat, who is used to getting her way. It serves her right to experience real life, so she doesn't keep thinking that life is nothing but parties and noise. She has to learn that she can't always get her way. And she has to learn to respect the war effort and be proud of doing her part.

Betty is a very talented pilot. But she's too uncontrollable if someone doesn't guide her and puts her in her place from time to time. If someone doesn't do that, she will end up getting hurt.

Pat: A peculiar and clumsy girl. Tall and broad-shouldered. She always dresses in men's clothes, chews loudly, and speaks too much. Helen tries to help her with guidance and corrections. Pat has talked about her ambitions after the war, but she shouldn't use the war as a platform for her own career. It is unfitting.

Pat is a skilled aviator, and so very differently elegant when she flies than when she's on the ground. Helen would love to see that elegance on the ground.

Violet: There is something off about Violet, but Helen can't put her finger on it. Violet seems helpful, but you never know exactly where you got her. It's frustrating and sometimes even unnerving. Violet occasionally explodes in a burst of anger, but it's never entirely clear why.

Sometimes she flies like Helen -- controlled and with the utmost respect for the large machine. At other times she flies like a lunatic. Never knowing which Violet is in the air, makes Helen uncomfortable.

Patricia Chadwick



"So, you wanna use my shoe for rowing?" Her tone is jaunty. The girl next to her in the shoe store blushes and quickly vanishes to the other end of the store. "Hate, hate, hate buying shoes." she thinks while looking at the enormous clog in her hand. The girl hadn't even said anything to Pat, but she kept staring. And she looked like the type who might say something snide. Better safe than sorry, so you don't end up looking like a clown without a quick comeback to someone's funny remark. Never again the clown. Never again just the target of hurtful remarks without forcing a confrontation. Never again indignity without fighting back. She's willing to throw the first stone even if just to be on the safe side.

In the summer of 1943 Patricia arrives at the airbase in Sweetwater, Texas. It is here that she is going to spend the next four months learning to fly military aircraft.

Patricia is 22 and from Vermont. In her own words, she grew up on a little farm in the middle of nowhere. She has lived her entire life together with her parents and four siblings, whom she loves more than life itself, but who can be a bit tiring from time to time. It's very possible to love people and find them incredibly annoying at the same time.

Pat got her pilot's license when she was only 17. She was supposed to wait until she turned 18. But she couldn't, so she lied about her age so she could fly. Patricia was always large for her age. At age 10 she had outgrown all her siblings. She always loved the outdoors.

There she can put her size and strength to good use and help out on the farm. Indoors she feels unnatural and clumsy. Awkward in the neat dresses her mother insists on making for her, even though her size 12 feet only allows to wear men's shoes. Her parents have told her that she was defiant from the day she was born. Pat yells out when the state of things don't suit her, and she has never backed down from laying a beating on her brother (or anybody else) when he deserved it. She doesn't want to be the silent girl who always waits her turn courteously and never speaks her mind. When you have things to tell the world, it better stop and listen. She doesn't stand for her brother being allowed to do things her sisters and her are not allowed. She doesn't take shit from anyone.

Pat knows she's quite a sight when she walks down the street. And of course she's hurt when people call after her or call her names, but she's built the way she is. It has been years since she tried to be someone she's not.

Now she tries to make the best of life and be happy. The world might not always smile back, but sour faces don't make things better. There is no reason to make things harder than they are. You should treat people, who don't mean you any harm, nicely. But Pat pushes back if they push her first. The more they try to make her change, the more she fights back. It is only fair that she tells idiots off. She will wear the clothes she want to, speak up when she wants to, chew with her mouth open when she feels like it, and laugh out loud when something is funny. America is the land of the free, and here you can make it even if you don't fit neatly into some category. But sometimes Pat wishes that she did fit neatly.

