

## Wild driver, Bareback rider – Virginia Mae Hope – MN WASP Pilot

**“You have what it takes.**

**Your star will shine way up there  
where it belongs”** – a friend’s letter to  
Virginia, Dec 11, 1944.



Virginia Mae Hope wanted to be a pilot from early on. She was born an only child in 1921 in Winnebago, MN. Her parents were farmers and were supportive of anything Virginia wanted to do. She was also influenced by an aunt who owned her own business in the Twin Cities, somewhat unusual for the time.

Virginia was known to love bareback horse riding, driving cars *fast* and pheasant hunting with her dad. She was mechanically inclined and if the family car broke down, Virginia could take things apart to find the problem and put it together again.

After high school Virginia (Ginny Mae to her friends) went to college, first at Gustavus Adolphus in St. Peter and then at Northwestern University in Illinois. While she was at Northwestern the government-sponsored Civilian Pilots Training (CPT) program began. Its purpose was to train pilots so they would be ready in case of war.

Early in 1941 while at Northwestern, Virginia enrolled in the Civilian Pilots Training program where she earned her private pilot and commercial certificates. The CPT program admitted one woman for every 10 men. Northwestern allowed two women into the program and Virginia was one of them.

After the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, Virginia, like other Americans, wanted to do her part to help. She got a job as an air traffic controller at the Minneapolis airport. The job had not been held by a woman before, but thousands of men were going off to war, leaving behind jobs to be filled. Virginia liked her job except for one thing: she wasn’t flying. She was on the ground directing pilots where to take-off and land.



**In 1943 Virginia applied to the WASP program and spent six months in training at Avenger Field, Sweetwater, TX.**

**WASP training included half days in a classroom studying geometry, weather and aircraft systems. In the afternoon, trainees went flying.**

**Virginia loved it.**

Virginia Hope, WASP Class 43-W-7 (photo courtesy of Texas Women’s University, Denton, TX)

WASP training gear included leftover flight suits from the men, usually way too big. Goggles, gloves, aviator jacket, helmet, parachute and a turban rounded out the wardrobe. The turban kept their hair out of the way and was also thought to make the women 'less of a distraction to the men'.

In November 1943 Virginia graduated in WASP 'Class 43-W-7'. Her parents traveled from Winnebago to Texas for the big day.



Upon graduation, WASPs were given new uniforms, designed by Jackie Cochran and Nieman Marcus. Uniforms were made from a special fabric color called Santiago Blue and included a jacket, beret, skirt and sometimes pants.

Virginia was assigned to Army Air Forces Weather Wing, 69<sup>th</sup> AAF Base Unit, Patterson Field, Fairfield, OH. The Weather Wing supervised all weather units assigned to the Army Air Forces. Virginia's duties included ferrying weather service planes and personnel on military missions.



Virginia Hope

W. D. FORM NO. 58 (APPV'D 10-22-43) WAR DEPARTMENT  
EMPLOYEE EARNINGS AND DEDUCTIONS STATEMENT

NAME: Hope (LAST), Virginia (FIRST), M. (INITIAL)

(CHECK ONE)  Per Annum  Per diem  Hourly

SECTION OR DIVISION: Weather A-3

RATE: \$3000

ROLL NO. \_\_\_\_\_ PAY PERIOD ENDING: 15 Dec 43

NOTICE TO EMPLOYEE: This statement, showing your usual earnings and deductions is furnished once, keep it for future reference. Should your net pay change, you will receive a new statement showing changed amounts.

SALARY EARNED	OVERTIME	GROSS EARNINGS	DEDUCTIONS				TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	NET PAY
			FEDERAL TAX	RETIREMENT	OTHER	BONDS		
\$125.00	26.18	151.18	24.80	6.25		31.05	120.13	

REMARKS: Full period.

