

Discover More...



High Flying Women – Pioneering Aviators

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HEART OF LINC'S

Introduction

This file contains material and images which are intended to complement the displays and presentations in Cranwell Aviation Heritage Museum's exhibition areas.

This file is intended to let you discover more about the female aviators who achieved their dreams and set aviation history.

The information contained in this file has been obtained from a number of sources.

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The Air Transport Auxiliary

MOTTO: Aetheris Avidi - Eager for the Air.

In 1938, the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) was instigated by the director of British Airways Gerard d 'Erlanger. He concluded that a war with Germany would lead to the suspension of civil and amateur flying. Some pilots could be absorbed into the Royal Air Force (RAF), but many capable and experienced pilots, because of age, physical limitations or gender, would not be considered for operational service in the RAF. Gerard d 'Erlanger was tasked with recruiting private pilots with at least 250 hours of flying time in to the ATA. Initially, a hundred pilots responded, and thirty were selected.

Operating out of RAF Ferry Pools, the ATA was given task of ferrying aircraft from storage to RAF Squadrons. The ATA had two pilot ranks: First Officers, who had over 500 hours experience, and could pilot twin-engine aircraft; and Second Officers, whose abilities were limited to light single-engine aircraft.

With the increasing demand for ferrying services, it was proposed that the ATA open its ranks to women. The Air Ministry opposed this, citing the following reasons:

1. Aviation was an unsuitable profession for a woman.
2. Women pilots would be taking flying jobs away from men.

Many protested against these views. Pauline Gower, a commercial pilot with over 2,000 hours experience, and a commissioner in the Civil Air Guard campaigned hardest. In November 1939, Pauline succeeded and it was decided to form a pool of eight women pilots to ferry Tiger Moths, and Pauline was appointed commander.



Pauline Gower waving from the cockpit of a Tiger Moth at Hatfield, Hertfordshire
Image - Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

The women would be based at Hatfield, Hertfordshire, and ferry aircraft from the nearby de Havilland factory. The ATA officially accepted the "First Eight" into service, on 1 January 1940, all of whom were highly experienced, having more than 600 hours of flying time each. They were: Winifred Crossley, Margaret Cunnison, Margaret Fairweather, Mona Friedlander, Joan Hughes, Gabrielle Patterson, Rosemary Rees, and Marion Wilberforce.

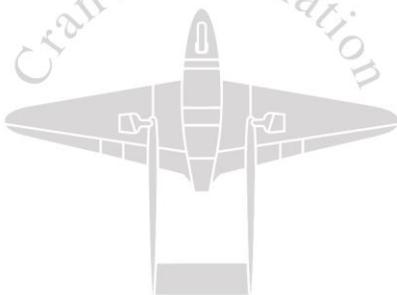
The "First Eight" were not allowed to ferry operational aircraft and fighter planes were considered beyond a woman's physical and psychological capabilities.



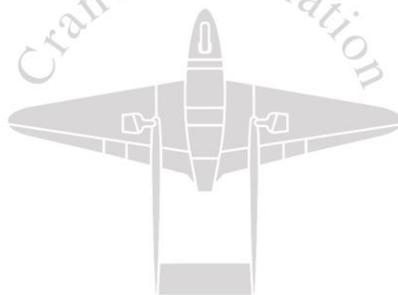
ATA female pilots walking past Tiger Moths at Hatfield.
Hertfordshire.

(right to left): Miss Pauline Gower, Commandant of the Women's Section, Miss M Cunnison (partly obscured), Mrs Winifred Crossley, The Hon. Mrs Fairweather, Miss Mona Friedlander, Miss Joan Hughes, Mrs G Paterson and Miss Rosemary Rees.

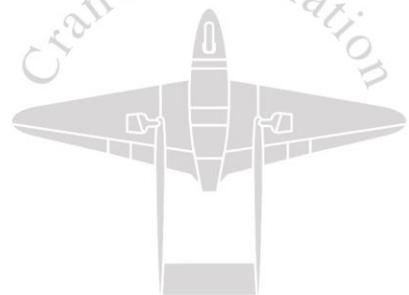
Image - Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain



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Pauline pushed to get her women recognised as competent to ferry more advanced aircraft, and finally the decision was made to allow women to fly Lysanders and twin-engine non-operational aircraft, such as Oxfords and Dominies.



Airspeed Oxford
Image - CAHM Archive

In May 1941, the ferrying demands for fighters and bombers exceeded the capacity of the male ATA pilots and the women were cleared to fly Hurricanes and Spitfires. Four of the “First Eight” - Winnie Crossley, Margie Fairweather, Joan Hughes, and Rosemary Rees - took that first flight on 19 July 1941, with each completing a short solo flight in a Hurricane.

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In September 1941, eleven women ferry pilots were assigned to Hamble, Hampshire, then an all-male pool. Margot Gore was appointed pool commander, and the men readily accepted her as their senior officer, a rare thing in those days.



Women pilots of the ATA
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

With the ever-increasing workload and influx of new less experienced pilots, a training programme for pilots to progress to more advanced types of aircraft was instituted. On completion of conversion training at the ATA Conversion School, pilots would be "seconded" to a pool to gain experience in that particular class, then reassigned, usually to their "home" pool, to handle regular ferrying duties. The success of this system and versatility of the pilots was demonstrated by Lettice Curtis, who was the first woman to fly four-engine bombers. In a single day, she flew a Spitfire, a Mitchell, a Mosquito and a Stirling.



Five ATA female pilots – Lettice Curtis on the left
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain



DH Mosquito
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

ATA pools were sited near the aircraft factories they were responsible for clearing. By 1942, there were 14 Ferry Pools, eventually, rising to 22 pools. Some like Cosford, and Hatfield were all-women Ferry Pools. Most were "mixed", with men and women pilots working side-by-side. ATA pilots faced many risks in their duties. They were not trained to fly with instruments so bad weather was a constant danger. The planes ferried by ATA pilots were defenceless, if they had guns or cannon, they were unloaded. ATA pilots flew without radio, and often with no sophisticated equipment other than a compass.

As the ferrying demands grew, the ATA actively recruited pilots to handle the workload. Limitations that might bar a pilot from service in peacetime were no longer barriers and the ATA recruited pilots who were not deemed able bodied enough to serve as aircrew in the RAF.

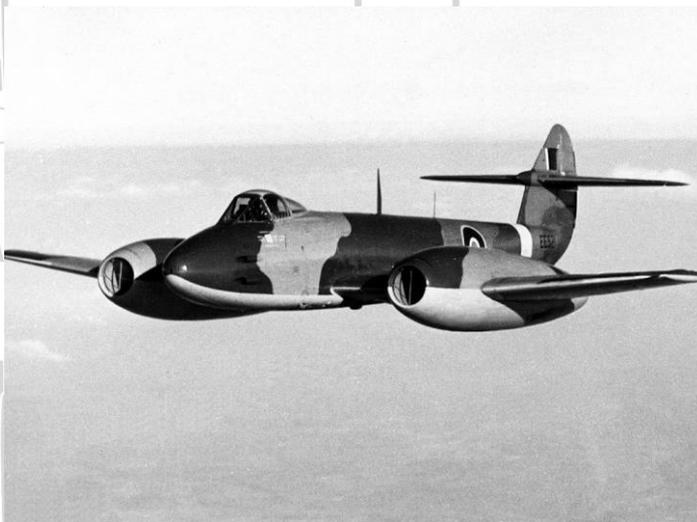
Pilots from 30 other countries served in the ATA. There were pilots from almost every occupied nation in Europe. Anna Leska from Poland managed to snatch a Polish Air Force plane from an airfield guarded by German soldiers, and fly it to England. She joined the ATA and rose to the rank of First Officer.

