

DETAILED COURSE NOTES FOR WH-B47
"WOMEN PILOTS IN WORLD WAR II: COMPARISON BETWEEN
THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION"

Time: FRIDAY, 9:30 AM TO 11:30 AM

Dates: NOVEMBER 18, DECEMBER 7th AND 9TH 2011
Wightman Cup Room

Course Description: History of female pilots in the United States and the Soviet Union during the Second World War. It is an inspiring story of competence and courage. In the United States a total of 1102 female pilots earned their wings and served in non-combat duties ferrying aircraft, test flying repaired aircraft, and towing targets for live anti-aircraft artillery training. They flew over 60 million miles in every type of aircraft, including advanced bombers such as the B-26 and B-29. Thirty-eight were killed in service. In the Soviet Union thousands of women served in all aspects of military aviation, to include as pilots in combat. Three all-women Air Regiments were formed in 1942, the 586th Fighter Regiment, the 587th Bomber Regiment and the 588th Dive Bomber Regiment. These regiments served with distinction from early 1942 until the end of the war. In addition, thousands of Soviet women served in other mixed male-female aviation units.

1. Introduction:

- A. Women in aviation prior to World War Two.
- B. Amelia Earhart and the Ninety-Nines, an association of women pilots, formed in 1929.
- C. National Civil Pilot Training program began in 1940 and continued until 1944. One of every ten students could be female. CPT eventually trained a total of 400,000. The Flying Program continued during the early years of WWII helping to provide female as well as male pilots.

2. United States Army Air Force (USAAF) in WWII:

- A. US military was very weak in the 1930s. The Air Corps numbered only 22,387 in 1939. It expanded to 51,000 in 1940 but this level was far below the 500,000 in the German Air Force in the same year. The United States mobilized in response to the war increasing the Air Force to a maximum strength of 2,372,292 in 1944. There was

an urgent need for pilots to test and ferry these newly-built aircraft to the training bases and deployment locations starting in 1942. WAPs were used for this role.

B. The maximum production level was reached in 1944. Jacqueline Cochran spearheaded efforts to allow women to fly non-combat missions thus freeing male pilots for combat duty.

C. Eleanor Roosevelt said September 1, 1942-- "Women pilots are a weapon waiting to be used".

3. American women in aviation in the United States during the War

A. Women served as an important part of the work force in the defense industry.

B. Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran was key leader for women in aviation. Her original name was Bessie Lee Pittman but changed her name to Jacqueline while working as cosmetics salesperson at Saks in NYC after she divorced Cochran. She married a man named Odum, who owned a cosmetics company. In 1932 she obtained her flying license after only three weeks training. She then used aircraft to promote her husband's cosmetics business.

C. Cochran was sent to Great Britain with American women in the service of the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Women proved able to ferry military aircraft.

D. Success in the British ATA enabled the WAFs to be established September 1942 at New Castle Army Air Field, DE, under Love. Back in the USA many of the newly built aircraft needed testing and ferrying to training bases. Six week stocks awaited delivery. The Ferrying Squadrons were called WAFs and had only a civilian status. There were three WAF detachments- Romulus MI; Long Beach, CA; and New Castle, DE.

E. Personality conflict arose between Jacqueline and Nancy Harkness Love, commander of the Women's Army Corps, or WACs.

4. Women's Flying Training Detachment:

A. Directed by Jackie Cochran. Recruitment. 25,000 applications, 1830 accepted, 1074 completed training. Hired as civilian employees with limited benefits. Training started at the Houston Municipal Airport in November 1942. Training moved to Avenger Field, Sweetwater, Texas, in February 1943.

B. The training program length began at 22 weeks but was later extended to 27 weeks.

5. Formation of the WASPs

A. During June-July 1943 the WAFS were integrated into the WASPs. Cochran was Director of Women Pilots, located at the AAF HQ. She served as Executive Director, and was based at the Air Transport. ATC, Command, at the New Castle, DE, Airfield. The WASP mission was expanded to included ferry operations, target-towing, reconnaissance and search-light training.

