



Women Airforce Service Pilots Reception

Tuesday, 9 March 2010



General Norty Schwartz

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for Delivery
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Page 1 of 2**

Introduction

Thank you, General Vaught, for that kind introduction. Generals Horoho and Sutton, thank you for your service and leadership, and for being here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an exceptional privilege for me to honor such a distinguished group as the Women Airforce Service Pilots, at this momentous occasion for them, for our Air Force, and for our Nation.

Righting Wrongs of the Past

This week, we cast our thoughts back to another era—not merely to honor the past, but in a larger sense, also to correct some of its errors; for while we are extremely proud of our Nation and its steady, incremental, and ongoing progress toward comprehensive and meaningful diversity, we realize that we must continue to be resolute with this “work in progress.”

Among the more significant of these oversights was the proper recognition of these courageous aviation pioneers and their families. Righting this, with the benefit of our further experience and greater insight, is our serious responsibility.

It is entirely fitting, therefore, that today—nearly 66 years later—we celebrate and honor you, the WASPs, not only for your wartime service, but also for your pivotal role in a much broader sense. In being among the early women pioneers to blaze a trail into the military cockpit—from those marvelous machines of the past to the highest performance aircraft of today—you helped to break barriers and shape modern American society.

Legacy of the WASP

The well-deserved respect for the WASPs is long overdue. Pioneers like them often had to endure persistent criticism, which makes their efforts ever the more courageous, and achievements ever the more substantial. When interviewed years later about the contempt in which some male pilots held



them, Anita Paul explained, “We just lived with it. We didn’t know what discrimination was. That term hadn’t even been coined yet.”

For decades, the status quo denied real recognition and golden opportunity, even as their competence was so obviously apparent. For instance, soon after the war, when Suzanne Parish sought employment as a commercial pilot, one airline wrote back, “With all of your qualifications, we would hire you in a minute...if you were a man.”

Thankfully, the daughters and granddaughters of America’s “greatest generation” have traveled far along the trail that the WASPs helped to blaze. Thirty-three years after the WASPs were disbanded—and as the Air Force Academy’s first female cadets worked through their sophomore year—Congress voted to grant veteran status to the WASPs.

Today, nearly another 33 years later, the Nation’s transformation is even more substantial, and our gratitude for the WASPs ever more sincere.

Conclusion

Through their service and their lives, the WASPs exemplify the notion that meaningful diversity bolsters our society by providing us with the full potential of America’s pool of talent and energy. After contributing so much to the war effort, WASPs became leaders in numerous endeavors, continuing their noble efforts to vanquish societal limitations and subtle forms of discrimination.

The victory of the WASPs is certainly a triumph for all Airmen, and one for all Americans as well. They demonstrated that our great Nation benefits most when it rightly harnesses the abundant energy, generosity, and talents of all of its citizens. And, they proved that far greater strength and vitality lie in inclusiveness.

It has truly been my honor to speak to you today. Thank you to all our honorees—those here and those who could not be here—for your breathtaking service when it wasn’t so easy to serve. Your virtue inspires us and reminds us of the possibilities when America unleashes the talent of all its citizens. We wish you all the very, very best. Thank you.