Pat's ambitions are even larger than she is. She wants to make it in the world. She wants to be the best pilot, and she wants to spend the rest of her life flying. She loves the rush of flying. She wants the speed and she wants to risk it all. Flying is dangerous, but it makes you feel alive. In addition, the aeroplane doesn't care how she looks. The aeroplane is always fair and never judges you. When Pat flies, she is part of a community - her and the aeroplane, and everyone else who shares her love of flying. On the ground, she is large and clumsy. In the air, her potential for elegance becomes apparent. They can see how she creates art with two wings. There she is beautiful.

When she flies, the only thing she fears is to be forgettable, to be the one no one notices. Or even worse, to be the one who flies clumsily.

When the men are away, it leaves room for a strong woman like Pat. She shouldn't say it out loud, but Pat is glad the war is happening. The women can get out and show that they can contribute beyond the confines of their homes.

It was Pat's brother who brought the WASP flier home. She would never have seen it if it wasn't for him. She never reads the newspapers if she can avoid it. The flyer said that the aviation pioneer Nancy Love Harkness sought female pilots to a corps whose mission was to relieve young men for wartime duty. The notion of the military appealed to Pat. There everyone is dressed the same, and treated the same. And it's an advantage to be big and strong. But most of all, it is the place where Pat can be allowed to fly large military machines, otherwise reserved for men.

PAT IN SUMMARY

She is a large, rough girl, who is often told that she doesn't fit in and that she's wrong. She speaks her mind, and she does whatever she feels like. She always has a witty remark or a sarcastic comment ready if anybody stares too much. That way, she fights the injustice of the world one step at a time. Everybody should be allowed to be who they want to.

The only place Pat feels elegant is behind the control stick. For her the aeroplane is where she can be a beauty, and where it, for once, is

other people who are clumsy and ugly.

For Pat the war is the means for her to fulfill her dream of spending the rest of her life flying. She hasn't really considered the consequences of it, and she has yet to realize that her father or brother might be killed. It is her great opportunity to fly now and forever.

PAT'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Violet: An odd bird. From time to time, she does weird and unexpected things. It's always hard to know what she thinks and how she feels. But Pat really doesn't mind. People are all different, and Pat is not normal either. Violet seems like someone who needs a friend to laugh besides her. If only she would be more open.

Violet is mostly a thorough pilot, who flies a little bit boringly. But sometimes the devil takes hold of her and she flies like a woman possessed. At these moments it's amazing to be in the aeroplane beside Violet. Amazing and terrifying.

Betty: So beautiful and charming. But also a bit cruel and very spoiled. Pat always feels a bit more awkward and insecure when she is near Betty. She doesn't know why, but she wants to be Betty's friend, even though she normally hates girls like Betty.

Betty is an incredibly gifted pilot. She takes risks but never without rewards. Pat is a bit envious of her talent, and tries to show off when she flies with Betty.

Helen: Is sometimes a bit unpleasant to be around. She has a very narrow view of what people are supposed to be like, and there isn't room for people to be different. It's easy for her of course, since she looks completely normal. Helen is one of those people, who should not be allowed to get their way all the time. She should learn to leave room for others.

There is no carelessness when Helen flies. She is exactly as conservative in the sky as she is on the ground. But even Helen must learn that you cannot control everything when you fly.

Violet Cowden



She locks the door - three times. Checks the handle - three times. Then she places her purse at its designated place in the hallway. After she enters the living room, she closes all the curtains, so no one can look in. Only then does she realize that the keys are still in her pocket. She hasn't hung them on the peg as she normally does. Never mind, Violet is always more laid back with those types of things when she's been out flying. She laughs out loud, thinking about the keys. Sits down and retrieves the letter from Jeremy in her purse. She can't count how many times she's read it. At first, she's composed while she tries to understand why her best friend wanted to go. In her head, she repeats what he told her before he left. "I'll see you when the war is over. I promise to make you proud." Then one of her episodes hits her. She grips the glass so hard that it cracks. Then she tears the letter to tiny pieces. Calls him the worst names she can think of. It's good that she's alone. She hates it when other people witness one of her episodes.

