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Taking Flight

By Raquel Ramsey & Tricia Aurand
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If you have read the history of the family of siblings Ed and Nadine Ramsey, you know they have an amazing heritage. If you have read the book **Lieutenant Ramsey's War** and/or seen the video **Never Surrender: The Ed Ramsey Story**, you know Ed's exceptional accomplishments as a cavalry commander and guerilla commander in World War II, then as a civilian working with and for the Philippine and Japanese people. Reading **Taking Flight**, you very quickly learn Nadine was an exceptional pioneer women aviator. She was one of the few who helped blaze the trail for today's female military aviators. Nadine's and Ed's mother, Nelle, was equally talented and accomplished.

I have known for several years that Raqui has been drafting this book to fulfill her promise to Ed—that she would tell Nadine's story. And tell it, she has. I love to read such stories, and when I find a good one, it is very hard for me to put it down. I also want to share it with others.

Nadine was born on March 17, 1911, into a family of pioneers, both father and mother and their ancestors. She inherited their pioneering gene, but theirs was on the vast lands of the mid-west United States. Nadine's pioneering spirit was in the sky. There she was free and at home. But first she had to get there.

Nadine's formative years were typical hardscrabble for her family, but the biggest thing in her favor was the closeness of her family, especially after her father died. Her and Ed's mother, Nellie, was their role model. Three major events changed the path Nadine's life would take: her father's death, the stock market crash in October 1929, and the family's move to Wichita, Kansas.

Wichita, in 1929, was designated the Air Capital City by the National Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce. Wichita was ideally situated in the center of the United States for all facets of aviation: experimentation, manufacturing and sales, commercial and passenger, refueling cross-country flights, free entertainment (take a blanket, lay on the grass, and watch the planes come and go), and famous aviators. It soon became the Air Capital of the World. Into this world came Nadine.

Sometime after arriving in Wichita, Nadine acquired her passion for flying. She saw it as her ticket to freedom from what could have been her destiny as a young woman during the Depression. Nadine also had a desire for adventure, even if it was dangerous. Flying was very dangerous, but that did not scare Nadine. With her own earnings and without telling her mother, who she knew would disapprove, and with Ed sworn to secrecy, Nadine began taking flying lessons. With six and one-half hours of instruction, she soloed in March 1936. Her mother was not happy when she found out, thanks to a local newspaper photographer who took Nadine's picture after landing.

While Nadine was not the first female pilot, she did have many firsts: first Kansas woman to receive her commercial pilot's license, first woman pilot in the Wichita Chapter National Aeronautic Association, and the only woman pilot after World War II to train male pilots to fly Army Air Force (AAF) fighter planes. She was a stunt and racing pilot, Civil Air Patrol squadron commander, flight instructor for the federal Civilian Pilot Training Program, and one of 303 Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) to ferry all types of military aircraft during World War II. She also earned certification to fly AAF fighter planes. And she was the only woman to own a Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter airplane after WWII.

Unfortunately, the end of WWII also brought the opportunities for women pilots to pursue their flying passion almost to an end, in both military and commercial aviation. They were simply put out to pasture. Nadine experienced many up and down spirals in life over the next 50+ years, as she struggled to put meaning to her life without the freedom and joy of soaring through the skies. Today we call those emotions PTSD. Fortunately, she had the love of her mother for many of those years plus Ed's and his wife Raqui's support. She also remained in contact with several of her fellow WASP pilots.

Nadine's story is also the story of women and military aviation, the efforts to gain veteran's status and benefits for WASP members, and recognition of their service by the federal government. This book is a welcome addition to women-in-aviation researchers for the detail it contains. It is also a welcome addition to books for young women who seek to eventually become role models with great skill and achievement. Yes, I definitely recommend this book as I enjoyed it tremendously and learned a lot about Nadine Ramsey and women in aviation.

