

Raquel Ramsey and Tricia Aurand, *Taking Flight: The Nadine Ramsey Story* (<https://kansaspres.ku.edu/home/new-notable/978-0-7006-2980-0.html>). Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020. Images. Notes. Bibliography. Hbk. 320 pp.



As an air power historian, I sometimes wonder what histories and stories have been over told and which have not been told enough. There are times where I feel like certain aspects of air force or air power history which have been given enough treatment, and then there are those stories that are clearly due more attention. This book falls decidedly into the latter category.

Not every member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) has had their story told, but every one of them is worthy of a telling. Nadine Ramsay was one of over 1,000 women who answered America's call to serve their country as pilots during the Second World War, whose history was virtually ignored until the early 2000s when memoirs, biographies and original research into their story began to appear more heavily in print. It took from the end of the war until the 1970s for these women to even be accorded the status of a veteran. *Taking Flight* is the story of Nadine Ramsey and, more broadly, her family during the Second World

War.

In general, women who learned to fly before America entered into the Second World War had certain advantages. Most were middle or upper-middle-class with access to enough spare funds in the 1930s to learn how to fly. These women were lucky enough to stand on the shoulders of the giants of women in aviation, including Amelia Earhart and Jackie Cochran. Thus, when America entered the war, and it became apparent that more pilots were needed, it was not entirely out of the question that women could be called upon to serve and fly. It took likes of Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love to turn this dream into a reality.

Still, the programs created to bring women into their countries service was not met with enthusiastic support, 'The public had mixed reaction to women pilots. From the beginning they were under intense scrutiny' (p. 84). The women who chose to fly faced sexism and discrimination, but through every adversity, they proved beyond a conclusive doubt that they were not only capable of delivering aircraft but that often the 'women pilots could do the job, usually faster and more safely than the men' (p. 83).



President Barack Obama signed S.614 in the Oval Office on 1 July 2009. The bill awarded a Congressional Gold Medal to Women Airforce Service Pilots. Source: Wikimedia)

However, this is Nadine's story rather than that of the WASPs more generally. It becomes clear throughout these pages that Ramsey was a 'bright, glamorous comet' (p. 178) and not just during her time in service. Of course, her time as a WASP serves as the linchpin of the book. Ramsey, like so many others of her generation, was inexplicably drawn towards aviation. Hers was not the most direct route to becoming a pilot, but Ramsey's 'ready for anything personality' found her learning to fly in the sky of Wichita, Kansas, in the mid-1930s (p. 28). By the start of the war, she was a reasonably well-known aviatrix and, although again not through a direct route; she joined the women flyers of the Second World War. During her training, Ramsey lost a close friend, Helen Jo Severson, which is deftly demonstrated in these pages and is an incredibly moving passage as Ramsey struggles with this loss. Severson became one of 38 WASPs to lose their lives in service to their country (p. 87, 92).

Ramsey ferried aircraft, learned to fly fighters, and moved these aircraft, including P-51s and P-38s from their factories to their ports of embarkation. After the war, Ramsey, unlike so many of the other WASPs did not give up on flying, going so far as to purchase her own P-38, but I will leave those details for the reader to enjoy.

*Taking Flight* is an incredibly personal and poignant account of one family's successes and sacrifices during the Second World War. This book should find a home on the shelves of air power scholars, but a much wider audience will also enjoy it. Ramsey's story might be hers alone, but it is indicative of all the women whose service to the US and broader Allied war effort should not be overlooked. Instead, it should be embraced by a grateful nation. While writing a book review, I try to attempt to convey what makes the subject matter appealing or why the reader might want to purchase this book. In reading *Taking Flight*, I was continually struck by one thought, I wish I had known Ramsey.

If you are interested in further reading about the WASPs after reading Ramsey's story, then the following books are a great place to start. The most recent being Katherine Sharp Landdeck's superb *The Women with Silver Wings* (2020) (you can also catch Landdeck in a future *From Balloons to Drones* podcast ([https://soundcloud.com/from\\_balloons\\_to\\_drones](https://soundcloud.com/from_balloons_to_drones))). There is also Molly Merryman's *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II* (1998). Everything by Sarah Byrn Rickman is worth reading, but perhaps the best is *WASP of the Ferry Command: Women Pilots, Uncommon Deeds, The Originals: The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron of World War II* (2016), and *Nancy Love and the WASP Ferry Pilots of World War II* (2019). The University of Florida Press also has an excellent (and balanced) biography of the famous aviatrix *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane* by Doris Rich (2007). For a more general history, there is Deborah G. Douglas' *American Women and Flight since 1940* (2004).

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