During the summer of 1943, the women ATA pilots, who had previously earned 20 percent less than male pilots, were at last given equal pay. By now they were ferrying all classes of aircraft. The women faced the same dangers as the men, the same long, gruelling hours of flying, the same discomforts. However women were not officially allowed to ferry to the continent, though in late September 1944, Diana Barnato Walker flew a Spitfire to Brussels. Shortly after Diana's trip, ATA women pilots were officially cleared to fly to the continent.



Diana Barnato Walker climbing into the cockpit of a Spitfire
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

In the final days of the War, some flew to Berlin and a few women were given the opportunity to ferry Meteor jets.



Gloster Meteor
Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

The need for the ATA ended with the conclusion of the War and it formally ceased to exist in November 1945.

PAULINE GOWER AND THE FIRST EIGHT



Pauline Gower (far left) with the "First Eight" at Hatfield. The other pilots are: (left to right), Mrs Winifred Crossley, Miss M Cunnison, The Hon. Mrs Fairweather, Miss Mona Friedlander, Miss Joan Hughes, Mrs G Paterson, Miss Rosemary Rees and Mrs Marion Wilberforce.

Image – Wikimedia Commons – Public Domain

Pauline Gower had been a "joy ride" pilot through the 1930's, running a pleasure trip business from a field in Kent. By the age of 22 she had logged 600 hours ferrying planes for the ATA. Pauline rose rapidly to become the most senior ATA pilot by the end of the War. She continued to fly and instruct after the War. Pauline retired in 1985, with 11,800 hours in her logbook.

Joan Hughes learned to fly at the age of 15 and two years later was the youngest pilot in Britain. Aged 21 she joined the ATA and in 1964 was awarded an MBE for her war work.

Margaret Cunnison Ebbage was an instructor prior to the outbreak of war, and continued as a highly effective instructor with the ATA. She was the main instructor at Hatfield, undertaking the evaluation and training of new pilots. Margaret left the ATA to get married in 1943.

Mona Friedlander was a female ice hockey player, and had a pilot's and a navigator's licence. She spent many hours flying as a practice target for anti-aircraft batteries. Mona left the ATA in 1943, when Hatfield was closed, and got married.

Rosemary Rees/ Rosemary Lady du Cros was a former ballet dancer who flew before the War. She held an instructors licence and travelled extensively around the world in her Miles Hawk. In the ATA she became Second in Command of the Hamble Ferry Pool. After the War she set up an air taxi business.

Marion Wilberforce was an experienced pilot in the 1930's, flying her own Gypsy Moth. In the ATA she rose to become Deputy Commander of No. 5 Ferry Pool at Hatfield, and later became Commander of No. 2 Ferry Pool at Cosford. She served in the ATA until it was disbanded, when she purchased a Hornet Moth and continued flying until reaching the age of 80.

The Hon. Mrs. Margaret Fairweather became the first woman to fly a Spitfire. Prior to the war she had 1,000 hours of flying and was an instructor with the Civil Air Guard. Her husband, Douglas Fairweather was also a pilot and one of the first to sign on with the ATA. In 1944, Margaret was killed on flight while landing a Proctor.

Gabrielle Patterson was married with a small son, living in the town of Walsall. In 1935 she was the first woman to obtain an appointment as a flight instructor later becoming chief instructor and head of the Women's Corps of the Civil Air Guard in Essex.

Winifred Crossley Fair had spent five years towing banners for aerial advertising and as a stunt pilot in an air circus. She served in the ATA until the conclusion of the War when she married airline Captain Peter Fair.

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Amelia Mary Earhart



Image - Wikimedia

KNOWN AS: Lady Lindy
NATIONALITY: American
BORN: 24/07/1897 Kansas USA
DIED: 05/01/1939 Missing
NOTABLE FOR: First female to fly solo across the Atlantic.
Prolific author and essayist
Aviation Editor of Cosmopolitan magazine 1928-1930

Amelia Earhart was born in Kansas USA and spent her childhood living with her parents during the summer and her maternal grandparents during the winter. Amelia's grandparents were wealthy and she was sent to a private college preparatory school where she sometimes got into trouble due to her independent nature.

During WW1 Amelia visited her sister, Muriel and became a nurse's aide in a military hospital. In 1920 Amelia took her first flight and was hooked. She began flying lessons, paying for the course by working as a clerk, and bought her first plane with the help of her mother. Amelia named it 'Canary' and in 1923 she received her pilot's licence.

By 1928 a publisher contacted Amelia asking if she would like to be the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, as a passenger. The adventure provided the opportunity to make the trip and profit from it by writing about her experience. Amelia continued to break records, her most well-known happened in 1932, when she attempted a solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic. Amelia received the U.S. Distinguished Flying Cross for this accomplishment.

Earhart may not have been the best pilot of her generation but she was arguably the most courageous, becoming the first woman and only the second person to fly the Atlantic solo. A feat that made her famous, but more importantly to her, she proved a woman could fly a plane just as well as a man.

Throughout her life Amelia supported other woman and encouraged them to follow their dreams, as aviation editor at *Cosmopolitan* she encouraged readers to learn to fly, and was instrumental in the formation of *The Ninety-Nines*, an organization for female pilots and a supporter of the *Equal Rights Amendment*.

In 1935 Earhart became a faculty member at Purdue University as advisor to aeronautical engineering and a career counsellor to women students. During an attempt to make a circumnavigation of the globe in 1937 in a Purdue-funded plane, Earhart disappeared over the central Pacific Ocean.

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Amy Johnson



Image - Wikimedia

NATIONALITY: UK
BORN: 01/07/1903 Kingston upon Hull
DIED: 05/01/1941 Plane crash into water
NOTABLE FOR: First female pilot to fly alone from England to Australia
Bachelor of Arts in Economics
Set numerous long distance records
Flew with ATA in war

Amy Johnson was born the daughter of a fish merchant and educated in state schools. Subsequently she gained a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from the University of Sheffield. Amy then worked in London as a secretary to a solicitor. In 1928, Amy began to take flying lessons. After six lessons, she wrote: "I have an immense belief in the future of flying", from then on she was a pilot. After gaining her pilot's license, Amy left her job to work full-time as a *mechanic and* in 1929 *became* the first woman to qualify as a ground-engineer.

The lure of flying led her to undertake the first of her epic journeys. She persuaded her father and Lord Wakefield to share the cost of buying an airplane. The £600 De Haviland Moth was named Jason after her family's fish business.

Amy achieved worldwide recognition and was honoured with a CBE in 1930 and, when flying "Jason", she became the first woman pilot, to fly solo from England to Australia.

Amy never forgot her home town and in 1932 "*The Amy Johnson Cup for Courage*" was presented to Hull. The cup was funded with a purse of sovereigns received from children in Sydney and was to be awarded each year to a Hull child under 17 years for a deed of courage.

