



Fly Girls: The Forgotten Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII

P. O'Connell Pearson

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It the tradition of *Hidden Figures*, debut author Patricia Pearson offers a beautifully written account of the remarkable but often forgotten group of female fighter pilots who answered their country's call in its time of need during World War II.

At the height of World War II, the US Army Airforce faced a desperate need for skilled pilots—but only men were allowed in military airplanes, even if the expert pilots who were training them to fly were women. Through grit and pure determination, 1,100 of these female pilots—who had to prove their worth time and time again—were finally allowed to ferry planes from factories to bases, to tow targets for live ammunition artillery training, to test repaired planes and new equipment, and more.

Though the WASPs lived on military bases, trained as military pilots, wore uniforms, marched in review, and sometimes died violently in the line of duty, they were civilian employees and received less pay than men doing the same jobs and no military benefits, not even for burials.

Their story is one of patriotism, the power of positive attitudes, the love of flying, and the willingness to do good with no concern for personal gain.

Fly Girls: The Forgotten Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII Details

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From Reader Review Fly Girls: The Forgotten Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII for online ebook

Sandy says

This is an interesting book describing women's roles in flight during World War II. Background information is included, as well as insights about daily life for the women & discrimination. The notes, timeline, & bibliography add to the text. The editor for the book, however, fell down on the job. In the beginning of the book "WASP" is fully capitalized, but later in the book it isn't. Also, while the photos included are helpful, there are few pictures of the women discussed in the text & the maps are too small. Many of the photos are either current or do not pertain to women aviators or the aircraft flown. Overall, it is an adequate introduction.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Plus

While WWI used planes, the technology and use really took off during WWII. It's hard for people today to understand how all-consuming this war was, but Pearson does a fantastic job at setting the scene. Factories of all sorts switched from their regular products to producing for the war effort. Some Kellogg's plants quite making cereal, for example, and produced K rations. Cars and car parts were not produced, families were encouraged to put in gardens, which many did since different types of food were rationed. So many men went to war that women had to step into jobs of all types that had previously been closed to them. It is not surprising, then, that women were grudgingly welcome to noncombat flying jobs. Civilian flying took off in the 1920s and 30s despite the Great Depression (even my uncles got together and bought a prop plane that they would land in the fields near their dairy), and women who knew how to fly saw the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program and others as a way to do something for their country using their skills. There were people and bases who were supportive and appreciative of these efforts, and those who were not, but stepping into a traditionally man's job had many challenges. There were no appropriate uniforms for the women, and they came up against a lot of prejudice and harassment. The final blow was the fact that the militarization of the programs was voted down, and the women involved didn't get full military honors and benefits for many years.

Fly Girls is a great book about World War II. It's a topic that a handful of readers investigate avidly, and I am pleased any time I can find a book on a tangent that hasn't been well covered. Pearson does an excellent job of delineating the general atmosphere both on the home front as well as the fighting front. In addition, the details about the tenacity with which women went after jobs that were not easy for them to get are inspiring. I have read quite a bit about both WWII and women's history, and even I did not know about the magazine articles at the time that downplayed the dangers the women faced and made the articles all about nail polish and well-coifed hair! The bibliography is extensive, and I appreciated the footnotes: all too many middle grade nonfiction books are a bit slapdash when citing sources, which makes it hard to encourage students to do it correctly!

Along with Colman's *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II* (1998), Mary Cronk Farrel's *Pure Grit: How American World War II Nurses Survived Battle and Prison Camp in the Pacific* (2014), Cheryl Mullenbach's *Double Victory: How African American Women Broke Race and Gender Barriers to Help Win World War II* (2013), this is an essential purchase for all middle school and high school libraries and is an excellent nonfiction companion to Smith's *Flygirl* and Davis' *Mare's War*. Now I really want several more middle grade novels about the brave women who flew during WWII.

Molly Dettmann says

I thought this was a decent upper elementary/middle school nonfiction about the brave women pilots of WWII. The book gives an intro to how WWII started and then focuses on the obstacles and prejudice women military pilots faced as they fought tooth and nail to be treated as equals to men. I appreciate that the narrative didn't shy from how the women also showed prejudice themselves and excluded African-American women from training in their program, but that part was just a blip in the overall story. I wish there had been more pictures of the women and planes and that there had been better maps (small and in black and white made them hard to read). Things did drag toward the end, but overall I feel it's a worthy addition to school libraries.

