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# With Brave Wings She Flies: Women Pilots in World War II

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# With Brave Wings She Flies: Women Pilots in World War II

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Sarah Lucas '16

Supervised by Dr. Mark Gingerich

What comes to mind  
when you think of World  
War II, women and  
planes?





160 44 9A.C

# The Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) - Great Britain

- Who?
  - Gerard d'Erlanger
  - Pauline Gower
- What?
  - Took over the ferrying arm of the RAF
- When?
  - September 1939
  - Women - January 1940
- Why?
  - Employ pilots ineligible for the RAF
- How were women involved?
  - 166 women pilots
  - 1518 pilots total











# Combat Pilots - USSR

- Who?
  - Marina Raskova
- What?
  - 46th Night Bomber Regiment, “Night Witches”
  - 125th Dive Bomber Regiment
  - 586th Fighter Aviation Regiment
- When?
  - October 1941
- Why?
  - Propaganda? Personnel Shortage?
- How were women involved?
  - Began exclusively for women
  - One unit remained all female
  - Two integrated due to personnel shortages









# Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) - USA

- Who?
  - Nancy Love - WAFS
  - Jacqueline Cochran - WFTD
- What?
  - Ferrying, instructors, target towers, test pilots, chauffeurs, advanced schools, etc
  - “Aerial dishwashing”
- When?
  - WFTD - September 10, 1942
  - WAFS - September 15, 1942
  - WASP - August 5, 1943
- Why?
  - To relieve men for combat duty
- How were women involved?
  - Exclusively women













# Similarities and Differences

## ATA (Britain)

- Civilian
- **Founded for men**
- **Integrated unit**
- **Total war**
- Quiet disbandment
- Had to prove selves
- **Women back to home**
- Minimal recognition
- **No place in postwar aviation**
- Most international

## Combat Pilots (USSR)

- Military
- **Founded for women**
- **Two integrated units**
- **Total war**
- Quick quiet disbandment
- Had to prove selves
- **Women back to factory**
- Some recognition
- **No place in postwar aviation**

## WASP (USA)

- De Facto Military
- **Founded for women**
- **Unintegrated**
- **War removed**
- Disbandment contentious
- Had to prove selves
- **Women back to home**
- Most recognition of three, but still minimal
- **No place in postwar aviation**

Why is this  
important today?

“Female service, be it combatant or noncombatant was not seen as positive social good but rather as a make-do measure which had to be processed and presented in such a way to limit the harm it could do to the social fabric”

- Gerard DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird

What percentage of pilots worldwide are women?

**> 6%**



# Percentage of Women Pilots

USA

UK

Russia

6.6%

3.3%

?%

# Personal Background



# Personal Research



With WASP Shutsy  
Reynolds at Oshkosh 2015



Research at the Imperial  
War Museum, London



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# Questions?

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