Striking the Heart of All Who Saw Her

By A.Z. “Chig” Lewis, son of WASP Dot Swain Lewis

Something about the music made your heart stop...the sound of young women singing marching music: “I want to be...a real H.P....Umm and a little bit more...a WASP Trainee...You'll go Forth From Here...With Your Silver Wings,...I’m a Yankee Doodle Pilot...Born with a Yearning to Fly...” and seeing those women on the float, eight WASP: ALYCE ROHRER, VIRGINIA LEE DOERR, FLORA BELLE REECE, MARTY WYALL, FLORENCE MASCOT, SHIRLEY KRUSE, LOIS BRISTOL YOUNG, MARGOT DEMOSS, who would have been singing those songs some 70 years ago. Several of them were in uniform.

And walking right beside were 15 younger women, in various uniforms, Air Force, Navy, commercial pilots, the legacy of the WASP. The WASP Wings worn proudly on the front of the float, the motto “Our Eyes are On the Stars” underneath, and the WASP Trainee statue, her face raised upwards to the sky, striding forward much as the women walking alongside. Above, a scaled model of an AT-6 also rose upwards, toward the stars, propeller spinning, glistening silver-leaf in the sun.

The float struck the hearts of all who saw her...several of the judges were seen with tears in their eyes at the judging...all along the parade route, the crowds rose and saluted and cheered and cried...hard to know what struck so many so deeply. Was it the 38 white stars in the bed of roses on each side? The beautiful Congressional Gold Medal, fashioned in glowing seed-work on the side, or the iconic pictures of JACQUELINE COCHRAN, NANCY LOVE, the four WASP B-17 pilots striding, the Life cover of SHIRLEY SLADE on a wing, LIBBY GARDNER smiling out of the cockpit of a B-26...All these elements — the music, the women of all ages, the plane, the symbolism on the float — combined in a magical way to win the National Trophy from the judges, and the utter excitement and enjoyment of all who witnessed the float in person.

If you were watching on national television, you didn’t see this. Commercial interests were more important than this honor to all of our nation’s military and WWII veterans, and a few mishaps and bad planning prevented our float from reaching the TV corner before the national networks cut away. This excluded viewers across the nation from participating in this magical moment.

But this magical moment did happen. It was wondrous. No conspiracy...no intentional forgetting of the WASP like 70 years ago...just an unfortunate lack of priorities in an overly commercialized world, where the float we built without major corporate sponsorship, without adequate publicity, that we are still trying to pay for, created a special transformative magical moment — a statement about our nation’s history, the value of our nation’s women and military service, a declaration of patriotism and national pride. A moment that we can all share in our minds and hearts — a magical truth that happened, that existed before, and that will, if we share and remember, live on as a true expression, a symbol, a special unforgettable celebration of the WASP.
EDITORIAL

WASP Wear the Mantle of Roses With Pride

By Sarah Byrn Rickman, WASP News editor

In this Run for the Roses, the WASP and their myriad supporters did themselves proud. Uphill all the way aptly describes the journey — from Chig and DOT LEWIS’S seed of an idea as the New Year 2013 was dawning to the triumph of the full blossomed all-American rose that was the WASP float New Year’s Day 2014.

Kudos, to ALL who made it happen along the way.

That Dot did not live to see it is a deep regret we all feel, but surely she, with her new pair of wings, was up there in an AT-6 flying over the proceedings.

Ah, yes, the AT-6. When it came time to choose THE airplane to fly from the float, many bigger, faster aircraft were tossed out as possibilities. The AT-6 is the airplane that every graduate WASP had to master to get her wings. And though the 28 original WAFS did not go through the training, we can account for nearly every one of them listing the vaunted AT-6 in their logbooks at some point in their WASP careers. It is THE universal WASP plane.

The people who made this marvel happen were Chig Lewis and Kate Landdeck, the president and vice president of the sponsoring organization, Wingtip-to-Wingtip Association. Working closely with them were Meg Farrell and Emmy Friend, daughters of JEAN McCREERY (44-10), Carol Ann Benson, daughter of ALYE ROHRER (44-4), and float builder Tim Estes, of Fiesta Parade Floats. Alyce and therefore Carol Ann are hometown Pasadena gals, and it was Alyce who made the initial connection with the Tournament of Roses Parade committee. And that’s just the top of the list. So many many more worked, and worked, and worked.

This is a story of celebration, because a lot of people who had never heard of the WASP before have heard of the WASP now. The ladies tell us, with great feeling and humble pride, of the parade watchers they saw with tears in their eyes, of the salutes and the throaty cheers, and how the crowd in the bleachers stood up when “Our Eyes Are on the Stars” passed by.

This was a goodie, ladies! Revel in it. You earned it.