In the summer of 1943 Violet arrives at the airbase in Sweetwater, Texas. It is here that she is going to spend the next four months learning to fly military aircraft.

Violet is 26 and lives outside Columbus, Ohio. She is a teacher at a local private school for children of the wealthy. Violet had a strict upbringing. She is from a catholic home, where her parents fully adhered to scripture. Her father, who had immigrated from England, had fought in the great war. The war had made him strange. He never talked about it, but he had seen things in the trenches no man

should see. It was there he found God. And God was part of all aspects of their lives, always watching them. Violet isn't sure if she believes in God anymore. But the idea that someone or something is always watching her every move, knowing her innermost secrets, fills her. She has never been able to shake it. Outside her living room two lamp posts stand close to each other. When you're sitting on the couch they look like glowing eyes. Violet always draws the curtains of that window. She can't bear the thought of being watched or put on display.

Violet learned early that you shouldn't bother other people with your emotions. It's better to keep up appearances and stay in control. At home she also learned that you should help others and always show compassion. Maybe that's why she became a teacher. To help. But too often her darker side (as she has it named) gets in the way.

Sometimes her myriad of feelings overwhelm her. Then she does the most astonishing things. Sometimes she becomes furious, other times she laughs out loud like a maniac. Once she woke up blind drunk with no memories of the night before. Inside her lives a devil, who sometimes emerges in violent eruptions.

Violet knows that she's disturbed. She tries not to let it show, but she doesn't always succeed. She keeps her dark side in check by sorting everything, and can get so very angry when something messes up her structures. She needs everything to be in its rightful place. Often she gets up several times during the night to make sure the front door is locked, or that all the drawers are closed. At the airfield she can spend hours manically going over the aircraft before getting behind the stick. Jeremy knows that side of her. They confide in each other. He's also disturbed, and she wants to help him. She wants to help everyone who struggles. She and Jeremy have each other. Or used to - maybe he'll never return. Either way, she knows that she'll never see the old Jeremy again. War changes people.

It has been years since she got her pilot's license, and she always goes flying on Sundays, when others are in church. She loves to fly.

When she's flying, she can be alone with her thoughts. She dares to cry, to shout, and to talk to the aeroplane like it was a person. She knows that the large machine always obeys her every move. In the air, Violet is two different women. The wild and the calm. When she's calm she flies composed. Almost a bit boring. But sometimes it comes over her, and she loses herself in the rush and empties her head of thoughts. Then she flies like the devil. She breaks the rules and lets go. If you can't let go at that moment - then you can't fly. Violet's greatest fear is also her greatest joy. When her wild side comes forward, she loses control, and risks it all. She hopes that she will never subject anybody else to it. Her life is her own, but she is not the master of other people's lives.

The war has grounded all private aviation. Violet misses the calm she felt when she flew the large machines. She has difficulty settling in, now that the only thing in her life is the school. That is why she applied to the WASP corps the moment she heard about it.

She would have dreamed of working for the airforce if it wasn't for the war. War is for men, and the same goes for the military. It is not something you kid around with. It is serious and tragic. The war makes Violet so very sad. She wishes it wasn't necessary, but it is. It's a necessary evil needed to fight an even greater evil. They say that the world will help Europe, and she believes them.

VIOLET IN SUMMARY

Violet really wants to help other people who are struggling. She is

an anxious soul, who feels deeply, and for whom all these feelings sometimes become overwhelming. She is neurotic, always needing everything to be in its rightful place. She has an explosive temper, that she tries to keep under wraps. When things become too much, she's never really sure how she'll react.

When Violet flies she is either calm or wild. She never knows when her wild side comes over her, but she dreads and loves it at the same time.

Her life has already been marked by war, and she finds it gruesome. But if the war is necessary, she will be happy to help, so it can be over as fast as possible.

