

HOLLY RIDGE | 1943

# Off She Goes!

With all due respect to Rosie the Riveter, let's not forget about Amy the Aviator.

While millions of American women joined the workforce during World War II, inspired by Rosie's iconic "We Can Do It!" campaign, a smaller number contributed to the war effort not in factories but in the wild blue yonder, as members of the innovative Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Some 25,000 women applied for the elite program, but only 1,074 earned their wings, including some who were assigned to Camp Davis, north of Wilmington, from 1943 to 1944.

Faced with a shortage of pilots, military leaders developed the WASP program to train women to

fly military aircraft in the states, freeing up male pilots to go overseas for combat duty. WASPs flew less dangerous missions — at Camp Davis, for example, they towed targets for anti-aircraft training — but their jobs were not without risk, and 38 women died in service to their country.

Because WASPs were considered civilian pilots, they weren't given veteran status until 1977, when the oversight was corrected. In 2010, they were awarded the distinguished Congressional Gold Medal. To the WASPs of World War II, we salute you. You were never front and center like Rosie the Riveter, but your contributions to our country are no less riveting.

— Jimmy Tomlin

A group of Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) stand ready in front of a Beechcraft AT-11 at Camp Davis in Onslow County. WASPs were the first women to fly U.S. military aircraft, and they logged more than 60 million miles.



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