WASP daughters:
Carol Ann Benson — Alyce Rohrer, 44-4
Emily Friend — Jean McCreery, 44-10

WASP:
Margot DeMoss 44-5
Lee Doerr 44-3
Adeline Ellison 43-6
Alma Fornal 44-5
Shirley Kruse 44-6
Florence Mascott 44-10-t
Jean McCreery 44-10
Flora Belle Reece 44-4
Dawn Seymour 43-5
AJ Starr 43-4
Tommie Thoits 44-10-t
Marty Wyall 44-10
Lois Young 44-3

Contributors for this issue:
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Chig Lewis, President, Wingtip-to-Wingtip Association and son of WASP Dot Swain Lewis, 44-5
Chris Rose, Friend and Volunteer

Military Escorts:
Trish Beckman
Jen Cress
Sandy Opeka
Lucy Young

Websites:
TWU: ......................... www.twu.edu/library/wasp
WASP on the Web: ................ www.wasp-wwii.org
Wings Across America: ........... www.wingsacrossamerica.org
WASP Museum: ..................... www.waspmuseum.org

DEADLINE

Next issue of the WASP News is planned for September 2014
Deadline for news is August 15, 2014
WASP Archives THE Source for Float Media Requests

By Kimberly L. Johnson, Coordinator, Special Collections, TWU

The Woman’s Collection is proud that the WASP Archive is the largest collection of resources under one roof. Researchers can access historically rare and one-of-a-kind documents, photographs, films, uniforms, and artifacts. It is a testament to the archives, comprehensiveness that filmmakers, historians, scholars, documentarians, students, and enthusiasts from around the world use our collections to advance their projects. Our active engagement and participation with the public is demonstrated by our ongoing work to preserve, promote, and protect the WASP legacy.

Events such as the Rose Parade spark interest and fuel inquiry about the WASP Archive. In the weeks leading up to the Rose Parade, the Woman’s Collection began preparing images and documents for use by the media. During the winter break, the WASP Archive was mobilized to respond to media requests for images and film footage providing access to an international cohort interested in publicizing the WASP. Many of the news outlets we worked with were a direct result of the Wingtip-to-Wingtip Association’s efforts to generate media interest for the WASP and the Rose Parade. Other requests came directly to the WASP Archive in the days and weeks before and after the event. We were delighted when Thomas Sparrow with BBC Telemundo reached out to the WASP Archive for sources to interview. Likewise, when Josh Trudell with Beckett Media contacted us for information about the WASP for a story to be published later in May, we responded.

The WASP Archive stands as an example of an archive in action providing research support, fielding media requests, and advocating to new audiences and future scholars the importance of preserving women’s history. Our ongoing efforts to support the media ensure the legacy of the WASP endures.

Every day we connect with students, journalists, teachers, pilots, military personnel, and life-long learners discovering the WASP. Their history continues to influence the scholarly record and shape popular culture. The Woman’s Collection staff has completed more than 5,000 requests from patrons worldwide during the past four years. Visitors come from across the country and North America to access our collections. TWU’s archival collections generate enthusiasm and motivate interest about women’s history. Our collections distinguish us from our peers and further define TWU as a premier research destination for women’s history.

It is evident the WASP legacy will endure long into the future. Their story is timeless inspiring generations of new devotees. Their history resonates with today’s female pilots. The Woman’s Collection stands poised to capture their stories, preserve their history, and cultivate relationships that establish TWU as the preeminent leader in the collection and preservation of women’s history.

Today, staff is working with a core of dedicated documentarians, filmmakers, historians, authors, and media representatives specializing in women’s military and aviation history on upcoming publications and productions.
A Rose Parade float, on its own, seems a frivolous thing. I admit I was among those who doubted the very idea of it. And yet when we walked into that hangar at Fiesta Parade Floats (they call it a “barn” but it is clearly a hangar) the smell of roses and the beauty of the floats convinced me that this was a wonderful way to help tell the story of the WASP and their legacy.

This was a moving, living exhibit that helped millions of people learn about the WASP and the media attention the WASP received from the float continues to this day. The Wingtip-to-Wingtip Association, the legacy organization of the WASP made up of WASP, Kids of WASP and Friends of WASP, was honored to sponsor the National Trophy Award-winning float, “Our Eyes are on the Stars.” It was an effort that would not have happened without the support of many.

Hundreds of people donated to help pay for the float, from a schoolgirl in Idaho’s $5, to WASP Mary Nesbit Hearn’s generous donation of $50,000. Our float builder, Tim Estes of Fiesta Parade Floats, stubbornly stuck with us as we struggled with fundraising. He is a pilot too, and wanted to help honor the WASP and tell their story. While eight lucky WASP rode on the float during the parade (their names were drawn from a hat), fourteen younger women who represented the WASP legacy walked alongside it in support of the WASP and to help show that the WASP story didn’t end in 1944, 1977, or even 2010. The WASP story and the WASP legacy live on.

This TWU special edition of the WASP News shares with you the story of the WASP who were able to travel to Pasadena, California, for the Tournament of Roses Parade on January 1st, 2014. Wingtip produced the little booklet that came in the envelope along with it, which tells the broader story of the float, the media, the volunteers, and the Legacy Walkers. These two documents combined should help you see what a wonderful thing the WASP Rose Parade float was and continues to be.