Between 1932 and 1936 Amy continued to make long distance record breaking flights both alone and with her new husband, Jim Mollison. By 1938 Amy had divorced Mollison and despite the celebrity and record breaking achievements, found it difficult to earn a living as a commercial pilot.

So in 1940, Amy became a pilot in the women's section of the Air Transport Auxiliary, flying machines and men to wherever they were needed, becoming a First Officer.

On 5 January 1941, while flying an Airspeed Oxford from Prestwick to RAF Kidlington Oxford, Johnson went off course, reportedly out of fuel, she bailed out as her aircraft crashed into the Thames Estuary. The crew of HMS Haslemere spotted Johnson's parachute and saw her alive in the water, calling for help. Conditions were very poor, Lt Cdr Fletcher, the commander of HMS Haslemere, dived into the water to rescue Amy. He failed and died in hospital days later. Amy Johnson's body was never recovered.

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Elise Raymonde de Laroche



Image - Wikimedia

KNOWN AS: Baroness Raymonde de Laroche/Bird Woman
NATIONALITY: French
BORN: 22/08/1886 – Paris France
DIED: 18/07/1919 - Plane Crash
NOTABLE FOR: First female to get a pilot's licence
Attempted to become first female test pilot
Actress turned aviator
Accomplished balloonist and engineer

Elise Deroche was the daughter of a plumber who later changed her name to become a self-styled Baroness. She was born with a sense of adventure, style and commanding appearance, which enabled her to have some success as an actress, changing her name to the more dramatic Raymonde de Laroche

After teaching herself to ride the new invention - bicycles, she went on to fly balloons, becoming an accomplished balloonist when woman balloonists were rare.

Wilbur Wright came to demonstrate his new flying machine in France 1908, during the exhibition he offered women in the audience a chance to fly with him. De Laroche took the opportunity and she discovered her passion for planes.

In 1909, the Baroness Raymonde de Laroche was dining with aviation pioneer Charles Voisin, he suggested that she learn to fly an airplane and offered to teach her. In 1910 she received the first pilot's licence awarded to a woman. Receiving this allowed her to enter any aviation contest and the press christened her 'Bird woman'.

De Laroche entered the 1910 Reims meet as the only female participant and was seriously injured in a crash. After a lengthy recovery, she went on to win the Femina Cup for a nonstop flight of four hours.

During WW1 Elise's flying career was put on hold, she volunteered her flying skills but was turned down, so she became a chauffeur for the French military.

In 1919, the "Baroness" set a women's altitude record of 4,785 meters (15,700 feet). In the summer of 1919, de Laroche, who was also a talented engineer, reported to the airfield at Le Crotoy to copilot a new aircraft in hopes of becoming the first female test pilot. Unfortunately, the aircraft went into a dive on its landing approach and both the "Baroness" and the pilot were killed.

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Bessie Coleman



Image – Wikimedia

KNOWN AS: Queen Bess
NATIONALITY: American
BORN: 26/01/1892 Texas
DIED: 30/04/1926 Plane crash
NOTABLE FOR: First female Afro-American to hold a pilot's licence.
A manicurist by profession.

Bessie came from a poor family. She worked in cotton fields but also studied in a small segregated school and attended one term of college. In 1916 she moved to live with her brothers in Chicago, working as a manicurist. Whilst living here, she heard stories from pilots returning home from WWI about flying during the war.

Bessie Coleman fearlessly took to the air when aviation was a greater risk than it is today. Her early interest in flying was frustrated because neither African Americans, nor women had flight school opportunities in the United States, so she saved up to go to France to become a licensed pilot. Bessie became the first woman of African American and Native American descent, to hold a pilot licence, achieving her international pilot licence in 1921.

Coleman quickly realised that in order to make a living as a civilian aviator she would have to undertake "barnstorming" and perform for paying audiences. To succeed in this arena, she would need a more extensive repertoire and Bessie could find no one willing to teach her, so in 1922, she sailed again for Europe.

"Queen Bess," as she was known, was a highly popular draw for the next five years. Invited to important events and often interviewed by newspapers, she was admired by all. She made her first appearance in an American airshow in 1922, at an event honouring veterans of the all-black 369th Infantry Regiment of WWI. Held at New York City, the show billed Coleman as "the world's greatest woman flier". She also quickly gained a reputation as a skilled and daring pilot who would stop at nothing to complete a difficult stunt.

In 1926, Bessie was in Florida after recently purchasing a Curtiss JN-4 (Jenny) in Dallas. Her mechanic and publicity agent, William D. Wills, flew the plane from Dallas to Florida in preparation for an airshow, but had to make three forced landings due to the plane's condition. Upon learning this, Coleman's friends and family did not consider the aircraft safe and implored her not to fly it.

Wills took off with Coleman in the other seat. She had not put on her seatbelt because she was planning a parachute jump and wanted to look over the cockpit sill to examine the terrain. Ten minutes into the flight the plane unexpectedly went into a dive and then a spin. Coleman was thrown from the plane and died instantly when she hit the ground.

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Air Commandant Dame Felicity Peake

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NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 01/05/1913 Stockport
DIED: 02/11/2002
NOTABLE FOR: First Director WRAF

Air Commandant Dame Felicity Peake DBE was the daughter of a prosperous Manchester-based industrialist. Educated at St. Winifred's, Eastbourne, she left before taking her school certificate to go on to a finishing school outside Paris. Felicity married in 1935, the same year she qualified for her pilot's licence. With war looming Felicity, whose lack of solo flying hours prevented her from joining the air transport auxiliary, volunteered for No 9 ATS company of the RAF. She was called up on 1 September 1939 and became a Pilot Officer.

In 1941, Felicity joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) recruiting staff at the Air Ministry. In 1943, she became deputy WAAF administration staff officer at Bomber Command. This was followed by promotion to Wing Commander and command of the WAAF officers' school at Windermere. In 1944, she was appointed senior WAAF staff officer with responsibility for the welfare of women radar operators and, in 1945, with the rank of group captain, she became senior WAAF staff officer to the C-in-C Mediterranean and Middle East Command, in Cairo. In 1946, Felicity was appointed Director of the WAAF.

As the last director of the WAAF, and the first director of the WRAF, Felicity steered the service through the difficult transition to its peacetime role. Having received the MBE for wartime services, she was named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1949.

Following her retirement in 1950, Felicity was appointed a trustee of the Imperial War Museum in 1963, and was its chairman from 1986 to 1988 and founded the *Friends of the Imperial War Museum*, later becoming its president.

Elsie Mackay



Image - Laurie Notaro

KNOWN AS: Poppy Wyndham
NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 1893, Simla, India
DIED: 13/03/1928 Lost in Atlantic Ocean
NOTABLE FOR: British Actress
Interior Designer
Aviator died crossing Atlantic with Walter GR Hinchliffe

Elsie was born in 1893 in Simla, India, to Jean Paterson Shanks and James Mackay, 1st Earl of Inchcape a British colonial administrator in India who became chairman of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O).

She appeared from 1919 to 1921 on the stage and in eight screen performances under the stage name Poppy Wyndham.