VIOLET'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER CHARACTERS

Patricia: Violet pities Pat. She's an elephant in a china store, and her large body and excessive arm movements makes her intimidating to watch. Pat is warm and kind towards Violet, but Violet doesn't understand why. It makes Violet a bit uneasy, but surely Pat means well. It is, however, despicable how Pat uses the war to fulfill her personal aspirations.

In the air, however, Violet never feels unsafe alongside Pat. Pat flies in a calm and breezy manner, though she also knows how to use the throttle.

Helen: Inside Helen lives a true dreamer, but she is held in check

by a belittled housewife. She is always so serious, and convinced that she's always right. Helen has difficulty acknowledging that others are not necessarily like her, and she needs to learn that. In addition, her view of the war is a bunch of rosy red, patriotic nonsense. War should not make people proud. War is terrible.

Helen flies conservatively, even though she's plenty skilled. It can be hard to always have complete control over everything in the air. Yet Helen thinks that she can keep control all the time. Violet wishes that Helen sometimes would get a bit shook up by what happens in the sky.

Betty: Shouldn't pretend to be so naïve. It doesn't become her, and Violet easily sees past her facade. Betty exploits her looks and her charms to get things her way, often at the expense of others. Pat is often the one to suffer, and Violet would wish that she could teach Betty that you become a happier person by being nice to others. Betty lacks humility, and it would become her to be as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside.

Betty is a natural when it comes to flying, and it is so unfair. She flies off the cuff, like she doesn't have a fear in her life. An excellent pilot also respects the machine, but Betty doesn't respect anything.

Violet Cowden

Dies at 94: civilian WASP aviator during World War II.

She flew 19 different types of aircraft, logging enough miles with the Women Airforce Service Pilots to have flown around the world 55 times by her estimate. She was the subject of a documentary film, 'Wings of Silver.'

Violet Cowden never lost her love of flying, a passion born when she was a young girl envying the hawks soaring above her family's South Dakota farm in the 1920s. When she was a young first-grade teacher learning to fly out of an airfield in Spearfish, S.D., in the early 1940s, her students always knew when she had been flying because she was so happy.

Her love of flying only increased when she joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during World War II. And although her career as a pilot ended after her wartime service, her enthusiasm for flying never let up. Indeed, Cowden gleefully co-piloted a World War II-era P-51 Mustang with dual controls and flew from San Bernardino to Orange County last year when she was 93. As she put it in a 2010 documentary about her life in the sky: "I always say the worst thing about flying is coming back to earth. That's the hardest thing for me. I would stay up, I would — but you do run out of gas."

Cowden, a former president of the WASP veterans organization whose experiences and indomitable spirit inspired later generations of female pilots, died April 10 of congestive heart failure at Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian in Newport Beach, said her daughter, Kim Ruiz. She was 94. Cowden was 26 when she earned her WASP silver wings in 1943. "I joined because of love for the country," she told *The Times* in 1993, "and I thought maybe I could contribute something to the war effort." Of the 25,000 women who applied for the WASP training program, 1,830 were accepted and 1,074 graduated. As civilian pilots under contract to the military, the WASP fliers freed up male pilots for combat missions. Members ferried pursuit aircraft (fighters), bombers and transport planes from factories to military bases and points of embarkation within the United States — and performed other duties, such as towing targets for antiaircraft gunnery practice and flying as engineering test pilots. Cowden flew 19 different types of aircraft, including fighters.

The P-51 Mustang was her favorite, she said in the 1993 *Times* interview. Once, she recalled, she got a P-51 up to more than 400 mph when she raced a Navy pilot from Columbus, Ohio, to Newark, N.J. "I just stayed ahead of him all the way," she said. Cowden also delivered the first P-51 to the Tuskegee Airmen, the nation's first black military air unit. The dangerous work of the WASP — 38 pilots died during training and on active duty — wasn't always appreciated. "I landed an AT-6 in Kansas City," Cowden recalled in a 2010 interview with the *Orange County Register*. "The commanding officer at the field heard that a woman had flown it in and wouldn't accept it. I just ignored it. That's all you can do." Cowden later figured she logged enough miles to have flown around the world 55 times during her wartime service. One of the saddest days of her life, she said in the 1993 *Times* interview, was when the WASP was deactivated in December 1944.

