



 **THE WOMEN WITH WINGS** 

THE WOMEN WITH WINGS

A Limited Series Drama

Based on a True Story

A pilot shortage in WWII allows women pilots in the U.K. and the U.S. to take over military flying duties at home while overcoming gender prejudice, the military establishment and friends dying to prove themselves equal to the male pilots in the cockpit of any plane, all while qualified black female pilots are rejected due to color.



On the surface, **THE WOMEN WITH WINGS** could easily be put in the box of the feature film version of **A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN**, but at the core, this series is more aligned to the heart and soul of **A BAND OF BROTHERS**, with the added grit and wit of the female perspective as it recounts the remarkable achievements of an elite team of female pilots whose World War II undertakings are as incredible as they are true.

The World

From Rosie the Riveter to selling war bonds, and even playing baseball in a league of their own, most of us have a vague knowledge on the periphery of our minds of women being called to a different kind of arms on the home front as men fought in WWII. Yet despite the enduring acclaim of *BAND OF BROTHERS* and the much anticipated *MASTERS OF THE AIR*, no series or film has covered the mission of women civilian pilots; who freed countless male pilots for combat, as they transported and tested planes from factory to field in the U.K. and U.S.

To be accepted into the experimental and rigorous training program, the women need at least a private pilot's license while the men don't need one to enter training. In the aftermath of Amelia Earhart and others around the world like her, most of these women have a lot more than the right stuff.



The reality is they are still the consequences of the era; chastised to put a little muscle on those pretty arms. Scowled upon by pilots' jealous wives and disparaged by male pilots afraid for their jobs. Promotional news reels remind viewers that they are still the softer, fairer sex, worried to death about getting their hair wet.

Yet the need for pilots is so desperate during WWII, that the males in charge have no choice but to listen to the women trying to initiate programs in Europe and eventually the U.S. The U.S. program is so hastily put together because of the pilot shortage that the women pilots are accepted as civilians with no military benefits, but with the promise to be commissioned officers soon and receive the same benefits as the men. The women fight for militarization and equality but as the Bill goes before Congress, male civilian pilot trainers aren't needed anymore as the Allies are winning and the male pilots could be drafted into the ground army where they are needed – so they create a Lobby to get the WASP flying jobs. As the women wait for militarization, scathing and untrue stories about them come out in the press and support the men's cause. To add insult to injury, "Ladies Courageous" starring Loretta Young supposedly portraying Nancy Love, hits the theaters and makes the women pilots look inferior to the men.

Each episode will incorporate actual snippets from the women that relate to the story line.



The Why

Yes, it's a period piece, but it could not feel more present than it does today.

Despite everything women have accomplished in almost 80 years since WWII, we still live in a country where the equal rights amendment has never been ratified, and young girls and women of all ages can be jailed for seeking healthcare for their reproductive organs. In fact, there was a directive not allowing the female pilots to fly while menstruating, but it is quickly squashed. Make no mistake, this isn't a socio-political series with women's rights on a soapbox. This is the story of a group of women who answered the call to country despite those who commanded that they were incapable. They got the job done despite being denied the basic rights provided to their male counterparts, these women risked their lives just the same.

Creator Deborah Jennings has letters of agreement with several of the actual peoples' families. She is a walking encyclopedia of women's aviation during WWII. She was raised by two WWII veterans and grew up listening to her dad's stories about serving in the Army Air Forces and her mom's stories of service as an Army nurse.

Deborah developed the largest WASP exhibit in the country at the Seattle Museum of Flight. She has organized and conducted 16 filmed interviews of WASP and one American woman who flew in England with the ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) for Paul Allen's "Flying Heritage Collection."

She has also interviewed the Black couple Mildred and Gene Carter who were based in Tuskegee, Alabama and have a unique perspective of what was happening. Both of them pilots, Mildred was turned down for the WASP training program due to segregation laws.

THE WOMEN WITH WINGS are the females who stepped up and made it possible for male pilots to go to war and Deborah is the female with the most access and she is the most knowledgeable to tell their story.



The Characters

JAQUELINE “JACKIE” COCHRAN

Bold is an understatement, brash a necessity; Jackie was Amelia Earhart's best friend and successor and she holds more aviation records than any pilot in history, male or female. In 1938, Jackie wins the famous Bendix race against a field of men and is propelled into being the most famous female pilot of her day. That feat finds her sitting on an aviation committee with General Hap Arnold (Commander of the Army Air Corps) which gives Jackie an opportunity to push her plans to use women to fly military aircraft. Jackie's resourcefulness and business insight comes from a tough upbringing schlepping in salons for a buck, that she turned into a thriving cosmetics business by delivering her product via a plane she learned to fly on a dare from the man who would become her husband and benefactor.