Virginia's Earnings Statement, Pay Period ending December 15, 1943

Virginia loved her job in the Weather Wing. Her favorite place to fly was Minneapolis, because it was close to home. Flight plans were less rigid then and according to MN Historical Society records, Virginia would sometimes take a detour and fly over Winnebago, buzzing Main Street. It was reported she flew so low walls shook, picture frames fell off the walls and people ran into the street as she flew over.

Virginia flew many types of aircraft: C-78, AT-6, BT-13, C-40, A-24, A-25, C-39, C-49, C-53, C-64, L-4, AT-9, PT-19, B-17F and BC-1.



A few planes Virginia flew: C-53

B-17F

AT-9

When the announcement came the WASP program would end in December 1944, Virginia was very disappointed. But she was determined to find a job as a pilot. She applied for a number of pilot jobs, including at airlines, but was only offered stewardess jobs.



Virginia Hope

**INDIVIDUAL FLIGHT RECORD**

(1) SERIAL NO. F-51933 (2) NAME HOPE VIRGINIA M. (3) RANK WASP (4) AGE 19 21  
 (5) PERS. CLASS Civ. (6) BRANCH Air Corps (7) STATION Patterson Field, Ohio  
 (8) ORGANIZATION ASSIGNED A.F. (9) ORGANIZATION ATTACHED 2nd Weather  
 (10) PRESENT RATING & DATE Pilot 6-6-44 (11) ORIGINAL RATING & DATE Pilot 6-6-44  
 (12) TRANSFERRED FROM (13) FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS None  
 (15) TRANSFERRED TO (14) TRANSFER DATE

PERS. CLASS	NO.	A. F.	COMMAND	WING	GROUP		SQUADRON	STATION	MO. YR.	(17) MONTH NOVEMBER 19 44
					NO.	TYPE				
1	C-45	2								
4	C-47B	4								1:40
4	C-47A	4								:55
6	B-17F	1								
7	UC-78	2								
8	UC-78	3								
11	UC-78	3								
12	C-45F	2								1:45
13	C-47A	6								
15	UC-78	2								
17	B-17F	1								
18	C-45	1								
16	Link Tr.	0								:40

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

EUGENE C. PARKERSON,  
Major, Air Corps,  
Base Operations Officer.

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COLUMN TOTALS	9:05	1:20	15:40	3:50	:25	4:20	:40
(42) TOTAL STUDENT PILOT TIME	(43) TOTAL FIRST PILOT TIME	(44) TOTAL PILOT TIME					
37) THIS MONTH	19:30	29:35					
38) PREVIOUS MONTHS THIS F. Y.	175:30	7:20	331:20	3:00			
39) THIS FISCAL YEAR	195:00	7:20	360:55	3:00			
40) PREVIOUS FISCAL YEARS	386:20		470:40				
41) TO DATE	180:30	581:20	831:35	3:00			

AIRCRAFT	NO.	CARD NO. 1	CARD NO. 2	CARD NO. 3													
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