"The war was winding down and the men were coming back and wanted their jobs back," she said. "I felt a lot of resentment." In "Wings of Silver: The Vi Cowden Story," a 34-minute documentary by Mark and Christine Bonn of Hermosa Beach, Cowden said: "I think the shock of the whole thing was that I thought we were doing something so important and then all of a sudden it's not. It's like you've been doing all of this for nothing." After the force was deactivated, Cowden said, "we had our commercial license and if the airlines would have hired women at that time I probably would have been flying the rest of my life." Instead, she got a job with TWA in New York City, where she worked at the ticket counter for about a year. "But that was so awful," she said, "because here the planes were flying and you wanted to fly and you couldn't and it just wasn't satisfying." She later co-owned a ceramics shop in Lynwood, got married and became a mother.

After moving to Huntington Beach with her family in 1972, she operated the Teachers Resource Center in the Huntington Beach City School District. It wasn't until 1977 that members of the WASP were recognized as military veterans and given limited benefits. In 2010, Cowden joined some 200 other surviving WASP veterans in Washington, where they received Congressional Gold Medals for their wartime service. During question-and-answer sessions at film festivals where "Wings of Silver" has been screened, Christine Bonn said last week, "the first question everybody asks is, 'Where did you find this amazing woman?' They're all blown away and inspired by her."

"Vi really embodies all the aspects of the WASP — their spirit of adventure, courage and can-do spirit."

Cowden, who was born in a sod house on a farm in Bowdle, S.D., on Oct. 1, 1916, celebrated her 76th birthday in 1992 by putting a new twist on her old love: skydiving out of an airplane in tandem with an instructor at 12,500 feet. She jumped again in 2005 when she was 89, that time with the Army's elite parachute team, the Golden Knights. "Vi found joy in every day," said Katherine Landdeck, an associate professor of history at Texas Woman's University, which houses the WASP archives. "She loved flying and being in the air and sharing not just the WASP story, but the love of flight with everyone." Cowden's husband, Scott, died in 2009. In addition to her daughter, she is survived by two sisters, Betty Niese and Lillian Riede; and three grandchildren. A memorial service is pending.



Patricia Erickson (born Chadwick)

WWII WASP was happiest when flying

A member of a pioneering group of female paramilitary World War II pilots, Winter Park resident Patricia Erickson, died March 2 at the age of 92.

Part of the group known as Women Air Service Pilots, or WASPs, which won a Congressional Gold Medal of Honor in 2010, Erickson first became interested in flying after graduating from the Ricker Classical Institute in her hometown of Houlton, Maine. She won a scholarship to a Civilian Pilot Training Program in Caribou, Maine, soon afterward and graduated in her early 20s.

"I passed! My dad finally agreed to my staying in a boarding house while taking flying lessons (\$5.00 a week for room and board at that time)," she wrote as part of a WASP memoir under her maiden name, Patricia Chadwick. "I kept books at the airport to pay for my flying time."

Inspired by a female flight trainer, she joined the ranks of the female aviators and graduated as part of the second WASP class on May 28, 1943. More than 1,000 women ultimately joined the group, whose members flew more than 60 million miles in all types of military aircraft in an effort to free up more men for combat duty. Assigned to a ferrying division of the Air Transport Command base in Romulus, Mich., Erickson flew B-17s, B-24s, B-25s and other bombers and fighter planes in the military's inventory, her family members said.

"In Romulus, some of the most 'fun' trips were to Cap-de-La-Madeline Primary Flight School in Canada ferrying PT-26 Cornells," Erickson wrote in one of the WASP memoir books. "We took some to the Northwest from the Canadian factory, sometimes going the northern route across Southern Canada, and sometimes going the longer route south via El Paso and up through Oregon. Gee, what trips we did have."

