



## BEYOND THE CIVIL AIR PATROL: WOMEN IN AVIATION, COMBAT FERRIES, & ORDNANCE

**NOVEMBER IN**  
AVIATION HISTORY

As World War II raged in Europe and East Asia, Americans had growing concerns and sense of duty towards the war effort. By the time the war touched the American home front on 7 DEC 1941, industry had already been partially mobilized and a handful of men were serving in defacto Air Corps in China. At home, the Americans had begun to organize their civilian corps in the form of various organizations. These included several structures which included women in aviation all serving in non-combat functions in the Army Air Force (USAAF).

A shortage of pilots at the beginning of the war led to a precarious situation within the USAAF. The Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron was formed on 25 SEP 1942 and was tasked with ferrying aircraft from the U.S. mainland to Africa. Flight requirements included a pilot's license with around 500 hours of flight time and rated for flying aircraft of at least 200 horsepower. Only a few hundred female pilots met these requirements at the time, and the restrictions were much different for male pilots.

Jacqueline Cochran was placed in charge of the Women's Auxiliary Service Pilots (WASP) School in August of 1943. WASPs flew every airframe in the USAAF inventory from 1941 through 1945, including B-26 Marauders and B-29 Superfortresses. In fact, B-29 deliveries were initially carried out almost exclusively by women. This was a psychological play by GEN Hap Arnold who was combating the reputation of the B-29 at the time among male pilots. B-29 ferry crews were to disembark from their aircraft with the aircrew in sight to show that the airframe was safe. Late-war aircraft were no longer delivered by the WASPs as the organization was disbanded in late 1944 after the USAAF determined that the

male pilot requirement had met sufficient thresholds.

The Pacific Theater route consisted largely of island hopping, due to the scattered nature of land in the vast ocean. Island hopping was the means of progression by Army and Navy forces as well. The Atlantic Theater was not quite as forgiving, with the routes skipping along the Caribbean before skirting the coast of South America to Natal, Brazil. From here, they would make the jump across the Atlantic to various fields in Africa, with some routes running through Ascension Island.

Of the approximately 2,500 women accepted into the program, only about 800 completed their training. The typical regiment resulted in 560 hours of ground school and 210 hours of training. While they received the same training as their male counterparts, WASPs were never allowed to engage in combat. Following the formation of the Air Force (USAF) in 1948, 121 former WASPs received commissions, though they were all administrative officers.

However, elsewhere in the United States, women continued to contribute to the war effort and the air campaigns. Women Ordnance Worker (WOW) employees in the Army continued to work to make parts for B-17's, B-24's, B-26's, and B-29's as well as numerous parts for fighter and patrol aircraft. At the Rock Island Arsenal, almost the entire rifling and gauging shop for the Browning Machine Guns was staffed by these WOWs. Many of these guns were then sent to be fitted on B-17 bombers.

WOWs contributed to the war effort across multiple fields of expertise ranging from rifling to working on frames, smelting, and grinding metal, and even testing of rifles and ammunition. While

many of these roles were fulfilled for the armed forces on the ground, others provided aid for the warriors in the sky as well.

The Americans were not alone in their adaptation of the female pilot. In 1939, the Royal Air Force in Britain established the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). In 1941, conscription of female employees began, which continued until over 180,000 members were enlisted. Duties here included ferrying aircraft as well as working in war plants and factories. However, unlike their American counterparts, WAAF members were not allowed to work as flight line crew, and most ferrying was conducted through the Transport Auxiliary.

The female aviator's history was only just beginning in World War II and paved the way for many generations to come.

### REFERENCES

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1945

ENS Jake West lands his FR-1 Fireball on the USS Wake Island in the first jet to land on an aircraft carrier.

06

1947

The Grumman F9F Panther makes its first flight, and will be a staple aircraft used by the Navy during the Korean War.

21

1949

The H-19 Chickasaw Helicopter makes its first flight, the main helicopter used during the Korean War.

10

2001

During the Battle of Mazar-e-Sharif, U.S. Air Force Special Operations Forces assist in the first cavalry charge of the 21st century.

09

2007

The first deployment of bombs from an MQ-9A strikes an enemy Afghanistan position.

07