B. Target towing was carried out by the WASPs at Camp Davis, NC, beginning in July 1943.

6. Over 250,000 Women served in the US military during the war as WACS, WAVES, and SPARS (Coast Guard Auxiliary). Note that Oveta Culp Hobby was commander of the WACS, the largest of the uniformed military female organizations.

7. Decision was to discontinue WAFS in 1944 and integrate them into the WASPs in 1944.

A. The male pilot shortage was over in 1944. Over 8000 Civilians working as flight instructors lost their jobs and were the main lobby group opposed to the militarization of the WASP Program.

B. Gen Hap Arnold wanted to integrate WASPs into the Air Force and supported the WASP militarization bill, HR 4219, March 1944. Strong lobby action and bitter debate in Congress ended with the defeat of bill on 21 June. Last class at Avenger Field graduated on 7 December 1944. Gen Arnold orders WASP discontinued in December 1944.

8. Accomplishments of the WASPs. Over 1100 women earned their wings and flew with the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP). They served as civilian employees of the United States Army Air Force, and not as military personnel. They were limited to non-combat administrative operations such as the ferrying of aircraft, test flights of repaired aircraft, and the aerial towing of targets. They flew 60 million miles in 77 different types of aircraft to 120 different bases in the Continental United States. The WAFS and WASPs

delivered over 12,000 aircraft. 38 were killed in the line of duty. The WASPs had safety records equal or better than male pilots in the same kinds of operations.

9. Post-War Developments

A. Achievements of the WASPs were long neglected until 1977 when they were officially recognized as veterans.

B. Female military pilots were commissioned in the US Navy in 1974. Later that year they were commissioned in the US Army. Women were admitted to pilot training in the US Air Force in 1976. All military aviators were limited to non-combat flying missions at that time. In 1991, Army helicopter pilot Major Marie Rossi became the first female pilot to be killed in a combat zone. The line between combat and non-combat duty was no longer clear. The epitaph on her gravestone at Arlington reads: "First Female Combat Commander to Fly into Battle". Finally, in 1993 women aviators were officially allowed to fly combat missions.

C. In 2004 19.6% of the USAF was female, with 519 female pilots, 3.8% of the force.

D. In 2009 Congress awarded the WASPs the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor a civilian can receive along with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. About 300 of the original 1,103 WASPs are still alive. The medal will go to them and to family members of those who have passed away.

10. Women in the Soviet Air Force:

A. German invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941. Germans invaded with a total of 3,800,000 men along an 1800 mile front. Massive German air assault destroyed most of the Soviet Air Force aircraft on the ground.

B. Marina Raskova, the Jackie Cochran of the USSR, convinced Stalin to support training and use of women as combat aviators.

C. Three all female air regiments were formed in late 1941 and began combat operations in early 1942.

D. The 586th Women's Fighter Regiment was initially equipped with Yak-1s. It flew a total of 4419 sorties and participated in over 125 separate air battles. They amassed a total of 38 confirmed kills. Ten women pilots of the 586th were killed in action.

E. The 587th Women's Day Bomber Regiment, equipped with the Petlyakov Pe-2 twin engine Bomber; and the 588th Women's Night Bomber Regiment, equipped with the Polikarpov Po-2 biplane. They were called "the night witches" by the Germans since they operated only at night against the German front lines. They were very successful. Twenty-three women of the "night witches" won the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Six other female pilots from other units won the same title.

F. Other women served individually with men in other aviation units. For example, in 1944 1,749 women served on the Zabailsky Front; 3,000 women with the Far East 10th Air Army; and 437 women with the 4th Air Army of the Second Belorussian Front. The latter unit also had the crack 46th Guards Women Air Regiment comprised of 237 women officers, 862 sergeants, 1,125 enlisted women and 2117 auxiliaries. They were equipped with the IL-2 and IL-2M3 Shturmovik tank buster aircraft.

G. In 1946 almost all of the female aviators were deactivated. Today in Russia less than 1% of the military force is female.

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