

# “REEL STUFF”



## Flygirls in development

### Mini-series will honor WWII WASP

By Ron Kaplan

The accomplishments of the 1,074 Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during World War II, and their predecessors, the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), rank among the top of America's wartime annals. The path to establishing an all-female pilot corps to ferry military aircraft, which was needed to free up male pilots to serve in combat roles, was wrought with challenges. Their achievement is ably documented in a wealth of written histories, such as *On Final Approach*, by Byrd Howell Grainger, and author Sarah Rickman's *The Originals* and her forthcoming book, *WASP of the Ferry Command*.

From waging political battles in the Pentagon to fighting sexism on the flightline, the WASP were ultimately successful in writing history in the skies. However, a cinematic take on those adventurous wartime women aviators, including their dynamic and visionary founders, Jackie Cochran and Nancy Harkness Love, has strangely been too long in coming. It would be hard to top the WASP story for real drama, from triumph to tragedy.

WASP flew over 60 million miles in every type of military aircraft, from BT-13s and P-47s to B-26s and B-29s. They tested and flew aircraft right off the assembly lines, and served as target tow pilots for live-fire practice. A total of 38 WASP gave their lives in service to their country, yet it was not until 1977 that they were granted status as veterans. In 2009, they were collectively honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. Sadly, their colorful example of courage, skill, determination, passion and personal sacrifice to the war effort remains unknown to the masses.

Matia Karrell of Los Angeles was friends with one local WASP in particular, Violet Cowden, who passed away in 2011. Having researched the WASP for over 20 years, Karrell, a Fulbright Fellow and Oscar-nominated live-action short film director/writer, made a promise to Cowden that she would do whatever it takes to tell their story. Now she has her own company, The Red Door Films, poised to deliver on that promise. In development now is her dramatic television mini-series titled *FlyGirls* that will tell the epic tales of the WASP through the friendship of three women, composite characters based on real-life participants.

Karrell, *FlyGirls* creator/director, says the ten part mini-series, "... will follow them embarking on an experiment, forming the first all-female air force squadron that, within two years would number over a thousand pilots. Instead of being honored at war's end, they are shamed, accused of taking jobs away from men, finally grounded and silenced. Their contribution would remain classi-



fied 'top secret' by the U.S. Government for over three decades."

Though not a documentary, *FlyGirls*, which is based on Grainger's book, will also draw on a wellspring of source material in the unpublished diaries of Ann Wood-Kelly, one of 24 American women recruited to fly for the British Air Transport Auxiliary before U.S. entry into the war. Karrell, sensitive to the risk of a studio or network possibly commercializing or "Hollywoodizing" the development of *FlyGirls*, opted to crowdfund the project on Fund DREAMER, while also seeking investors.

Once full funding and a top-tier script writer is secured, Karrell expects production to begin sometime in 2017. Karrell will direct, joined by Hilary Prentice, an award winning producer. Plans call for filming in Southern California; Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas (World War II training site for hundreds of WASP), and East Coast locations. Seeking to be as authentic as possible, the mini-series will use as many real warbirds as is financially feasible. To learn more, visit [www.flygirlstheseries.com](http://www.flygirlstheseries.com) or email Karrell and Prentice at [flygirlsw2@gmail.com](mailto:flygirlsw2@gmail.com).

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