

## 318 AAF FLYING TRAINING DETACHMENT (PRIMARY)



### MISSION

### LINEAGE

318 AAF Flying Training Detachment (Primary)

### STATIONS

Avenger Field, Sweetwater, TX

### ASSIGNMENTS

### WEAPON SYSTEMS

PT-13

PT-17

PT-19

PT-22

PT-23

PT-27

### COMMANDERS

Maj Robert K. Urban, #1943

Capt Landon McConnell

### HONORS

Service Streamers

## **Campaign Streamers**

## **Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

## **Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

## **MOTTO**

## **OPERATIONS**

### **Pioneer Prince Air Academy**

Working with the Army Air Forces, Jacqueline Cochran established a training facility at the Howard Hughes field in Houston, Texas, for Women Air Force Service Pilots, or WASPs as it was known. However, she was unable to develop a satisfactory school there. In January 1943, she and the AAF began to look for an alternative location. Avenger Field was chosen due to its multi-phase training capability and other assets. The field was acquired by the Houston contractors from Plosser-Prince, and in February 1943 Avenger Field became an all-female installation except for a few male instructors and other officers. The field was officially assigned to the 318th Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment, 31st Flying Training Wing. Flight training was contracted to Aviation Enterprises.

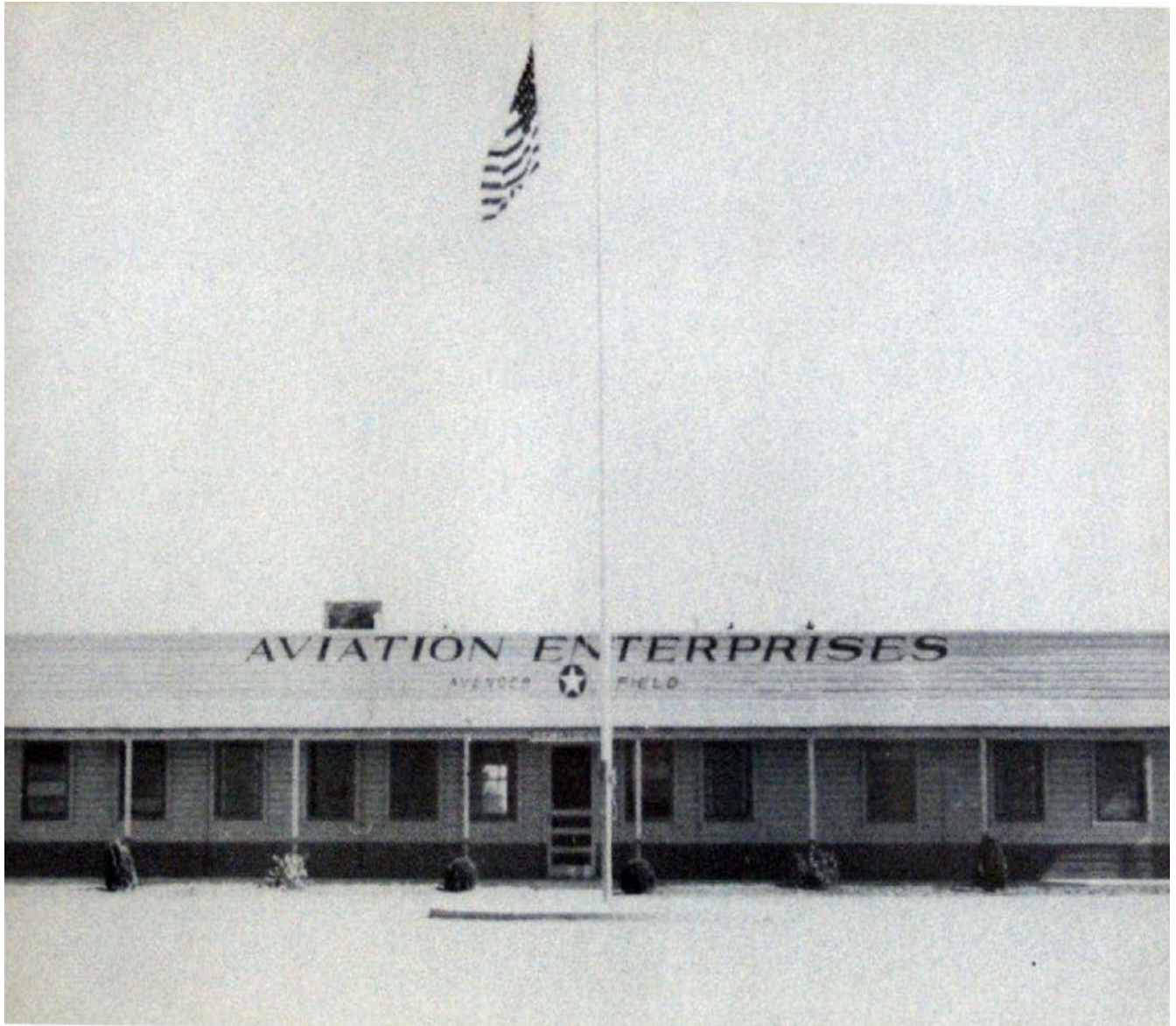
Classes entered the WASP program at Avenger Field in monthly intervals. A total of 18 classes completed training: 8 in 1943 and 10 in 1944. Of the 25,000 women who applied for flight training, 1,830 were accepted, and of those, 1,074 received their wings. Training for women pilots paralleled but did not duplicate that given the men. Because the women were expected to go into ferrying, emphasis was placed on cross-country flying. Gunnery and formation flight training were omitted.

The first course was four months long. Although the hours were flexible and varied according to previous training, 115 flying hours were generally called for in addition to 180 hours of ground instruction. As the experience level of the trainees declined, the course was expanded and revised. By the end of 1943, the length had been extended to 27 weeks and the flying hours to 210. Few curricular changes were made in 1944; the main one increased training from 27 to 30 weeks.

The WASPs were employed under the Civil Service program. It was always assumed they would become part of the Army when a proper place within the military organization could be found for them. In fact, bills were introduced in Congress to give them military rank, but even with General Arnold's support, all efforts failed to absorb the WASPs into the military.

Avenger Field remained a WASP training base until being disbanded in December 1944. 1,074 women pilots were trained at the facility including 37 that gave their lives in the service of their

country. On December 20 the Army Air Forces disbanded the WASP program and the WASPs returned to civilian life with no veterans' benefits. In 1977 Congress finally granted benefits to the 850 remaining WASPs.





Maj Robert K. Urban, Commander, 318 AAF Flying Training Detachment





318 AAFFTD Class members, Avenger Field, Sweetwater, TX. ca. 1943.



"Reflecting." 318 AAFFTD Class members, Avenger Field, Sweetwater, TX. ca. 1943. (USAAF)







PILOT, CO-PILOT  
AND OBSERVER—  
AT-17's CREW OF THREE



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USAF Unit Histories  
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Sources

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Unit Yearbook. *318 AAFSTD, Class of 43-W-4 and 43-W-5. Avenger Field, Sweetwater, TX. 1943.*  
Monde, Bennet B. *Wings Over Sweetwater, The History of Avenger Field, Texas.* Private printing, 1995.