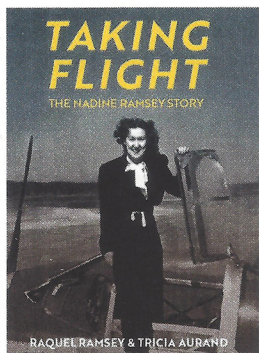


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BOOK REVIEW

TAKING FLIGHT: THE NADINE RAMSEY STORY by Raquel Ramsey, Tricia Aurand, et al.



Nearly 1,100 women answered the call to service as pilots ferrying planes all across the United States from early 1942 until the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) was disbanded in 1944. During that time, these women had to overcome the discrimination they faced because of their gender.

Nadine Ramsey was born in 1911 in Carlyle, Illinois. She and her younger brother, Edwin, lived there with their parents while their father worked in the oil fields. Her story, *Taking Flight: The Nadine Ramsey Story*, written by Edwin's widow, Raquel Ramsey, and Tricia Aurand, was recently published by the University Press of Kansas.

Early in 1930, their widowed mother moved the family to Wichita, Kansas. It was there in "the exploding aviation industry" that Nadine became interested in flying. She attended a college for the secretarial and bookkeeping jobs that women were expected to do. But she also paid for flying lessons with her meager salary and received her limited commercial pilot license in the spring of 1937. Nadine became one of the first two women to carry airmail for the US Postal Service.

Nadine moved to California in 1939, got a job with Douglas Aircraft Co., and then took flight training at Mines Field. She soon accepted a job at Aero Acceptance Corp. and offered flight training and sales as part of her secretarial duties, using her own small plane.

While taking a prospective customer flying, Nadine's plane was caught in a downdraft and crashed. Both women escaped with "crushed and mangled" legs, and Nadine also had a broken back and ribs.

As soon as Nadine's brother Edwin heard, he left law school at Oklahoma University to take care of her. He later encouraged her to get back in a plane and said she would, "even if he had to drag her by the hair." After her recovery, he persuaded her to keep flying because there was a war coming and she'd be needed.

The war did come. Despite the Army Air Force's need for pilots, it took a great deal of effort to allow women to fly. WASP was formed in 1942. The women pilots were allowed to live on military bases, trained as male military pilots were, wore uniforms and marched, but were paid less than men and were not allowed to leave the United States.

Thirty-eight of these patriotic women—who ferried about 12,000 planes, completed countless domestic missions, and flew more than 1 million miles in service of the war—died during their service. Yet these women could not be buried in military cemeteries, and the military wouldn't pay for funerals or to send their remains home. Flags could not be draped over their coffins.

At the last graduation ceremony of the last WASP training class, General Henry "Hap" Arnold, commanding general of the US Army Air Forces, said he hadn't been sure "whether a slip of a girl could fight the control of a B-17 in heavy weather." But, he said, "It is on the record that women can fly as well as men."

Nadine Ramsey loved flying, loved the country and wanted to be a part of the war effort. The WASP flew almost every type of military aircraft, including the B-26 and B-29 bombers, and even towed targets for ground and air gunners who were training with live ammunition. Nadine was one of only 26 women to fly the P-38 fighter aircraft.

After the war, Nadine stayed on at Long Beach Army Air Base as an attaché to the Sixth Army Ferrying Group.

In the late 1960s, the WASP started to have reunions, and the women began to fight for military recognition. That status was finally granted in 1970. They were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Barack Obama. Nadine, who died in 1997, received the honor posthumously.

Nadine Ramsey's story is the story of women's fight for equal treatment as pilots and how these women contributed greatly to the war effort. The book is a fitting ode to an amazing woman and those she flew with.