Elsie then developed a career as an interior designer, creating state rooms and public spaces for her father's shipping line P&O. In 1923 she launched the RMS *Maloja*, and went on to design much of the interiors for the four P&O "R" class ships of 1925.

In 1923 she took up flying, gaining her pilot's licence at the De Havilland Flying School, and bought a plane. She was regarded as a contemporary role model amongst women, with dark looks, graceful manner, and a habitually well-dressed appearance. She was noted for driving her Rolls-Royce at great speed and was a familiar sight in her Avro biplane in the skies over South Ayrshire and Wigtownshire. Elsie was one of the first women in Britain to gain her Royal Aero Club pilot's licence.

Elsie expressed a determination to be the first woman to fly the Atlantic. To achieve this ambition Mackay bought a Stinson Detroiter. It was shipped from the USA to Britain and delivered to the

Brooklands motor racing track. Elsie named the monoplane with gold tipped wings and a black fuselage *Endeavour*.

In 1928 the *Daily Express* discovered that Captain Hinchliffe and Mackay were preparing for a transatlantic attempt by carrying out test flights at RAF Cranwell. The story was silenced by Mackay's threatened legal action as she intended to depart in secret while her father was in Egypt, having promised her family she would not make the attempt.

On 13 March 1928 'Endeavour' took off from RAF Cranwell with minimal fuss. Approximately five hours later, the chief lighthouse keeper at Mizen Head on the south west coast of Cork, saw the monoplane on course for Newfoundland. A French steamer later reported seeing them still on course but nothing else is known. In December 1928, eight months later, a single piece of identifiable undercarriage, a wheel with a serial number on it, washed ashore in North West Ireland.



Florence Lowe



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KNOWN AS: 'Pancho' Barnes
NATIONALITY: USA
BORN: 14/07/1901 Pasadena, California
DIED: 30/03/1975 Boron, California
NOTABLE FOR: First female motion picture stunt pilot

Florence was born into a life of wealth and privilege. She inherited a love of aviation from her grandfather Thaddeus Lowe, creator of surveillance balloons for the Union Army in the American Civil War.

At 18yrs Florence entered an arranged marriage with an Episcopal minister C. Rankin Barnes and gave birth to a son some years later. The marriage was unhappy from the start and in 1928 she left her husband and son. Dressing as a man, Florence travelled to Mexico on a 'banana boat' and roamed around Mexico for seven months. During this adventure she acquired the nickname 'Pancho'.

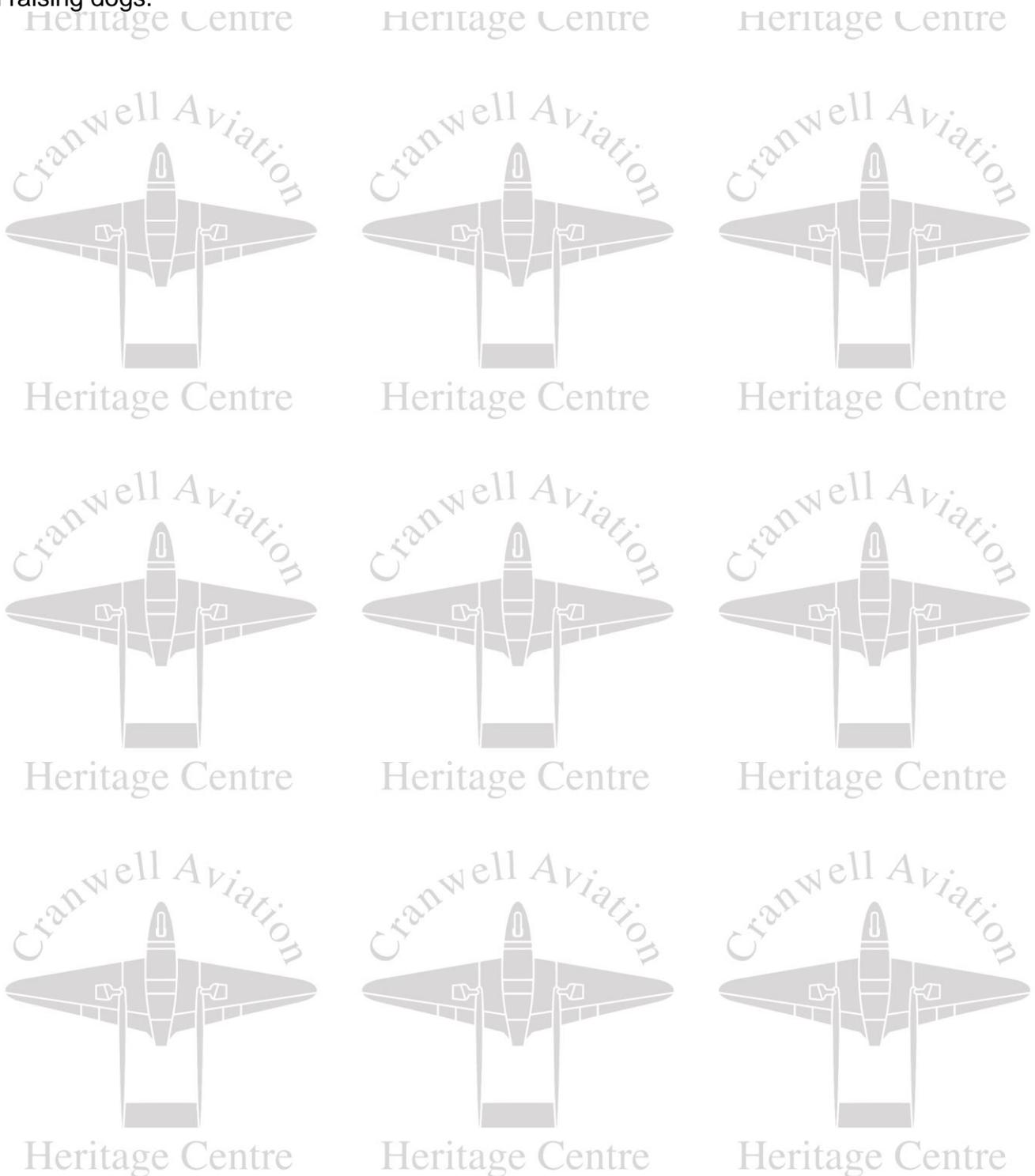
Returning to San Marino, 'Pancho' asked a WW1 veteran pilot to teach her to fly, he didn't want to and attempted to scare her instead by doing aerobatics. This didn't work and during her first solo flight after only six hours of lessons 'Pancho' repeatedly buzzed her husband's church to disrupt his sermon. In August 1929, 'Pancho' flew in the inaugural Women's Air Derby, a cross-country race. She was in the lead during the second stage of the race but was forced to withdraw after colliding with a truck on a runway. 'Pancho' competed again the next year, when her average speed of 196.19 miles per hour set a new world speed record for women.

Barnes performed the air stunts for Howard Hughes's 1929 film *Hell's Angels*, becoming the first woman stunt pilot in motion pictures. From her work in films 'Pancho' founded one of the first unions in Hollywood, the Associated Motion Picture Pilots, wanting to ensure stunt pilots received decent wages. In addition to her stunt work, Florence was also employed by Lockheed as its first female test pilot.

In 1934, she formed the Women's Air Reserve to assist people in need of medical attention during times of disaster.

