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LONG BEACH

Aviator Nadine Ramsey led a daring life of adventure

Before she died, Nadine Ramsey, a pioneer female aviator who played a heroic role in World War II, had requested that her ashes be spread from an airplane over the Pacific Ocean and Long Beach Harbor.

Ed Ramsey, her brother and an American war hero himself, climbed aboard a Cessna at Long Beach Airport on March 4, 1997, to carry out his sister's wishes. He leaned out the plane's window and released her ashes over the ocean and watched "as they were swent away in-



Rich Archbold
Columnist

stantly by the wind, just how she had wanted to go. His brave sister was floating forever, riding the air currents, as part of the restless sea and sky. She was home."

This emotional moment is described in the compelling book, "Taking Flight, the Story of Nadine Ramsey," written by Raquel Ramsey, her sister-in-law, and Tricia Aurand. It is a story of a young girl raised in Depression-era Kansas who rose above adversity and dreamed of flying, something a lot of women simply didn't do in those days.



COURTESY OF RAQUEL RAMSEY
Nadine Ramsey in her WASP uniform headshot.

But she persevered, got her pilot's license and soloed in 1936, leading to a life of adventure. Nadine Ramsey was never one to brag or boast, but her life

as a pioneer female aviator and her role in World War II is the stuff that movies are made of.

She became one of the first two women to fly mail for the U.S. Postal Service and was one of 1,102 women to join the Women's Airforce Service Pilots and one of only 303 WASPs to transport military aircraft to bases across the nation for use by men in combat against the German Luftwaffe. She also instructed male pilots to fly fighter planes. She was one of only 26 WASPs who flew the storied Lockheed P-38 Lightning, a fighter plane known for its distinctive

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twin tails. And, after the war she became the only woman to own a P-38, naming it "Lucky."

In a foreword to the book, Maj. Gen. Jeannie M. Leavitt, Director of Operations and Communications, Air Education and Training Command, Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Tex., said her journey as an Air Force pilot would not have been possible without "incredible women" like Nadine Ramsey blazing the way before her.

"Nadine Ramsey can rest in peace, knowing that her story will encourage future generations," Leavitt said.

Nadine Berniece Ramsey was born Aug. 28, 1911, in Carlyle, Illinois, 50 miles east of St. Louis. Her brother, Ed, was born on May 9, 1917. Because an oil boom in Carlyle was slowing down, the family moved to Kansas where an oil boom was taking off. Tragedy struck when Claude Ramsey, Nadine's father who had become increasingly abusive, committed suicide. The family moved to a small house just east of downtown Wichita in 1930 and Nadine's dream of flying became a reality.

In 1939, Nadine concluded she had gone as far as she could go in Wichita and she moved



PETER STACKPOLE — THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES
March 1946: Pilot Nadine Ramsey, admiring her new P-38 fighter plane in March 1946.



COURTESY OF AMY BARNARD
Raquel Ramsey, the coauthor of "Taking Flight, the Story of Nadine Ramsey."

to California in a small house a block from the Pacific Ocean in Manhattan Beach. Southern California was a hotbed of aviation then with Douglas Aircraft achieving fame in manufacturing airplanes in El Segundo and Long Beach.

She got a job at Douglas and became secretary to the sales and service manager of the El Segundo plant, but she continued flying. She was offered and took the dealership for Taylorcraft, maker of one of the country's most popular light planes.

She began demonstration flying all over Southern California skies. She was having the time of her life, but personal tragedy was about to strike her.

While flying with a prospective customer, her plane got caught in a downdraft and crashed. Both women escaped but suffered crushed legs. Nadine also had a broken back and broken ribs. Doctors wanted to amputate one of her legs, but she refused and faced months of rehabilitation.

Her brother encouraged her to fly again because he said she would be needed for a war that was coming. She joined the Women's Auxiliary Flying Squadron and eventually found her way to the base in Long Beach to ferry the P-51 Mustang, an aircraft that would soon become known as the Game Changer because of its versatility and fire power, and other planes, according to the book.

The book describes the history of Long Beach as a city and aviation hub in great detail. In a preface to the book, author Raquel Ramsey thanks historians across the nation for their research help, including Brandon Werts and John Royce of the Historical Society of Long Beach.

Raquel Ramsey told me that her sister-in-law loved Long Beach and made it her permanent home. The author mentioned a photo hanging

on the wall on the second floor of the Long Beach Airport showing members of the WASP 6th Ferrying Group with Nadine and the group's commander, Barbara London.

In addition to telling the story of Nadine Ramsey's life, the book also tells in detail the shameful way that WASPs were treated by the U.S. government after the program was discontinued in 1944.

As one WASP member said, "They took us out of the cockpit and told us to get back in the kitchen."

But WASP members began fighting back for their military service and that military status was finally granted in the 1970s. They also received the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor, when President Barack Obama signed a bill in 2009 giving them that honor. By that time, many had died, including Nadine, who died at a Long Beach convalescent home in 1997.

The book is a promise that Raquel Ramsey said she made to her husband. "He asked me to write her story because he said, 'She had more guts than he ever had.'"

Ed Ramsey led the last cavalry charge in American military history against the Japanese Army in the Philippines. After the fall of Bataan, he became the leader of the Filipino resistance against the Japanese and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by

Gen. Douglas MacArthur. He died March 7, 2013, at 95.

"I wanted to keep the legacies of Nadine and my brother alive," Raquel Ramsey said. "Nadine was a woman ahead of her time. Nadine was a soft-spoken lady, so kind and loving. We spoke every day at 4 p.m. when I called her. She was truly an inspiration and a female aviation pioneer, but she never spoke of her achievements."

Like her brother, Nadine Ramsey is a true hero. Her story needs to be told. "Taking Flight: The Nadine Ramsey Story," does that in a very readable way.