Wingtip is continuing to fundraise to make our final payment of $35,000 on the float. We also continue to use the publicity gained from the float to tell the WASP story and support the WASP Archives at TWU, the WASP Museum in Sweetwater, and the Women’s Memorial in Arlington. For more information about the float or Wingtip-to-Wingtip Association please contact me (landdeck@yahoo.com, 940-368-0164) or Chig Lewis or go to www.waspfloat.com. I hope you enjoy the stories about the float experience as much as we enjoyed and were honored to be a part of it all. CAVU.
‘I Loved Every Skinny Minute’ of the Rose Parade

By Flora Belle Smith Reece, 44-4

There was not a single thing that I did not like about the WASP float in the Rose Parade. Sunday evening before the parade, we were invited to the float builders’ reception. My daughter, Connie Fox, came down from Oakhurst, CA, to take me down. We received our passes and went to look at the float. My daughter-in-law, Val Reece, met us and took us to where my granddaughter, Susan Smith, and great-granddaughter, Allison Smith, were working. Susan is a leader and Allison a member of a Girl Scout troop that volunteered to work on the float.

We attended the reception where I was introduced to two of the flyers of the Condor group of fliers from Van Nuys. That group had invited the WASP for lunch on New Year’s Eve Day after the judging of the floats. So they told me they would see me the next day.

We needed to be on the bus the next morning to be at the float builders by 8 a.m. to be on time for the judging. Connie and I were the first ones on the bus. We were told to wear what we planned to wear when riding on the float New Year’s Day. I wore a flight suit so I could put layers underneath for warmth. We were assigned our seats and told we could not get off the float until after the judges came. That took several hours. We could talk and, of course, our beautiful walkers were there to see that we were comfortable or if we had any needs. What a great group they were. I do have a picture with all their names thanks to photographer Robert Ellwood. His pictures are just fantastic.

Our walker escorts stood when our music started and stood at attention or saluted. They added so much to the entire picture. The crowd, when we were riding down the street, loved them. I only knew two of them before, Sandy and Wendy, and am not good at remembering names. But I loved each and every one of them. Of course Kate also walked, but not in line with the walkers. She kept going around the float to make sure we were doing well. So thoughtful of our well-being.

We had pictures taken and then got on the bus and were taken to Van Nuys for the Condor luncheon. What a welcome! TV stations and others were interviewing. One was from Australia. It is always fun to be asked specific questions about our long ago training and fun to share. Lunch was outstanding. Then the four pilots who were there offered rides in the back seat of the AT-6. Chris Rushing, one of the two pilots I had met at the reception, asked me if I wanted to go. What a very special treat that was. It is impossible to express what a fun, fun time that was. The “Missing Man” flight was beautiful. With a thankful heart I would say, “Thank you, Father, for these big and small favors You bestow on us.”

The next morning we had to be up and on the bus early. Finally it was time to be loaded onto the float. What a privilege to be one of the ones riding. The day was beautiful. We couldn’t see the Thunderbird fly over, but later saw the pictures that Robert Ellwood took. Beautiful.

We started down the parade route. There were shouts of some of our names. ALYCE ROHRER has lived in the Pasadena area for sixty years. She taught school there and her children went to school there, so many called out to her. It was fun to find my daughter, Connie, in the seats right after we turned the corner, and also to see my son, Rusty Reece and his wife, Val, in the group after we turned the corner on Sierra Madre Street.

I personally had several people who came to the parade just because the WASP were having a float. Rosemary Jenson was one. She’s a fellow member of our local 99 chapter, Antelope Valley. Also there was Lynne Hsia, chapter secretary. I really appreciated their taking the time to come. A couple that use to have the hanger next to Rosemary at Fox Airport was there. They also brought me a beautiful picture of the float.

I cannot go without mentioning that being interviewed by the TV stations was another enjoyable experience. Three of them came to my house and each group was just special. I was asked to go to Pasadena where Alyce lives and interview with the Los Angeles Times. I felt they did a good job both with the article in the paper and with the video that they put out.

We saw many of the other floats as we were shown where ours would be parked. The bus was waiting for us. People called out wanting to talk to us. I was the last one on the bus. Kate said they had just gotten the lunches handed out, but I should have been there earlier. It was a great adventure and I loved every skinny minute of it.
THE WASP

OFFICIAL WASP ARCHIVE
WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

TEXAS WOMAN’S UNIVERSITY
DENTON, TX

Special Issue 2014
Samantha Weeks and Lee Doerr, a mutual admiration society

Escorts after the parade: Landdeck, Opeka, Scott, Louis, McComas, Weeks, Cress, Young, Beckman, Tobias, Cooper and Oslund.

Our eyes are on the Stars.

Millie Young and Dawn Seymour promote the WASP float at WAI in Nashville, March 2013.

Jean McCreery and Wendy Cooper ham it up.

Sandy Opeka, Margot DeMoss & Betty Strohfus.

Photo courtesy Dawn Seymour

Special Issue 2014
This is number _______________ of a Special Issue of the WASP News, Commemorating the WASP Presence in the 125th Tournament of Roses Parade, January 1, 2014. Limited to 1,500 copies.