Barnes' free spending and the Great Depression depleted her finances. Using the remainder of her money Barnes purchased a ranch in the Mojave Desert, California in 1933. 'Pancho' moved there with her 12-year-old son and began to sell provisions to a nearby military encampment. Expanding her property into a resort, complete with bars, a restaurant, a dance hall, and a motel she created a place for pilots to relax, and it became a popular place for military personnel, pilots and celebrities. When the airfield became Edwards Air Force Base, the foremost U.S. experimental flight testing centre, the resort retained its popularity with the test pilots. Sadly, the growth of the air force base and a fire brought Barnes's ranch to an end in the 1950s.

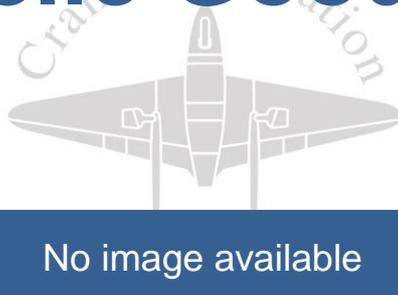
Over the years Barnes married and divorced four times. She spent her later years racing horses and raising dogs.



Flt Lt Michelle Goodman DFC



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NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 22/11/1976
DIED:
NOTABLE FOR: First female to be awarded DFC

Flt Lt Michelle Goodman DFC was born in Bristol in 1976. She attended state schools until undertaking further education at The University of Manchester and achieved a Masters in Aerospace Engineering.

Michelle's interest in the Royal Air Force had started back when she was 9 and saw the Vulcan flying overhead; she had made her mind up that she wanted to be a pilot.

Michelle started Officer Training at RAF Cranwell in 2000 and then completed elementary flying training in the Grob Tutor trainer. On completion of this phase of training pilots are streamed for training on either fast jets, helicopters or multi-engined craft. Michelle was selected to start basic fast jet training on the Tucano at RAF Linton-on-Ouse. After 100 hours on the course she was re-streamed to helicopters.

RAF Shawbury is the helicopter training base Michelle completed basic and advanced helicopter training at RAF Shawbury and was then assigned to the Merlin fleet on 28 (AC) Squadron at RAF Benson.

After 5 years of training she was finally on the front line in May 2005 as a Limited Combat Ready pilot. On Michelle's third detachment she received a Distinguished Flying Cross for a rescue mission that she conducted into Basra city on the night of 1st June 2007.

Flt Lt Goodman retired from the RAF in 2012.



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Hanna Reitsch

No image available

NATIONALITY: German
BORN: 29/03/1912 Silesia
DIED: 24/08/1979 Frankfurt
NOTABLE FOR: First female test pilot
Won the Iron Cross and Luftwaffe Diamond Clasp

Hanna Reitsch was born in Hirschberg, Silesia, 1912, the daughter of an ophthalmologist. The diminutive, slightly built blonde, who was to become a symbol of virile heroism in the 1930s wanted to be a flying missionary doctor, but instead became an excellent glider pilot. She set records with daring and unusual skill, she worked as a movie stand-in flyer, and she went on an expedition to study weather in South America.

Between 1931 and 1939, she set numerous records for nonstop distance gliding and in 1937 she became one of the first people to cross the Alps in a glider. Hanna's feats were unrivalled and after graduating to powered aircraft, her daring and skill landed her in the forefront of Germany's aviation efforts.

Hanna was recognized as Germany's leading aviatrix for her work flying experimental aircraft. One of her first feats was to fly the world's first practical helicopter inside an exhibition hall. Always the professional flier, she was quickly recruited as a test pilot.

As the world's first female test pilot and helicopter pilot, Hanna became known for her courage, she took on many unbelievably dangerous jobs. Hanna flew everything the Third Reich had: from the first helicopter to the prototype of a piloted V-1. She did everything but fly combat missions and was given the honorary title of Flight Captain, and in 1942 was the first German woman to be awarded the Iron Cross. Although politics had nothing to do with her love of flight, she was the only woman ever to be awarded the Iron Cross and Luftwaffe Diamond Clasp.

Hanna is possibly best remembered for her daring landing into and take off from Berlin during the final days of the Third Reich. She flew into Berlin in a small Fieseler Fi-156C Storch piloted by Luftwaffe Generaloberst Ritter von Greim. Their purpose was to convince Hitler to escape Berlin as the Russian armies stormed the city. When von Greim was shot she took over the controls and managed to land the plane. Hitler however refused to leave the city and the pair were possibly the last people to leave the beleaguered city.

Hanna went on to set more than 40 altitude and endurance records in motorless and powered aircraft in her lifetime. From 1962 to 1966 she directed the national school of gliding in Accra, Ghana, and her last gliding record was made in the United States in 1979.

Harriet Quimby



Image - Wikimedia

KNOWN AS: First lady of the air
NATIONALITY: USA
BORN: 11/05/1875 Michigan
DIED: 01/07/1912 – Fell from a plane
NOTABLE FOR: First female licensed pilot in USA
First woman to fly solo across English Channel

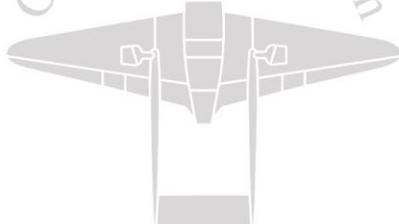
A poor upbringing and state school education did not deter Harriet from pursuing her dreams. She started work as a New York Journalist in 1903 reviewing theatre productions and Chinatown life. This led to a job at *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, writing advice for women, on careers, auto repairs, and household tips. Harriet was the independent woman of her day, living on her own, having a career, driving her own car, and even smoking.

Whilst attending the *International Aviation Tournament* in New York, she met John Moisant, who ran a flying school. In May 1911, Harriet began flying lessons at the *Moisant Aviation School*. Most flying schools refused woman students, so a woman learning to fly became big news, allowing Harriet to convince *Leslie's* to run a series of articles - "**How a woman learns to fly**".

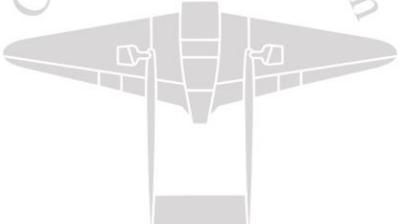
On August 1st 1911, Harriet received her pilot's licence, she was among 10 woman in the world who were licensed to fly and the first in America. Harriet began touring as an exhibition flyer. Air exhibitions were popular and everyone wanted to see the female pilot.

No female had ever attempted a solo flight over the English Channel, and Harriet wanted to be the first. She travelled to England by liner, and decided to attempt to fly from England to France on April 16th 1912. Had the Titanic not sank at the same time, overshadowing Harriet's successful flight, she would have become famous.

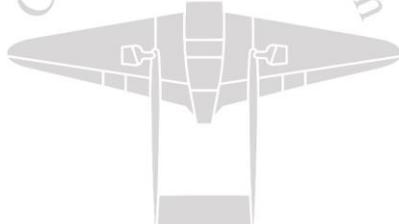
On July 1st 1912 during William Willard's *Boston Aero Meet*. Harriet took off in her Bleriot plane with Willard as passenger, circling Boston Lighthouse. The plane went into a sudden nosedive and Willard fell from the plane to his death, Harriet tried to regain control but tragically fell into the waters, and died instantly. The plane glided to a landing in the mud.