Cindy Hudson says

During World War II, people all over the U.S. were asked to pitch in to help the war effort. For women especially, this meant they got to do jobs they would not have been otherwise allowed to do. One of those jobs was flying military aircraft. In the 1940s, women had a hard time being accepted as pilots at all, much less in a military setting.

Fly Girls: The Daring American Women Pilots Who Helped Win WWII by P. O'Connell Pearson tells the incredible story of some of these women. Despite facing discrimination on bases, they bravely flew planes while being shot at, so they could help soldiers gain skill at shooting planes down. They ferried planes from factories where they were built to bases where they would be used, freeing up men to serve in combat, where women weren't allowed.

Every step they gained had to be fought for, as many in the military thought women should not be allowed to fly planes at all. They even faced sabotage on some bases where they worked. Also, it took decades and an act of Congress for the women pilots to be recognized for the work they had done.

Fly Girls is a fascinating look at the personal stories of the women who defied accepted gender roles and refused to be grounded when they knew they could help. Historic photos, sidebars with info about events happening elsewhere with war efforts, and quotes from the women and others bring the story of this chapter in history to life. I recommend it for mother-daughter book clubs and readers aged 9 to 16.

The publisher provided me with a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Barb Dixon Palmieri says

"Their motive for wanting to fly airplanes all those years ago wasn't for fame of glory or recognition. They simply had a passion to take what gifts they had and use them to help defend not only America, but the entire free world, from tyranny...And they let no one get in their way."

I saw this book come into the store and knew I had to read it. Patricia O'Connell Pearson did a great job. There was obviously a lot of research that had gone into this book. The research and information about what happened during WWII here in the states and the information about each type of plane that was built and used during WWII is amazing. What the women went through during this time and since then is not well documented. Pearson was able to gather information on many of the women. There are plenty of stats as well. There were a couple times I thought it was a little "preachy" but I understand it was to show how these women did as much, and sometimes more than the men but received little praise and/or recognition for what they accomplished.

All in all it was an interesting book and would be great for senior elementary and middle school children.

Ellen Klock says

Fly Girls: The Forgotten Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII by P. O'Connell Pearson is a nonfiction book written for middle school children introducing the lives of various female aviators who made an impact on the world by their contribution to the war effort in World War II. Laying the groundwork, Pearson goes back to the beginning of the unrest in Europe, describing the actions of Hitler and the Axis as well as the relationship between England and its Allies, especially when the Germans invaded Poland and war was pronounced. She then takes us to Pearl Harbor and the start of the United States' involvement in the war. In between there is a discussion of the rise of aviation with heroes such as Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart creating a public interest in flight.

During the prewar period, the head of the Airforce realized America needed more military planes. The growing number of female pilots, often overlooked because of their gender, wanted to help, but they were referred to opportunities overseas since the US military did not allow female recruits. Those attitudes changed slightly as the need for volunteers increased resulting in the introduction of the WAVES (Women Accepted For Voluntary Emergency Service) and the the WACS (Women's Army Corps), but it wasn't until the establishment of the WASP (Women's Arlington Airforce Service Pilots) that women aviators were allowed to be of use to the Army Airforce.

In the meantime women could play a role as instructors since male pilots were desperately needed in fighter planes. Women were considered too weak to handle the physical challenges of controlling a plane in rough weather and while they might be capable of filling auxiliary roles, they were not allowed to be involved with combat due to their "unstable", "feminine" characteristics. At least that was the public perception, in spite of the fact that thousands of women were accepted in the Women's Auxiliary Airforce in England while the Russian Airforce had three all female combat units complete with women manning the bombers.

Still, the war needed pilots, so Nancy Love was asked to form a Squadron and women were finally recruited to fly in noncombat missions for the WAFS (Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron), but they had to stay civilian until Congress approved the measure. Unfortunately, Congress was reluctant to give their approval

for what they considered an experimental program. Twenty eight women answered the call with another twenty five women already in the British Corps. Eventually over a thousand of woman were recruited to become pilots for the newly established WASP. The standards for these female recruits, even though they weren't officially military, was higher than those for the men because they were expected to prove their worth, despite the unequal rate of pay.

The details of the lives of Nancy Love, Betty Giles, Jacqueline Cochran, Cornelia Fort, Betty Huyler Gillies, Barbara Poole, Evelyn Sharpe, Gertrude Meserve, and Marion Florsheim are intermixed with the war effort. These women took on the more tedious and often dangerous tasks such as transporting planes from the factories to the bases, flying planes pulling targets for artillery practice, and testing newly designed aircraft or piloting those which had just been repaired.