Her individual flight record dated November 1944

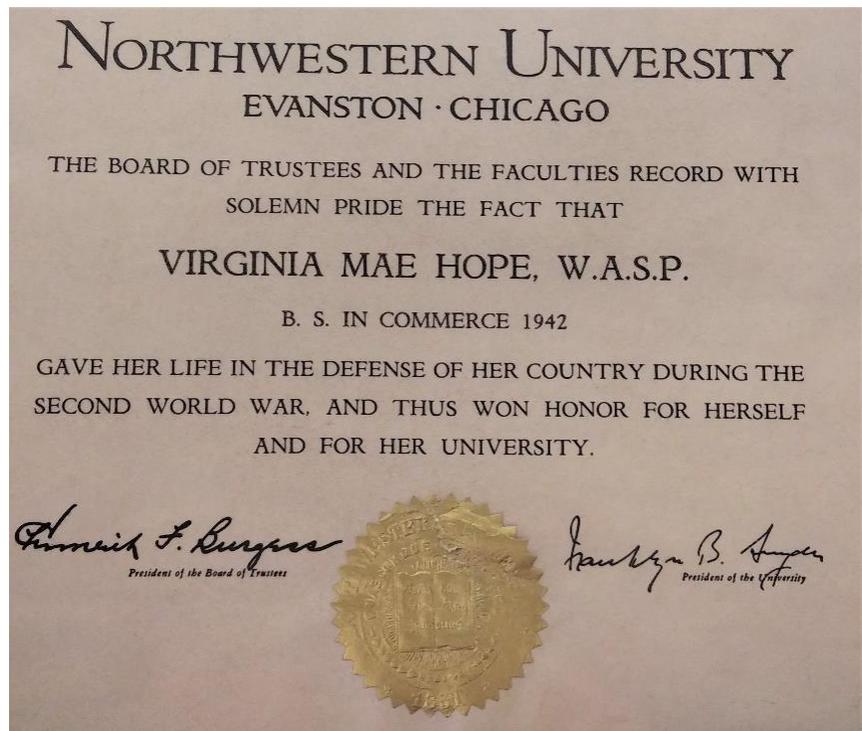
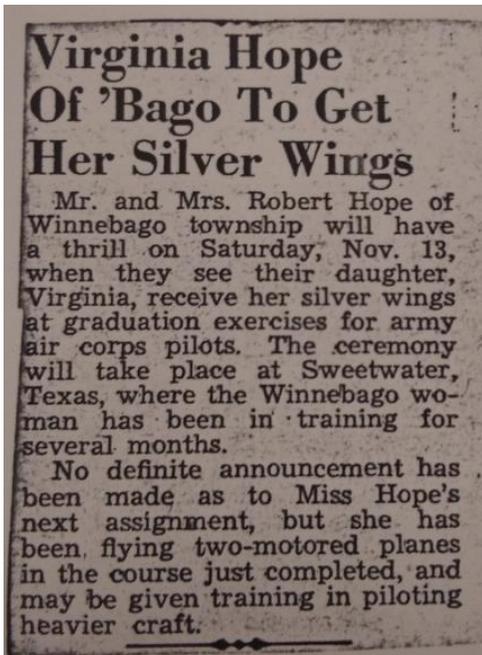
In November 1944 Virginia secured a position with the Reconstruction Salvage Co. in Oklahoma City, ferrying surplus army aircraft to civilian airports for resale. She was excited to start her new job which allowed her to continue flying.

On December 7, 1944, Virginia boarded a plane in Omaha bound for Oklahoma City, along with 15 other pilots. She was 23 years old. Tragically the plane crashed shortly after takeoff from the Omaha airport. Neither the company nor the government informed the family of her death.

Virginia's family was informed of her death by their neighbors, who had heard of the crash on their radios. Before learning of the crash, her parents received a letter from Virginia saying the WASP program was discontinued and she would be home for Christmas, the first time in two years. Only later they learned of the plane crash and Virginia's death.

We honor Virginia's memory and her ultimate sacrifice. Her life, though cut short, was an amazing story of dedication to service and passion for life and flying. Her name also lived on within her family. Virginia's cousin Lyle named his first daughter Virginia Mae, after the cousin who took him on many wild Sunday drives.

Virginia is laid to rest at Riverside Cemetery in her hometown, Winnebago, MN. During Memorial weekend, we plan for the opportunity to lay a wreath at Virginia's grave or one of the 5 amazing WASP laid to rest in Minnesota, in honor of their service and contributions to aviation.



Special thanks to Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX, for their permission to use selected WASP Archive photos in this series of articles.

Thanks to Star News-Elk River, "Minnesota Woman Flew Planes to Help War Effort", by Joni Astrup, September 15, 2010.

Thanks also to Minnesota Historical Society for their Virginia Mae Hope artifacts collection. Her family donated flight training log books, photo albums, military paperwork and other memorabilia from Virginia's time as a WASP. The collection is available for public viewing at the Gale Family Library, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN.