Seventy-six years ago, women weren’t allowed to fly planes for our military. A group of brave women pilots called WASPs changed that!

This is pilot Ruth Dailey Helm in 1943.
It was 1942, and the world was at war. The war was called World War Two. Millions of Americans had joined the military and left our country to fight in Europe and Asia.

**A Pilot Problem**

Our military leaders had a problem. They needed pilots to fly planes here in our country. But who could do it? Most of the pilots were gone, fighting in the war.

Back then, all military pilots were men. Women could serve as nurses, doctors, mechanics, and drivers. But they weren’t allowed to fly planes.

**Wild About WASPs**

Our leaders took a chance on female pilots, and they started a new program called the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP.

Right away, the program was a huge hit, and thousands of women wanted to join. “We wanted to serve our country,” says Nell Bright. She became a WASP in 1943.
The WASPs flew planes in the United States. They tested planes to make sure they were safe to fly. Sometimes the planes pulled targets behind them so that men on the ground could practice shooting.

Another Kind of Fight

It was hard, tiring work. “We were busy from 6 in the morning until 10 at night!” says Nell.

Through it all, the WASPs worked together. “Everybody supported everybody else,” says Nell.

The WASPs were talented pilots, but some people were angry at them. They thought it wasn’t ladylike to fly planes. They told the WASPs that they were stealing jobs from men.

But the WASPs wouldn’t quit. They had a job to do.

After the War

By 1944, the war was ending. Male pilots were returning to the United States, and they wanted their jobs back. The WASPs had to go.

That was bad, but there was something worse. Even though the WASPs had flown for the military, they weren’t officially called veterans. They couldn’t go to military hospitals like other veterans. They couldn’t be buried in military cemeteries. It was like they had never served our country at all.

The WASPs knew this wasn’t fair, so they kept fighting to be called veterans. Finally, in 1977, they won! They officially became U.S. veterans, and they could be treated like every other veteran.

Today, there’s a museum in Texas at the old WASP training ground. Now everyone can remember the bravery of the high-flying WASPs!

—as by Blair Rainsford