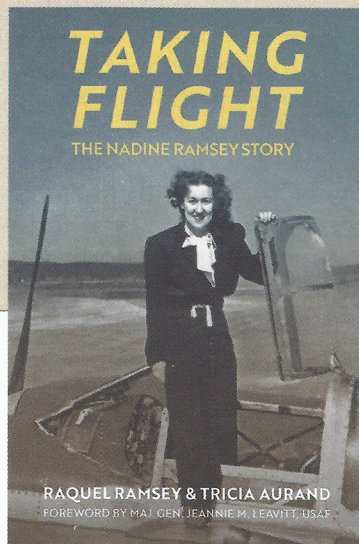


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BOOK REVIEWS



"Taking Flight"

By: Raquel Ramsey and Tricia Aurand

Rev: Lt. Col. Thomas A. Duke, USAF (Ret)

As a pilot, I was curious to know about women military pilots in WWII, and read "Taking Flight" by Raquel Ramsey and Tricia Aurand. This book not only chronicles the life of Nadine but also tells the story of 1,830 pilots that were admitted into military life as Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) who ferried military airplanes during the war and their dedication and struggle to be recognized for their contribution to the war effort. Nadine became one of 303 WASPs to ferry pursuit planes (fighters) for Air Transport Command (ATC) and one of only 26 qualified in the twin-engine P-38.

Nadine was already in her early 30s when she paid her own way and joined one of the early classes for training in Sweetwater, Texas, in the spring of 1943. The training was very much like that which military Aviation Cadets were given---, demerits, washouts, bunks, marching, crowded showers and about 100 hours of flying with dreaded check rides. Those graduating received wings as WAFs and soon became the original WASPs when they transferred to Dallas,

Love Field. Shortly thereafter Nadine transferred to Long Beach, California where she trained to fly the P-38 and other fighter planes. She also flew P-39s and P-51s that were being modified at factories from coast to coast, sometimes flying 100 hours a month and seven days a week.

Meanwhile, the WASP leadership struggled to better the lives of these women pilots with no progress with the military leadership and Congress. They were busy trying to join the Women's Army Corps (WACs) who as nurses and administrators had all the benefits and privileges of the regular Army. By the end of 1943 more male pilots became available to ferry aircraft as overseas tours ended and new recent pilot training graduates became surplus. In anticipation of merging into the regular Army, Nadine graduated from Officer Training in August 1944 but Congress had balked. On October 5, 1944, 1,102 WASPs were were informed they would be sent home on December 20. They were not reimbursed for the travel.

As a civilian Nadine became an instructor at Long Beach teaching ground school to new pursuit plane ferry pilots. In 1945, when her brother, Ed, who had been reported as missing since 1942 in the Philippines, was sent back to the States for hospitalization, Nadine flew him to Kansas and

stayed with him until he was well. (read Lieutenant Ramsey's War by Edwin P. Ramsey and Stephen J. Rivele). She continued instructing at Long Beach until ferry pilots were no longer needed in 1946. After the war was over, she could not resist buying a surplus P-38 and flying it in air shows

It took another 30 years for former WASPs finally to be given veteran status during the Carter administration. The WASP veterans kept continual contact through reunions, yearbooks and newsletters. There were continual efforts in Washington to no avail. When the Air Force Academy started giving flight training to women cadets in 1976 the Pentagon press lauded them as the "first women new military pilots." This aroused much publicity countering that claim. Senator Goldwater and many new Congresswomen initiated legislation that recognized the WASPs as the first. Nadine was one of the few remaining WASPs to get an Honorable Discharge and Veterans rights and benefits without back pay finally, thirty years late in 1977.

Read the book. As Major General Jeannie M Leavitt, an F-15E fighter pilot herself, states in the Forward, "My journey as an Air Force fighter pilot would not have been possible if it were not for the incredible women who went before me, beginning with the WASPs." Read all about it!