Erickson later married Air Force pilot Carl E. Erickson, and they traveled to Japan and Africa before moving to Winter Park, where they raised their four children. Daughter Ingrid Campbell said her mother loved to paint, garden and, in northern climes, cross-country ski, though her happiest times were rooted in flying.

"She often said that was the happiest time of her life," her daughter said. "My mother was on the cutting edge of aviation. ... She lived on the wild side."

Erickson was honored on March 10, 2010, when WASP pilots received Congressional Gold Medals at a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol. Only about 300 of the WASP pilots were still alive at that point, but many of them attended. Campbell traveled to Washington to collect a medal on behalf of her mother, who used a walker in her later years, though she had remained in relatively good health until a fall about a week before her death.

She was predeceased by her husband; her sister, Carolyn C. McVickers; a son, Eric Erickson; and a grandson, Jim Higgins. In addition to Campbell, she is survived by her brothers, John H. Chadwick of Augusta, Maine, and James M. Chadwick of San Jose, Calif.; daughter Christina Verlander and son Nils Erickson; and seven grandchildren.

Baldwin Brothers Cremation Society in Winter Park handled arrangements. A service will be held later in Houlton, Maine.



Helen Wyatt Snapp

Helen Wyatt Snapp did not want to be called a hero.

"The real heroes are the people who don't come back" from combat, said the former WASP pilot. Despite that humility, Snapp was recognized in South Florida and beyond for her contributions to aviation and for helping pave the way for women in flight. Snapp died Jan. 20 at Memorial Hospital West in Pembroke Pines from complications after a hip fracture surgery. She was 94.

"The real heroes are the people who don't come back" from combat, said the former WASP pilot. Despite that humility, Snapp was recognized in South Florida and beyond for her contributions to aviation and for helping pave the way for women in flight.

Snapp died Jan. 20 at Memorial Hospital West in Pembroke Pines from complications after a hip fracture surgery. She was 94. Snapp was born in Washington, D.C., and attended Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Va. During one summer break from school, she and her sister Evelyn began taking flying lessons. Although she had a fear of heights, when World War II broke out, Snapp entered the Civilian Pilot Training program and became a licensed private pilot.

In 1942 she married Ira Benton Snapp, a lieutenant in Company B 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army during its campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. It was while her husband was overseas that Snapp learned about the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) training program and began training in Sweetwater, Texas. She became one of the country's first female military aircraft aviators. When she graduated, she was sent to Camp Davis in North Carolina, where her duties included radar operations, aerial target towing and search light training. Later, she flew at Liberty Field in Fort Stewart, Ga. Her responsibility there was to fly planes that towed targets, at which male recruits would shoot live ammunition. Snapp's final task in active service was a top-secret mission with radio-controlled aircraft, that would later be packed with explosives and used as the first guided bombs.

She also piloted the B17 Memphis Belle, while traveling from Tampa to Jacksonville, when the plane was being used for War Bond promotions. She was trained to fly both single and multiple-engine planes. When WWII ended, Snapp returned to the Washington, D.C., area where she and her husband raised three sons. Simultaneously, she worked for the U.S. Post Office. They moved to South Florida in 1984.

Snapp's son Jeremy said his mother has served as a source of inspiration for him since he was a child. "She participated in a piece of history and got to do a lot of things people normally don't get to do ... like fly fighter planes," he said. Besides her aviation career, Snapp was known for enjoying life and cherishing time with her family, friends and fellow pilots, he said. If she saw any opportunity to connect with her contemporaries, she would take it, he said.