Even though there were many qualified African American women ready to serve, since the black and white troops were kept separate during the war, allowing these female pilots into the WASP would have jeopardized the program. (It wasn't until 1948 that the military was integrated, after the war was over). In spite of this precautionary measure, in 1944 Congress voted to disband the WASP organization even though the women had done a stellar job on some very difficult and dangerous tasks attempting to overcome the prejudice and harassment from service men who felt threatened by their presence. Unfortunately, the propaganda against female aviators was used against them despite the positive reports from their commanding officers. In 1977 their service was finally recognized as active duty by the military and they received the recognition they deserved, but the right to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery was still being contested as recently as 2016.

With the current emphasis on the role of women in American Society it is appropriate that the actions of these courageous women are revealed, especially for our youth. It's also important that our young women have these role models brought to their attention as well as showing the male population that women are just as capable as men, even in professions considered too "tough" for a female to handle. In 1991 Congress finally authorized women to fly in combat missions with 1998 the year that women fighter pilots actually flew in a combat mission to Iraq in Operation Desert Fox, but it took until 2004 for the first woman in US Airforce history (Col Linda McTague) to command a fighter squadron.

It is evident by the way the story is told that this is a book aimed at children. While it starts out more like a textbook than a nonfiction book, as the narrative progresses it gains our interest reflecting the fact that this is a worthy topic and the author has done extensive research. There are insets giving background information to help with the reader's understanding, including a comparison of 911 with Pearl Harbor and a description of the Great Depression. Some of the tidbits are quite informative, such as the annotated list of military medals and honors.

Unfortunately, this is an overview and the lives of the majority of women aviators are given only a cursory glance, instead of an in depth biography. An annotated listing of each woman and her accomplishments would have been a welcome addition. However, the book does include an index, notes, and a list of references, so it would definitely be good for basic research, as long as the reader recognizes that Patricia Pearson has placed her own definitive American slant on events, often simplifying complicated scenarios. A plus is the emphasis on the role of women in the twentieth century and their fight to be taken seriously, especially in the field of aviation. It wasn't until 2015 that women were legally considered on an equal footing with men throughout the military, but the implementation of this ruling is a work in progress.

There were quite a few photographs in *Fly Girls*, but I felt that since this book was for youth, even more illustrations were necessary. Overall, a good introduction to a topic full of little known facts from this

historic time period appropriate for Middle School and High School Libraries, but also relevant for adult readers.

Four stars and a thank you to Netgalley for providing this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

This review also appears on my blog, Gotta Read:

ellenk59.wordpress.com

JoLee says

Featured on World War II Wednesday on Intellectual Recreation.

Fly Girls is the story of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) that flew for the United States during World War II. Patricia O'Connell Pearson's book is an engrossing and comprehensive look at the work of the WASPs. She chronicles how they began, the assignments they were given, their disbanding, and their fight for militarization in the decades following the war. Pearson includes many remarkable stories, including how Cornelia Fort saw the bombing of Pearl Harbor from her plane and how Dora Dougherty flew the B-29.

This book is extremely well-written and well-researched. I really enjoy learning about how women contributed during the war years, and I'd strongly recommend this book to anyone who shares that interest.

Moose Donica says

"As long as our planes flew overhead, the skies of America were free and that's what all of us everywhere were fighting for. And that we, in a very small way, are being allowed to help keep that sky free is the most beautiful thing I've ever known."

I was reading this book to try to get into the non-fiction genre (I usually read fiction) and I greatly enjoyed it. Fly Girls is the story of the WASPs, female pilots in WWII who fought sexism and discrimination to serve their nation. This book is informative, and the pictures gave it depth. Fly Girls was great for me because it was generally fast paced. Normally, the pace of non-fiction throws me off. HOWEVER, this book has some small technical and usage errors, like spacing and wording. Overall Fly Girls is a pleasurable read, and I recommend it to people who are interested in learning about WWII and how women helped to win it.

Maggie says

Made me interested enough in the topic to want to find a better book about it. But this one seemed to contain a lot of repetition and a lot of description of feelings (and not a lot of actual dates and events), as if there isn't enough information out there to fill out a book of this length. Also retells anecdotes instead of using quotes from the women involved. Does contain a few biased blurbs, but might be a good book to use the bibliography in the back for research, school work, personal interest, etc. I did notice one error missed in editing; says in one blurb that 6 million american women joined the workforce for the first time during the

war. Says on the very next page that six million women joined the workforce during the war and an estimated 3 million of them were joining for the first time.

