Airforce Service Pilots in member of the Women Alturas woman was World War II

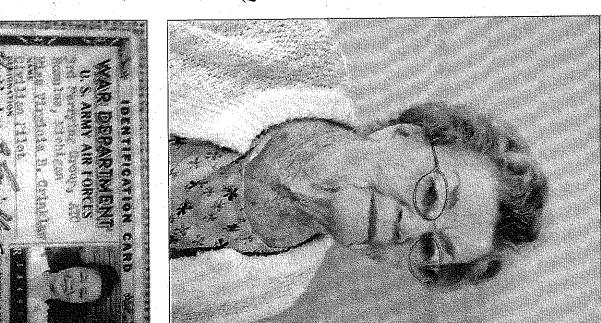
By JEAN BILODEAUX
H&N Correspondent

and assure her a place in history. shape her future decision that would at San Jose State University made a college student ixty-eight years ago,

encouraged to apply for what was to become the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP. Alturas resident Virginia Crinklaw Pierce was approached by one of her professors and

there was a severe shortage of combat pilots. It was determined that licensed women pilots, if given the same training as the Army's aviation cadets, would be equally capable of flying military aircraft and could then relieve some of the stateside male pilots for combat duty. During the early months of World War II, there was a severe short

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exciting and patriotic thing to do," Pierce said.

Her professor took her flying in his Stearman. When they were at altitude, he turned to her and said, "OK, take

"I flew that plane, and then knew that I would apply to be in the WASP," Pierce said.

Pierce, along ... 25,000 other women, applied. She was notified that she was one of fied that she was one of fied that she was one of fied that she was one of field that she

"I only had another month of college before graduation, so I didn't go in the first class," she said. "I really had to stretch to make the 5-foot-2 ½ height requirement."

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In March 1941, she went to Texas and enrolled in basic training. The classes were the same as the men's classes, only restricted to women. After graduation she was sent to Michigan for advanced training.

serve our country and excited about flying planes," Pierce said. "We were proud to

Pierce received advanced training and was soon flying air-craft from the factories Among the aircraft Pierce regularly flew were the P-51, P-40, P-39, P-47, P-63, BT-13 and AT-6. She co-piloted the B-17 and the B-24. "Once I taxied up to a group of pilots in a P-51. The pilots told me they

TOP: Alturas resident Virginia Crinklaw Pierce, 88, was a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP, during World War II. She flew American and Canadian planes from coast to coast.

ABOVE: Pierce's War Department identification card. "We were proud to serve our country and excited about flying planes," Pierce said of the WASP. when, where or how long she'd be gone. She flew American and Canadian planes from coast to wished they could fly a plane like mine. They were flying little puddle jumpers and were a bit jealous."

to bases, from base to base, never knowing

The 1,074 graduating WASP were stationed at 120 Army air bases and flew more than 60 million miles. They flew every type of assignment flown by male AAF pilots, except combat. They even test flew the B-29 to prove to male pilots they were safe to fly.

"Once you learned to fly one type of plane, you could fly them all," she said. "Basically they were the same."

Pierce still remembers with regret and pain a woman in her outfit named Hazel Lee. As

Arnold, on Dec. 7, 1944, addressed the last WASP class saying in part, "I salute you ... We of the Army Air Force are proud of you. We will never forget our debt to

the WASP were quietly disbanded and sent home. They received no military benefits. Thirteen days later, the WASP were qui-

were invited to attend the bill signing. Seven years after the bill was signed, they received their service medals in Congress voted to give the remaining WASP veteran status 33 years later, but still no ben-efits. No WASP members mail.

Pierce has been a brine shrimp harvester, high school teacher, judge and justice of the peace. She sailed around Hawaii in a catamaran with rocket scientist
Werner Von Braun. She
retired from teaching
at Surprise Valley High
School at age 72.

just tired," she said. "At age 88, I just want to stay alive as long as I can. Every day I wake up is a good day. I'd really like to see us get veteran medical benefits, though." "I'm not retired, I'm st tired," she said. "At

Lee was cleared to land, the tower cleared anoth-er plane at the same time. The second plane landed on top of Lee's aircraft, killing her.

serving their country. Their bodies were sent home in pine boxes, and burials were at the expense of family or classmates. No American flag-draped coffins were allowed, Pierce Thirty-eight WASP lost their lives while

"Once I was flying, and the ground crew forgot to fill the tank on my plane," she said. "I ran out of fuel. It was suddenly very quiet. I was at a high altitude so wasn't too worried as I had plenty of room to coast in."

"I called into the closest landing field stating my problem and requesting permission to land. The controller told me to circle the field and get in line to land. I responded, "What part of "out of fuel" don't you get? I'll be damn lucky to make the field."

radio, and c landed her Pierce hung up the adio, and coasting in, anded her plane safely.

## end of the war