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Dame Helen Charlotte Isabella Gwynne-Vaughan



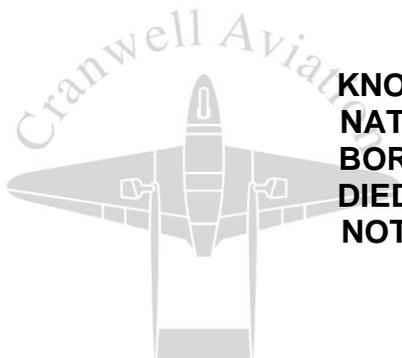
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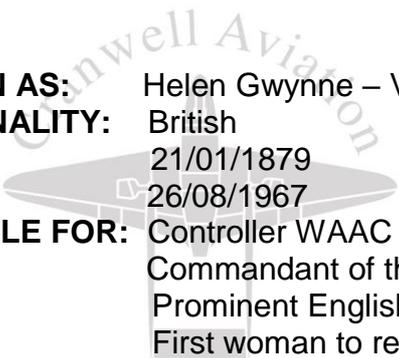
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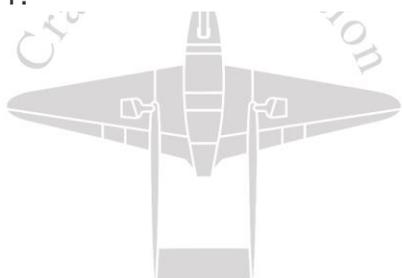
KNOWN AS: Helen Gwynne – Vaughan
NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 21/01/1879
DIED: 26/08/1967
NOTABLE FOR: Controller WAAC in 1917
Commandant of the WRAF Sept 1918 – Dec 1919
Prominent English botanist and mycologist
First woman to receive the military CBE in 1918



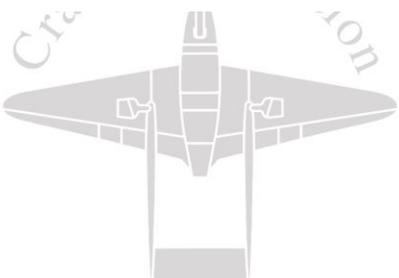
Helen Gwynne-Vaughan laid the foundations and set the standards for all women's air services. During WW1, she was invited by the War Office, along with Mrs Chalmers Watson, to help form the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). As Chief Controller stationed in France, she was instrumental in creating a respected and disciplined force.

As a result of her success with the WAAC, Helen was transferred to the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) in 1918. Given the powers of a Brigadier she began the task of re-organising the WRAF. She revised Standing Orders, overhauled the administrative system, opened and equipped a training site for the training of officers, authorised a new blue uniform and introduced military protocol. Her professionalism helped change male attitudes towards women in the air service. For her service she became the first woman to receive a military CBE in 1918. The following year in recognition of her achievements, she was made Dame of the British Empire.

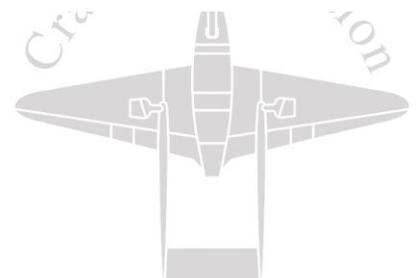
In 1935, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan played a key role in forming the Emergency Services, an organisation established to train female officers. In 1938, with war once again looming, the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's branch of the British Army, was created. Helen Gwynne Vaughan was appointed Director, a position which she held until she retired from military service in 1941.



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Helen Sharman OBE FRSC



Image - Wikimedia

NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 30/05/1963 Sheffield
DIED:
NOTABLE FOR: Project Juno Astronaut
First woman to visit the Mir space station
Chemist

Dr. Helen Sharman was educated at state schools and attended University of Sheffield in 1984 gaining a BSc in chemistry followed by a PhD from University of London. She worked as a research and development technologist in London and later as a chemist dealing with flavourant properties of chocolate.

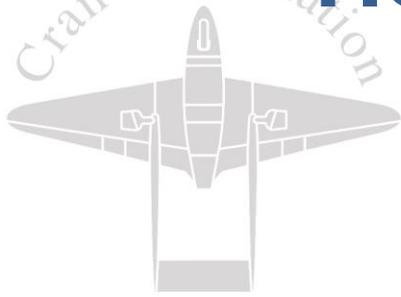
Helen replied to a radio advertisement for applicants to be the first British astronaut, and was selected. Project Juno was to be a collaboration between the Soviet Union and Britain, co-sponsored by British companies and several other schemes.

Sharman was selected because of her scientific, educational and aerospace backgrounds as well as her ability to learn a foreign language. Before her space flight, Helen spent 18 months in flight training at Star City, Russia.

The Project Juno consortium had trouble raising the required funds and the mission was very nearly cancelled. But when considering the flight's impact on international relations, the mission went ahead at Soviet expense although with less expensive experiments substituted for the original ones.

The Soyuz TM-12 mission to the Mir space station took off on 18 May 1991 and lasted eight days. Helen conducted medical and agricultural tests. She also photographed the British Isles and participated in radio hookups with British schoolchildren. Helen returned to Earth on 26 May. Sharman was 27 years old when she went into space, making her (as at 2015) the sixth youngest of the 545 individuals who have flown in space. Helen has not returned to space, although she has been shortlisted several times, and spent the years following the mission communicating science to the public through radio and television.

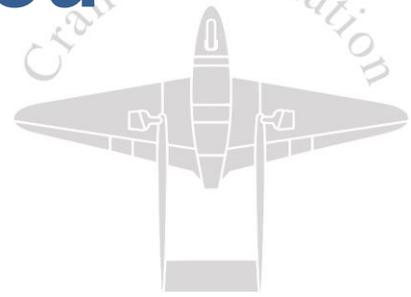
Hélène Dutrieu



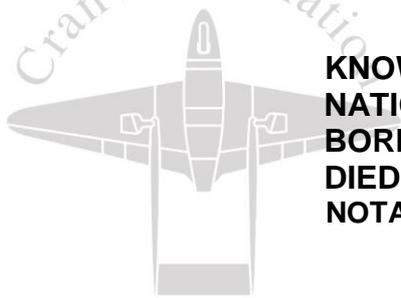
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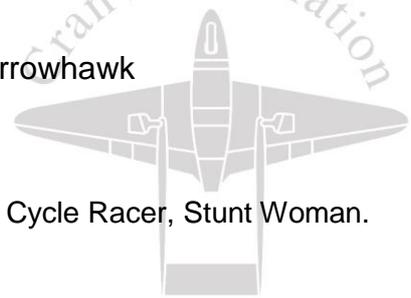
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KNOWN AS: Girl Hawk/Woman Sparrowhawk
NATIONALITY: Belgian
BORN: 10/07/1877 Tournai
DIED: 26/06/1961 Paris
NOTABLE FOR: Record Breaking Aviator, Cycle Racer, Stunt Woman.



