The Original Fly Girls

"Ladies and gentlemen" ... so began the Captain's announcement over the PA system on Flight AA70 from Los Angeles to Dallas. "Traveling with us today is Edna Davis, a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) from World War II." The applause that ensued must have been sprinkled with more than a few questions. All records of the WASP were classified and sealed for 35 years. Who were they and how did Edna become one?



The WASP were the first women to fly American military aircraft. During the war, at a time when trained male pilots were in short supply, more than 25,000 women applied for the WASP. Fewer than 1,900 were accepted and only 1,074 completed the four months of training, which meant learning to fly using the same courses as male Army Air Corps pilots.

Stationed at 122 air bases across the U.S., they flew every aircraft in the Army's arsenal: 60 million miles of operational flights between September 1942 and December 1944.

Thirty-eight WASP never came home. They were not considered military, so each one was sent home at family expense without traditional military honors, a flag draped over the coffin, or even a note of heroism.

After the records were unsealed in 1977, Congressional acts ensured that WASP were considered "active duty" for the purposes of programs administered by the VA. Later, they were awarded the World War II Victory Medal and the American Theater Ribbon/American Campaign Medal for their service during the war.

The Captain of Flight AA70 concluded his remarks that morning by saying, "We are honored to have Ms. Edna Davis with us this morning." An honor, indeed.