

Molly Merryman. *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. Pp. 237. Paper \$23.00.

Molly Merryman's *Clipped Wings* focuses on the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during World War II and demonstrates that they played critical roles and worked side by side with the male military, yet Congress refused to militarize them in 1944. A Professor of History at Kent State University, Merryman examines the reactions of male pilots to their female counterparts and media coverage of women as pilots, such as *Life* magazine. Her work chronicles the WASP from its inception in 1942 until the program's end two years later. Merryman demonstrates how various cultural influences singled out members of the WASP and prevented them from becoming part of the United States military solely because of their sex.

While the men were off fighting the war, women started working in factories performing tasks that were once reserved for men only. Piloting was one of those jobs since few men were left to ferry planes from one location to the next. Female pilots stepped in and created the Women Airforce Service Pilots. During their two-year existence, the WASPs flew a total of sixty two million miles and delivered 12, 652 planes on domestic ferrying missions (p. 8). All 916 women were experienced, licensed pilots who had completed extensive training, which was similar to the training for male pilots in the Army Air Force (AAF). All were well qualified and hired by the military but given civilian status. The women supported passage of a bill that would have allowed them to become part of the military and receive the same veteran and hospital benefits as the male pilots.

Merryman argues that male pilots and the media prevented female pilots from becoming militarized. During the WASP's time of service, male pilots became eligible for the draft as ground troops, thus losing their flight pay to the women pilots. The male pilots lobbied against their female counterparts and attempted to discredit the WASPs through the Ramspect Report, which used statistics of airplane crashes to depict women pilots as inadequate compared to male pilots. Media coverage played a huge part in how society personified the women pilots, which not always positive. Instead of portayed their services as patriotic, the women were criticized as outside of social norms for taking on a traditionally male role. As a result, Congress opposed women's efforts to become part of the military; this was the first time Congress denied a bill that was supported by both the AAF and WASP. It was not until thirty years later, in 1977, that Congress passed the bill granting the WASP's militarization, entitling the women to veteran status after their years of service during the war.

Merryman's work is a valuable analysis of why the WASPs during World War II were denied the same military benefits as their male counterparts. Her use of *Life* magazine and interviews with former WASPs are an excellent analysis of the group and the struggles the former WASP pilots had endured. The book is a fascinating social history of a topic that is not widely known or talked about. Readers will enjoy the history of these remarkable women and the way Merryman tells their story.

Helena Nunez