Hélène Dutrieu was the daughter of a Belgian Army officer and left school at the age of 14. Hélène's older brother inspired her to compete in cycle racing and professional track cycle racing. Between 1893-1898 Hélène achieved long distance and speed records, culminating with Leopold II of Belgium bestowing the Cross of St André with diamonds in honour for Hélène's cycling success. In 1903 she began performing in variety shows as a cycling specialty act, inventing her own stunt, a 15 m jump with a bicycle called "*The Human Arrow*".

Hélène learned to fly in 1910 using a Santos-Dumont Demoiselle monoplane, becoming the fourth woman in the world licensed as an airplane pilot. Her appearances at air shows earned her the nickname "*Girl Hawk*". She caused scandals early in her aviation career when it was revealed to the press that she did not wear a corset when flying. She did however wear the first known high fashion pilot suit, designed by a Paris couturier.

During 1910 Hélène was the first woman pilot to stay airborne for 2 hours 35 minutes becoming the first winner of the Femina Cup. In 1911 Hélène travelled to the United States with her Farman III biplane and competed for the women's altitude record, followed in 1912 by becoming the first woman to pilot a seaplane. In 1913 Dutrieu became the first woman aviator to be awarded membership of the French Legion of Honour.

During World War I Hélène became an ambulance driver, and was put in charge of the ambulances at Messimi Hospital. She later became the director of Campagne à Val-de Grâce military hospital.

After the war Hélène became a journalist, and later became vice president of the women's section of the Aero Club of France. In 1953 she was awarded the French Medal for Aeronautics.

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Jacqueline Cochran



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KNOWN AS: Speed Queen
NATIONALITY: American
BORN: 11/05/1906 Florida
DIED: 09/08/1980 California
NOTABLE FOR: Founder and director of WASP
Holder of most distance, altitude and speed records
First female pilot to break the sound barrier
First female pilot to land and take off from an aircraft carrier

Jacqueline Cochran's birth name was Bessie Lee Pittman. Pittman grew up in poverty and had little formal education, was married at 14, and divorced at 21. Bessie trained as a beautician and in 1929 moved to New York City, where she took the name Jacqueline. Her dream was to own a cosmetics firm. To do this she was advised that travelling around during the Depression would be easier if flying. She took her first flying lessons in 1932 and got her pilot's licence in three weeks. Meanwhile, in 1935 she established a cosmetics firm, Jacqueline Cochran Cosmetics, which grew and prospered under her management until she sold it in 1963.

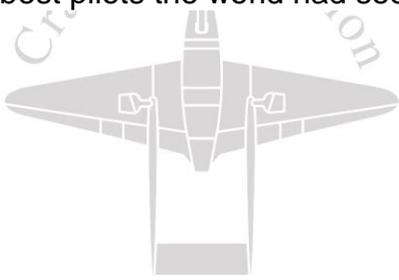
Jacqueline had a competitive nature and in 1935 she became the first woman to enter the *Bendix Transcontinental Air Race*. She went on to break speed and altitude records until war broke out in Europe.

In June 1941, she piloted a bomber to England and there, as a flight captain in the British Air Transport Auxiliary, trained a group of female pilots for war transport service. On her return to the US, she undertook a similar program for the Army Air Forces and in 1943 was named director of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), which supplied more than a thousand auxiliary pilots for the armed forces. In 1945 she became the first woman civilian to be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and in 1948 was commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserve.

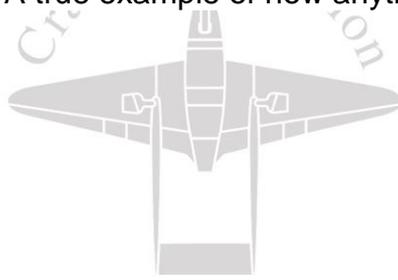
In 1953, eager to make the transition to jet aircraft, Cochran became the first woman to break the sound barrier, piloting an F-86. In 1964 she flew an aircraft faster than any woman had before, continued to break her old records and set new ones. In 1969, she was promoted to Colonel in the reserve, from which she retired in 1970. She continued as a special NASA consultant after her retirement.

Between 1959–63, Cochran was the first woman president of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale. During her career, Jacqueline won over 200 awards for flying and held more records for speed, distance and altitude than any other American pilot male or female.

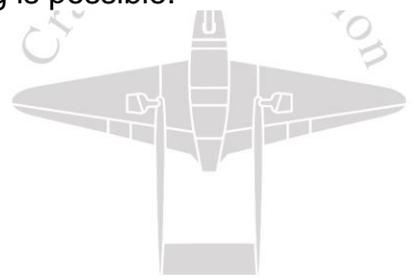
With little education but hours of hard work, Jacqueline believed she could accomplish anything, most of all she learned to reinvent herself, poor child to owner of a successful company, and one of the best pilots the world had seen. A true example of how anything is possible.



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Jean Lennox Bird



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NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 1912
DIED: 1957 Crashed on take off
NOTABLE FOR: First Female pilot in the RAF



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Jean Lennox Bird qualified as a pilot in 1930 at the age of eighteen and served in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). The ATA was a civilian organisation set up in WW2 to transport military aircraft between factories, Maintenance Units and active Squadrons.

After the end of WW2 the opportunities for women to continue flying in anything other than a private capacity were greatly limited but a number managed to do so. Jean managed to do so by serving as a member of the Women's Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. In 1952, with over 3100 hours experience on more than 90 aircraft types, she became the first woman pilot to gain her RAF wings.

Jean subsequently became a commercial pilot and died when the Aerovan she was piloting for an aerial survey crashed on take-off from Ringway Airport in April 1957.



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Dame Katherine Jane Trefusis Forbes, Lady Watson-Watt

No image available

KNOWN AS: Jane Trefusis Forbes
NATIONALITY: British
BORN: 21 March 1899
DIED: 18 June 1971
NOTABLE FOR: First Director Women's Auxiliary Air Force WAAF

Jane was the daughter of Edmund Forbes and was born in Chile where her father was an engineer. She remained unmarried until 1966, when she and Sir Robert Alexander Watson-Watt, who is credited with inventing radar, married in London. They had first met during WW2 when the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) was responsible for managing radar installations.

In 1936, Forbes, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan and Kitty Trenchard launched the Emergency Service, to train and organize woman to be prepared in case of war. There were probably fewer than 100 women in the organisation which was not officially recognized. Jane had been Chief Instructor at the Auxiliary Territorial Service School of Instruction in 1938. On 1 July 1939, three months before the beginning of World War II, she was appointed as Director of the WAAF in order *"to advise the Air Member for Personnel on questions concerning the WAAF"*.

By 1943 there were 175,000 women in the ranks of the WAAF. In October 1943, she toured Canada to assess the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force. She also toured India to investigate the possibility of employing women in the South East Asia Command. She retired in August 1944.

In January 1944, she was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE).

Liu Yang



Image - Wikimedia

NATIONALITY: Chinese
BORN: 06/10/1978 Zhengzhou, Henan province, China
DIED:
NOTABLE FOR: First Chinese woman in space

Liu joined the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1997 and learned to fly at Changchun No. 1 Flight College. She became a pilot of cargo planes attaining the rank of Major. Liu also became deputy head of her flight unit, joining the astronaut corps in 2010.

After two years of astronaut training, Liu was launched into space on June 16, 2012, with two other crew members, aboard Shenzhou 9, which accomplished China's first manned space docking when it docked with the space module Tiangong 1. The launch date was significant as it was 49 years to the day after the first female space traveller, cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova was launched into space.