The General sends her to London to help the ATA, and promises Jackie that when and if they need female pilots to help at home, she will be put in charge. She uses the opportunity to study that female program. Upon return to the U.S., she finds that another successful female pilot, Nancy Love, is leading the first ever Ferry pilot group of women. She demands that General Arnold give her the bigger training program he had promised her. Jackie's competition with Nancy, often in her own mind, drives a big story line in the series, but in the end, she's forced to put aside her ego, to gain support for women pilots to be classified as part of the military.



The Characters

NANCY HARKNESS LOVE

A risk-taking pilot by the age of sixteen, Nancy seeks every opportunity to be the first woman to fly every new military plane coming off the assembly line in WWII. She leads her all-female ferry pilot group as they deliver the bulk of new aircraft from factory to field, for men in combat overseas. Contrary to Jackie's love of attention, Nancy is a quiet leader who doesn't hesitate to jump in. When it becomes clear that the U.S. is desperate for pilots Nancy is given the opportunity to start the first female pilot ferrying group in U.S. military history, through her aviator husband's connections. She is soon overtaken by Jackie and sees her program folded into Jackie's. It's not until facing women pilots dying and the politics that deny them basic dignity, that Nancy shows solidarity, although Jackie gives reason for Nancy's resentment to soon return.



BARBARA ERICKSON

She is assigned commander of the women in Long Beach where over fifty P-51 Mustangs are coming off the assembly line every day needing to be flown across the country to be shipped to men overseas. She is a strong, smart, no-nonsense leader and a great pilot, she's devastated when one of her girls dies, but she has to buckle up and be the leader they need. She is the only female pilot to be awarded the Air Medal during the war. She is devastated when she is sent home on Dec. 20, 1944 while many planes sit on the tarmac without enough qualified male pilots to deliver them where needed.



GENERAL HENRY "HAP" ARNOLD

A heavily decorated pioneer in aviation, Hap becomes the commanding officer of the U.S. Army Air Forces before the U.S. enters WWII (he creates the Air Force as a standalone unit of the military after the war). Affable and a known prankster by friends, he is admired by many. But his patience is tested by Jackie as she bombards him about using women pilots in the military. They know how to push each other's buttons, but he recognizes the value and sacrifice the female pilots provide. The stress of the job contributes to several heart attacks and he wrestles with being behind a desk. In the end, he touts the WASPS extraordinary achievements and is sorry that even at his rank he does not have the pull to get them recognized as part of the military.



The Characters

GENE AND MILDRED CARTER

Mildred is the first black female pilot to get a pilot's license in Alabama. Mildred and Gene fall in love in the air and become known as the "first couple" at Tuskegee. They try to get a job with the Civil Air Patrol but feel they are denied due to color.

A month after he earns his wings as a second lieutenant, he goes off to war; she remains in Tuskegee, where she works at the airfield. He writes her letters nearly every day. But the war doesn't fully sink in for her until she sees a newsreel at the theater, where Gene with his unit tend to their aircraft in Africa. She cries. While Mildred is counted among the history-making Tuskegee Airmen also; but her dream of flying for her country is repeatedly snubbed. This becomes even more bitter as she receives a rejection letter from Jackie for the WASP program, where Jackie writes, "we have no provisions for colored girls."

Racism may have cut down Mildred's dream of flying in the military, but it never stops her ambition. She pilots planes until 1985, when a broken hip knocks her out of commission at the age of 64.

CHARLES ALFRED "CHIEF" ANDERSON

After teaching himself to fly, he is the first African American to fly a plane across the country, Anderson ends up in Tuskegee, Alabama as the director of the Civilian Pilot Training program. While Eleanor Roosevelt visits Tuskegee, she sees airplanes flying and asks to meet Anderson. The First Lady tells him she always heard that "colored people couldn't fly, I'm just going to have to take a flight with you." Anderson was not about to turn down the First Lady, despite the protests of her security detail. After that momentous flight Anderson stuns her even more when he introduces the first lady to Mildred Hemmons (Carter), his only female pilot graduate of the program.

They dub him "Chief," and Anderson continues to train the Tuskegee Airmen to fly for combat overseas. Today, he is considered the "Father of Black Aviation".



The Characters

CORNELIA FORT

Cornelia is our entry point into the pilot as a witness to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor where she is training a male pilot. She is a former debutante from Nashville who rebels against her high society and conservative lifestyle as flying becomes her first love.

