00:00:03 Announcer

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

00:00:11 Emily Yeap

March is Women’s History Month, which honors and celebrates the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary society.

A new book by Dr. Sarah Myers, a Missouri State University [history](https://history.missouristate.edu/) alumna, shines a light on the Women's Airforce Service Pilots or WASPs and their impact during and after World War II. It’s titled, “[Earning Their Wings: The WASPs of World War II and the Fight for Veteran Recognition](https://uncpress.org/book/9781469675039/earning-their-wings/).” I’m Emily Yeap.

Myers, who’s also associate professor of history at Messiah University, joins me today to discuss her first book, which began as a thesis project at MSU.

00:00:48 Sarah Myers

I was at Missouri State in 2007 to 2009, getting my master’s in history, and I wrote a master’s thesis while I was there on the Women Airforce Service Pilots that I wrote my book on. So, my book is about the Women Airforce Service Pilots who flew for the U.S. military during World War II, and it looks at the early history of women in flight and how these women were able to get their pilots licenses from a new deal government program and how they got interested in flying. And then I look at how they served during the World War II era and how in the post war period, they fought for the right to become veterans.

They were the only women's unit during World War II that did not get military status. And so I look at their 1960s to 70s struggle for veteran status, which they eventually received in 1977.

00:01:46 Emily Yeap

Myers explains how she found out about the WASPs.

00:01:50 Sarah Myers

So, I was looking for different research projects when I first got into the WASPs. I wanted to write something about women's history, and so I was like looking up lots of things online and Google searching and I found this website where you could e-mail a woman who was a pilot during World War II. And I thought, Oh, that's really neat.

So, I sent them emails and looked into their story and I thought it was interesting that they were the only women during World War II that served in the military that Congress did not give military status to, and so I wanted to learn more about why that was and kind of look into reasons and more of their story.

00:02:32 Emily Yeap

She shares about her research and writing process, including how she finally connected with a WASP after trying for some time.

00:02:40 Sarah Myers

When I was doing research, one of the sources I wanted to use besides like military and government records, is I wanted to hear from the WASPs themselves. I actually was trying to get into contact with some to interview them during my master’s thesis at Missouri State, but I could never find a WASP to interview that was like available or in my area.

Anyways, long story short, I was on a plane randomly after I had graduated in 2009 and there was this guy that I was sitting beside on the plane, we didn't talk during the flight, but when we were getting off the flight we made some small talk and he said, “My grandma was a WASP” and I said, “Oh, wow, that's amazing.” And he said, “Yeah, she lives in Indiana. Do you wanna interview her?” And I was like, “Yes, I would love to.” That was the way I got my first interaction with like a WASP. And so I conducted an interview with her, and then she told her friends about me. And that's how I was able to then interview more women pilots.

I also went to some of their reunions and air shows that they attended as well to try to just, you know, meet as many as possible to ask them questions that I couldn't find in other types of sources.

00:03:50 Emily Yeap

There were around 1,100 WASPs who served during World War II. What does Myers want readers to know about them?

00:03:57 Sarah Myers

I want readers to think about the fact that these women pilots are not the only people who served for the U.S. military who have tried to acquire military status, but they are representative of women's experiences in the military even today. And, why that I mean that the culture of the military, the design of technologies, including cockpits and uniforms and various other things are designed often for like an average size man and not for women or women's bodies, even though there's a large number of women serving in the U.S. military. And so, my book speaks to the ways that the media and the government and even like Congress, talk about these women and their roles and that really hasn’t changed a lot since 1944, and so I want to think about that, but also think about how do we define who we see as heroic or who we see as a veteran.

00:05:01 Emily Yeap

You can read more or buy a copy of “Earning Their Wings” on the [University of North Carolina Press](https://uncpress.org/book/9781469675039/earning-their-wings/) website. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

00:05:11 Announcer

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.