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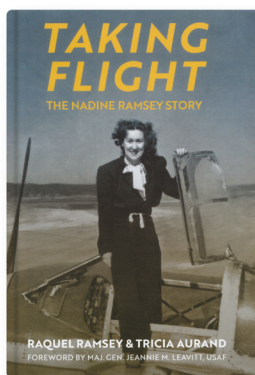
TAKING FLIGHT The Nadine Ramsey Story

By Raquel Ramsey and Tricia Aurand, University Press of Kansas, 2020, \$29.95.

Nadine Ramsey dropped out of high school to work as a secretary, helping support her family in the aftermath of her father's suicide. But the blossoming aviation industry of 1930s Wichita, Kan., soon inspired the energetic redhead to a new, and at first secret, objective: flying. Aware that her mother disapproved of women flying, Nadine managed to squirrel away enough money to pay for lessons at the Beechcraft factory at Wichita Municipal Airport. She soloed in a Velie Monocoupe after just 6½ hours of instruction. For Nadine, the sky was always a magnet after that.

Ramsey soon joined the growing ranks of women demonstrating aircraft in the wide-open Midwestern skies, appearing as a barnstormer whenever opportunity offered. In May 1938 she was one of a handful of women who took part in National Air Mail Week, marking airmail's 20th anniversary in the U.S.

By the fall of 1940, Ramsey had moved to southern California, working for aircraft manufacturers and insurers. One afternoon she was taking Gertrude Snow, a prospective buyer, on a demonstration ride when a freak downdraft forced her two-seater into a tree in the mountains near Los Angeles. It could very well have been the final flight for the young pilot, who suffered a broken back, fractured ribs and head injuries. Both her legs had been crushed as well, and doctors pushed her to let them amputate the one in worst shape. Nadine adamantly refused, however, backed by friends and family who



apparently took her at her word that she would “rather die if she could not fly again.”

Though she would be aided in a months-long recovery by her brother Edwin, who moved to the West Coast to offer support, Nadine was distressed by all the publicity following her crash. To make matters worse, Snow—whose multiple injuries did result in an amputated leg—sued her, claiming that the pilot had been drinking before their flight. The entire episode left Nadine bitter and uncertain about the future, but she managed to climb back into the cockpit by January 1941 in time to join the ranks of American women pilots supporting the war effort.

Ramsey joined the Civil Air Patrol the following spring, becoming an instructor, and later the Women's Flying Training Detachment, soon to be known as the Women Airforce Service Pilots—the first American women to fly military aircraft. Experienced aviators were then in great demand to train new pilots and ferry aircraft from manufacturers to military bases. Nadine would become one of only 26 WASPs who qualified to fly the P-38 Lightning as well as a long list of other combat planes, including the P-39 Airacobra, P-63 Kingcobra and P-51 Mustang.

Nadine Ramsey's biography will likely inspire any modern-day adventurer who is happiest in the clouds. But *Taking Flight* is in fact a “three-fer,” filled with entertaining details from the careers of Nadine's highly successful mom and brother as well. Mother Nelle founded a successful cosmetics business in the aftermath of a disastrous marriage. Brother Edwin, who in 1942 led the U.S. Army's last cavalry charge and commanded more than 40,000 guerrillas during the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, later wrote an autobiography, *Lieutenant Ramsey's War: From Horse Soldier to Guerrilla Commander*, upon which the 2016 film *Never Surrender* was based. All in all, theirs was a remarkable family.

Nan Siegel