Liu Yang was in charge of medical experiments during the mission.

Marie Marvingt



Fêtes d'Aviation Nancy-Jarville. 7 et 8 Avril 1912
Marie MARVINGT sur son Deperdussin, Gnome 50 C V

Image - Rosalie Maggio

KNOWN AS:	La Fiancee du Danger
NATIONALITY:	French
BORN:	20/02/1875 - Aurillac France
DIED:	24/12/1963
NOTABLE FOR:	WW1 Volunteer pilot flying bombing missions over Germany Air ambulance pioneer Athlete Balloon Pilot

Marie was born in 1875 to parents who encouraged her love of daring escapades and sports. By 1899, she had already competed in skiing, swimming and fencing competitions across France, and had gained her driving licence. In 1907, Marie won an international military shooting competition and became the only woman to be awarded the First Gunner palms. In 1908 she was refused admission to the Tour de France because it was a man's sport, but she successfully completed the course on her own.

Looking for new challenges, Marvingt soon turned her attention to aviation. Marie undertook solo ballooning expeditions across Europe and in 1909 became the first woman to pilot a balloon across the North Sea to England. Marvingt got her pilot's licence in 1910 and became the third woman in the world to be licensed to fly fixed-wing aircraft.

Between 1910 and 1913 Marie came up with an ingenious idea for medical evacuation by air ambulance in the case of war. Marie realised that the lives of fighting soldiers could be saved if they were transported by air. She approached various different factories until she found one who agreed in 1913. However, the outbreak of WWI meant that her idea had to be put on hold.

This setback did not deter Marie from her pursuit of action during WW1. She disguised herself as a French lieutenant and served on the French lines until she was discovered to be a woman and sent

home. This did not deter Marie's determination to be part of the action on the front lines. She used her Red Cross nursing skills to join an Italian Alpine regiment. Marie went on to become the first woman to fly combat missions when she flew bombing missions over Germany whilst part of her Italian Regiment. She eventually became the first women to be awarded the *Croix de Guerre* by France for her heroics as a bomber pilot.

After WWI, Marie continued to campaign and develop an air ambulance scheme. Making the case was certainly an uphill struggle as aircraft were generally considered dangerous and unreliable. Eventually the British and French colonial wars in the 1920s demonstrated the actual use of extensive aerial evacuation systems and the French government helped her set up an air ambulance in Morocco in the 1930s.

In January 1955, Marie was awarded the grand prize Deutsch de la Meurthe, in recognition of her victory in developing medical aviation against so much opposition.

Marie was a brave woman throughout her life and even learnt to fly a helicopter at the age of 82, and later flew over her home town in a US fighter jet, reportedly breaking the sound barrier. She was truly an inspirational pioneer and aviatrix.

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Voluntary Aid Detachments

KNOWN AS: VADs

Before the outbreak of WW1, the War Office deployed members of The Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service, the Indian Nursing Service and The Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS) which was formed in 1908 from female volunteers who had qualified as nurses in civilian life.

These nurses were intended to staff 23 War Office controlled Territorial Hospitals in pre-identified locations in time of war. The War Office saw no reason to employ vast numbers of nurses in peace time.

The War Office recognised current nursing arrangements would be inadequate if full scale war erupted in Europe, and supplementary aid would be required to provide transport and care for returning wounded personnel.

To address this, the Red Cross and the Saint John Ambulance began to form Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) to recruit and train local volunteers for the task. But no mixed detachments were raised. A male detachment was hard to recruit as they required 56 volunteers, headed by a Commandant, Medical Officer, Quartermaster, Honorary Secretary, Pharmacist and four sections comprising Section Leader and 12 men.

A Women's detachment was far simpler – 24 volunteers, headed by a Commandant, Lady Superintendent (a trained nurse), and four sections comprising a Section Leader and 4 women or two sections each with a Section Leader and 9 women. Within its ranks each detachment had to have 4 proficient cooks. To become full and proficient members of a VAD the girls had to train for and pass examinations in both first aid and nursing.

By outbreak of war, detachments had been formed and trained across the country. In Aug 1914, the VADs had 9000 members. By 1918, this figure had risen to 23,000 nurses and 18,000 nursing orderlies.

There were two classes of VAD: 'Mobile' - prepared to serve anywhere in the world, removing troops under fire and at hospitals behind the lines and 'Immobile' - registered to serve locally in Auxiliary War Hospitals (VAD Hospitals and Red Cross Hospitals).

To serve in a VAD, candidates were required to be presentable, with a recommendation or reference from local doctor, priest or magistrate. She was also required to give time on a regular basis. In 1915, with the introduction of a 'General Service' section in VADs, cooks, laundresses, clerks, typists, telephonists, drivers and chauffeurs were added to the list of jobs the girls could undertake.

Being a VAD nurse was often the preserve of local young ladies from middle and upper class families who could afford to give time, pay for lectures and had £1 19s 2½d to buy their uniform. They had to be between 23 years and 38 years of age and were appointed on two weeks probation. They were expected to serve for 3 months, although many served much longer.

Termination of employment would be if 'at any time they were found unfit in any respect for service.'

Each woman's role and rank was denoted by the colour of uniform worn, Commandant – bright scarlet dress, Quartermasters – grey, Cook – pale brown and VAD Nurse - pale blue dress. All were expected to have clean white headgear with starched detachable collar and cuffs. Nurse's aprons were not issued with red crosses and the women had to make their own. Legs were clad in black stockings with skirts at ankle length and every day boots. When outdoors a single breasted greatcoat and distinctive cloth hat were worn.

To achieve 24 hour cover, the girls worked shifts, and may have been assigned core duties, but no two days quite the same.



Valentina Tereshkova



Image - Wikimedia

KNOWN AS: "Chaika" (Seagull)
NATIONALITY: Russian
BORN: 06/03/1937 Maslennikovo
DIED
NOTABLE FOR: First woman in space

Valentina Tereshkova was born to a peasant family in the former USSR in 1937. Soon after starting work in a textile mill at the age of 18, Valentina joined an amateur parachuting club.

At the age of 24, just after the Soviet space program began to consider sending women into space, she applied to become a cosmonaut. Since there weren't many female pilots, women parachutists made excellent candidates. Qualifications included that they be parachutists under 30 years of age, under 170 cm (5 feet 7 inches) tall, and under 70 kg (154 lbs.) in weight.

Valentina Tereshkova, three other women parachutists, and a female pilot were selected to train as cosmonauts in 1962. Basic training for the women was very similar to the male cosmonauts. It included classroom study, parachute jumps, and time in an aerobatic jet. They were all commissioned as second lieutenants in the Soviet Air Force.

Valentina Tereshkova was chosen to fly aboard *Vostok 6*, scheduled for launch on June 16, 1963. Her flight lasted 48 orbits totalling 70 hours 50 minutes in space. The female cosmonaut program was disbanded in 1969.

Valentina Tereshkova received the Order of Lenin and Hero of the Soviet Union awards for her historic flight. Later she served as the president of the Soviet Women's Committee and became a member of the Supreme Soviet, the USSR's national parliament, and the Presidium, a special panel within the Soviet government.

In recent years, she has led a quiet life in Moscow.