After escaping the attack on Pearl Harbor, she is one of the first women to join Nancy Love's original group of female pilots in the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. She describes her experiences and passion for flying, beautifully in numerous letters home, before her untimely death while ferrying trainers with male pilots – the crash seems suspicious but it is ruled an "accident" by the Army Air Forces.



HAZEL YING LEE

Hazel learned to fly in a Chinese Flying Club in Oregon; after the Japanese attack on China, Hazel and her boyfriend go to China hoping to help defend their native country as pilots. Hazel is not accepted in the Chinese Air Force as a female. She finds out about the WASP and joins the 4th training class; the largest class yet. Everyone loves Hazel and her sense of humor. After training, she's sent to Michigan where she delivers P-39s and P-63s from the factory to Montana to be flown by men to Alaska. As she attempts to land with busy air traffic, under directions from the tower, another plane with a dead radio crashes with hers and they go up in a fireball. A man pulls Hazel away from the crash with her leather jacket smoking. She dies on Thanksgiving Day 1944. Her brother dies a couple of days later in Europe, but the family can't bury them side by side in the Portland cemetery they want – because they are Chinese.



There are many secondary characters; notably the men behind and above the women, as well as civilians who adore them and despise them. Over a thousand women went through the WASP training, our episodes are driven by a core group who were instrumental in creating roles for women pilots from beginning to end, when they were expected to go home and resume their "ordinary" lives.

ATA (England's Air Transport Auxiliary)

At the outbreak of WWII in England, Pauline Gower proposes the establishment of a female pilot group to help in the war effort in the newly established ATA. She is joined by reknowned pilot Amy Johnson, considered the British Amelia Earhart. In January 1942, Jackie Cochran and 25 American female pilots sign an 18 month contract with the ATA. Jackie serves for free as an honorary Flight Captain in charge of the American recruits, but she rubs the British the wrong way with her narcissism and hands off leadership.



AMY JOHNSON



PAULINE GOWER

Gower is appointed head of the women's group which grows quickly as women pilots from around the world offer their help. Nicknamed the Queen of the Air, Amy Johnson was an adored international celebrity thanks to her historic flights which included becoming the first woman to fly solo from London to Australia. Amy Johnson dies after having to bail out over the Thames. Among the many accomplishments of the ATA, the group achieved one thing the American female pilots could not -- equal pay as the men.

Series Pilot

PLANES BEFORE PEARLS

Our teaser entry point is Pearl Harbor, where civilian female pilot, Cornelia Fort, trains a male civilian when their plane is attacked by the Japanese. She immediately understands the gravity of the situation and takes control of the plane, as her student wonders if they are going to finish the lesson. In addition

to setting the stage of the backdrop of war, this immediately sets up the theme of these women, their innate skill in the cockpit, and ability to read a situation and handle it.

From the teaser, we get to know the core cast through a succession of their place in aviation before the war and how their seemingly disconnected lives will become intricately intertwined.

Jackie Cochran and her launching a cosmetics line, *Wings to Beauty*, with great fanfare by being able to fly it across the country, after rising from poverty and embracing a life of riches with her husband, to Nancy Love's leaving her Ivy League status to work with her husband's aviation business where she works with an all male team on new inventions in aviation, such as tricycle landing gear, and "Chief" Anderson and Dr. Albert Forsythe are the first African Americans to fly a plane across the country. General Arnold takes command of the Army Air Corps and has the daunting task to work with FDR to turn an obsolete air force into the strongest in the world in case we go to war. And Amy Johnson who also gets married and stays in the U.S., with Amelia Earhart after a crash.

Jackie's point of view becomes predominate to set up the story engine as her best friend Amelia Earhart disappears over the ocean. She hears her on the radio going into the ocean. Jackie gives her memorial speech and takes the torch to carry on for women in aviation becoming the fastest female pilot in 1937 and beating a Howard Hughes record.

To end the episode, Jackie steps up and takes part in the famous Bendix race against a field of men. In mid-air her engine sputters and stops, and she goes into a nose dive, and everyone thinks she will crash and burn.



PEARL HARBOR, DEC 7, 1941



JACKIE COCHRAN

EPISODE 2: A WEAPON WAITING TO BE USED

Jackie's nosedive takes us into her rocking her plane to come through and win the Bendix in spectacular fashion. She is propelled to being the most famous female pilot of the day. Her wealthy husband Floyd, wonders if she was afraid of dying. She proclaims that 'dying is easy in her mind and it is living that is so darn hard.' Jackie wants to fly for the military and she sets her mind to doing just that. Her feat finds her sitting on an aviation committee with General Hap Arnold and she pushes her plans to use women to fly military aircraft to open up more men for combat duty. General Arnold doesn't see the need stateside and tells her to go to England where they have had the ATA since the Nazi's attacked Britain. Amelia Earhart's other good friend and counterpart now in the ATA, Amy Johnson, dies over the Thames.