Snapp advocated for WASP pilots to be officially recognized as military members and spoke about the discrimination they felt at the time. Although they participated in military activities, they were considered civilians. Now, they are able to enjoy some military benefits, including using VA hospitals and the opportunity to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery. "They were doing a man's job, but they really were kind of played down," said Suzette Rice, the president of the Wings Over Miami Air Museum, who became a friend of Snapp's. Rice said Snapp and the other WASP pilots were trailblazers; they were considered civilian pilots, but now women in the military fight in active combat. Snapp was proud to help make that recognition possible. "That was the message Helen had," Rice said. "She would say, 'We were women doing a man's job, and nobody had done it before.'"

Snapp and 175 other living members of the WASPs received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2010. She was also active in women's pilot association the Florida Gold Coast 99s and the Wings Over Miami Air Museum. Ursula Davidson, a pilot and member of the Ninety-Nines, said she will most remember Snapp as a friend who "was always ready for an adventure."

"She was a good role model about how to live your life," Davidson said. "Just to keep doing what you like to do and not to be afraid."

Snapp is survived by two of her sons, Jeremy and David. She was predeceased by her husband and son Ira Ben Snapp II. There will be a memorial service for Snapp on at 11 a.m. March 2 at the Wings Over Miami Air Museum. Her family has requested donations to the Wings Over Miami Museum or the Florida Gold Coast 99s in lieu of flowers.



Betty Jane Williams

Betty Jane Williams earned her pilots license six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In January 1944 she joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots. The women flew 78 types of military aircraft. But they had to wait until 1977 to be eligible for veterans benefits.

Betty Jane Williams, who joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots, an elite group that flew noncombat missions during World War II, and served as a test pilot in Texas, has died. She was 89. Williams, of Woodland Hills, died Monday at Providence Tarzana Medical Center of complications related to a stroke, her family said. The war effort "needed everybody," Williams, a retired lieutenant colonel, told The Times in 1996. "An airplane doesn't respond to sex. It only responds to skill, and I was bitten by the aviation bug." Six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Williams earned her pilot's license in a civilian training program. With the advent of the war, the government grounded general aviation flying on both coasts, and she became a flight attendant with a Canadian airline, Williams later recalled.

When the airlines established instrument flight-training schools, Williams got pilot training at the University of Vermont, then taught Navy and civilian pilots instrument flight techniques. In January 1944, she returned to the cockpit with the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, and flew "wrecked planes that had been repaired to make sure they were air-worthy," Williams told The Times in January.

About 25,000 women applied for the program, but only 1,830 were accepted. She was one of 1,074 women who successfully completed the flight training in Sweetwater, Texas, as part of the WASP program, established during the war to cope with the domestic shortage of military pilots. At first, the women were restricted to flying in daylight in small aircraft but gradually took on more dangerous roles. "When you're a pioneer," Williams said in 1996 in The Times, "You don't want to be called a sissy."

Born in 1919 in rural Kingston, Penn., Williams was the middle of three children and grew up wanting to fly.

"Girls just didn't do those kinds of things," Williams said in 1997 in the Los Angeles Daily News. "But the 1940s had arrived, and so had war. That changed everything." As a WASP pilot, she was stationed at what is now Randolph Air Force Base near San Antonio. The women wore uniforms and piloted 78 types of military aircraft -- yet when the program disbanded in December 1944 they were denied military benefits and treated as civilians.

"We just thought we did an extraordinary job," Williams told The Times in 1993. "But to be booted out . . . it was a terrible injustice."

In 1977, the women were recognized for completing military service and allowed to apply for veterans benefits.

After the war, Williams became a commercial pilot, flight instructor and head of instrument ground school for New York airports in the late 1940s. She also produced and hosted an early TV program in 1946 about aviation that aired on CBS and NBC. During the Korean War, she served in the Air Force as a writer-producer for a video production squadron. In California, she worked for North American Aviation and spent 20 years at Lockheed Aircraft as a technical writer and in-house filmmaker. A founding organizer of the postwar WASP national organization, Williams served in several leadership roles and remained active in the group. In January, she helped launch a planned aviation and aerospace library at James Monroe High School in North Hills by donating hundreds of her flight-related books, photographs and paintings to the campus.

Services are being planned.