As General Arnold tells the President he needs more pilots, First Lady Eleanor visits Tuskegee and it's Mildred, the first black female to get a pilot's license in Alabama, who really impresses the first lady. Jackie writes a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt.

General Arnold tells Jackie she can fly the Hudson bomber from Canada to England. She jumps at the chance to be the first women to do so in wartime territory. This leads to Jackie taking a squad of female recruits for the ATA which fits into her plan to be the number one choice in the U.S. In London, Jackie meets with Pauline Gower who receives women volunteers from around the world who want to help by ferrying planes, Jackie's main interest is in how she can create a similar program at home. Meanwhile, Nancy Love works with her husband's team in ferrying planes from factory to field in the lend-lease program. Upon returning home, FDR and Eleanor request Jackie's company for lunch to discuss what she observed in England. The president promises to send a note of support for her ideas to use women pilots in the U.S. to the top military brass and Congress.

News of Pearl Harbor dominates the papers and airwaves, men form lines miles long to sign up for military service. Eleanor Roosevelt makes her support known...

“... this is not a time when women should be patient. We are in a war and we need to fight it with all our ability and every weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, are a weapon waiting to be used...”



NANCY LOVE



Episodes 3-8

ATA-GIRL

Jackie and 25 American female pilots sign a contract with the ATA in England. Jackie will be in charge of the American recruits. By late summer, Jackie shares news articles from home with General Arnold about the severe pilot shortage in the U.S. He asks Jackie to return to the U.S. with him. Meanwhile, in the U.S., Bob Love tells his Colonel that his wife Nancy can get a group of women pilots to do the job in short order. Nancy's plan is revived. Jackie lands in the U.S. to headlines about the WAFS and a photo of Nancy Love in print. She is livid.

1ST CLASS

General Arnold claims he knew nothing about Nancy's WAFS. He orders the commanders who caused this problem to give Jackie what she needs to start her training program, but Nancy's progress is further along and her first group, including Cornelia, is formed and already ferrying planes and living in frigid conditions with thousands of men. Jackie's Guinea Pig class convenes in even worse conditions at a hotel in Houston.

A LIFE'S WORTH

It's ordered that Nancy's WAFS expand to bases across the country to move planes off the assembly lines and deliver them where needed. This provides opportunity for Jackie's new grads just as her new training facility is opened in Sweetwater Texas. But their successes are brought down to earth when a trainee and her instructor die in a crash. Then Cornelia is killed while on a mission and while the circumstances are suspicious, no charges are filed and it is ruled accidental. To make matters worse, the government will pay \$200 for their death benefits, as opposed to the \$10,000 males get. The girls take up collections and get back to work.

COVER STORY

General Arnold and Jackie plan to join all the women into one group with the new name WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots). He will make Jackie Director of ALL the women pilots. Nancy is upset to have to serve under her. LIFE Magazine is at Avenger Field doing a story about the "girl pilots." The WASP program is not a secret anymore and Jackie announces that a Bill has been submitted to bring the WASP into the military which would give them full benefits.

EXPENDABLE

One of the girls is given horrible reception at Camp Davis, followed by a fiery crash where two girls die, Jackie comes to the base and investigates the possibility of foul play and promotes a need for safety checks with the planes.

General Arnold pushes for support to pass the Bill which will also bring equal pay and benefits as the men, but with fewer pilot deaths in Europe, civilian pilot trainers are no longer needed. The men complain and lobby that the women are stealing their jobs. General Arnold praises the WASP in his speech, and in a rare act of friendship, Jackie uses her cosmetician skills to help Nancy look more photogenic.

GROUNDED

The Bill fails. The girls continue doing their jobs regardless, they believe Jackie can save the program, but soon news comes that the WASP program will close at the end of the year; Dec. 20th 1944. The women continue on training, flying (and even dying) in wintry conditions. Nancy and the others are bitter that Jackie let them down and her girls offer to work for a dollar a year, heartbroken to leave planes sitting on a runway.



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Visit WASP on the WEB for more information on the WASP: <http://www.wasp-wwii.org>





THE WOMEN WITH WINGS



"You don't need legislation to prove something...you can be whatever you set your heart and head to be, and don't let anybody tell you you can't be, because 1078 women pilots did it in World War II."

- Annelle Henderson Bulechek 44-w-2

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