Heidi says

I'd heard of the WASP program before reading this book, but I didn't know much about it in terms of specific details. I know a lot more now having read this book. Pearson does an excellent job of describing the program as well as the events that led up to its creation and the events that led to its demise. Specific individuals who played a key role in the program are mentioned by name throughout the book. I especially enjoyed the experiences of specific WASP participants that Pearson shares throughout the book. These personal experiences helped clarify the points the author was making about the challenges these women faced in terms of physical, mental, and emotional challenges. I found it quite disappointing to read about the poor way many of the women were treated because other people didn't think women could be good military pilots, despite their proving their value over and over again. And yet, I couldn't help but admire the skill and determination that so many of these ladies exhibited in the face of discrimination and poor treatment. And their hard work did convert some of those around them to the value of the program. Pearson has written a fascinating, well-written account of an important program in the annals of World War II, where over a thousand female pilots sacrificed a lot to come to the aid of their country.

carlageek says

Fun and thrilling nonfiction about the squadrons of women pilots who flew for the US in the Second World War. Their stories made me angry, made me cheer, and even made me tear up at times.

As the war heated up, any men who could fly were needed on the front, leaving a shortage of flyers at home for duties such as training new pilots and flying brand-new aircraft from factories to bases. About 1200 superb women pilots stepped up, taking on every mission they could. They served as flight instructors, ferried aircraft, and even took on dangerous missions that some male pilots refused to fly - like towing targets for soldiers practicing anti-aircraft fire with *live rounds*.

And they did it all, as Ginger Rogers might have said, backwards and in high heels. Few in the military or in Congress believed that women should fly at all. Then they didn't think women could fly fast planes like fighters or heavy planes like bombers. The WASPs proved them wrong again and again, without military pay or military benefits (notwithstanding male pilots doing the same jobs who had both). When WASPs died in the line of duty - and about 40 of them did - their families had to pay to bring home their remains, and bury them without military honors.

Fly Girls is aimed at kids, which makes its relatively unsophisticated history of the war understandable and forgivable (in contrast to Denise Kiernan's *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II*, a book for adults that nevertheless presented a pretty stale and uncritical narrative of the war). And O'Connell Pearson doesn't gloss over *everything* that was messy; for example, the book acknowledges that the WASPs were all white, making room in its pages to mention Black male pilots in the war and Black women who weren't able to fly at all. Nor does the book shy away from subjects like sexual harassment (never mentioned by Kiernan, though it must have existed amply at Oak Ridge), objectification, and the general tendency to discount the value of any work as soon as women are doing it. O'Connell

Pearson sets forth these topics in the context of mid-century social norms - which might as well be medieval to the post-post-millennial target audience for the book - but she also doesn't pretend that all those problems are solved today.

In short, it's a terrific book all around, a real history book (with endnotes and bibliography - what a great example to set for kids, a narrative supported with facts from the historical record) with a great story to tell about some amazing women who deserve to be remembered. I'm no expert in books for kids, but I think *Fly Girls* would be a super addition to the library of any middle-school kid with an interest in history.

Kiffie says

A straightforward account of how women served as pilots during World War II, the challenges they faced, and their struggle to be recognized for the accomplishments they had. I had a little bit of a struggle keeping all the names straight, and it might have been better if the author had focused more in depth on just a few of the pilots who were involved. Still, it was very clear that these women were just as skilled as the men in flying military craft, and their treatment during and after the war was very unfair.

laurel [suspected bibliophile] says

I absolutely loved this fascinating and informative history of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II, who performed many dangerous and dreary missions ferrying planes across the country, pulling targets for live-fire training, serving as test pilots for new and "repaired" aircraft, and flying terrifying new aircraft to prove that it was "so easy a girl could do it." All this, while faced with monumental discrimination that sometimes ended in sexual harassment and sabotage, and the never-ending pressure of having to be lady-like while performing a traditionally male job.

Told in with a narrative similar to Steve Sheinkin, this MG/YA nonfiction is certain to engage readers. Pearson does a phenomenal job relating attitudes and events of the 1940s to current times, particularly when showing readers that the difficulties women faced during this time were the norms in a society where a woman's place was traditionally seen as in the home instead of in a cockpit—the most manliest of spaces. Pearson's outrage definitely shows at times when she writes about how women serving in military capacities had their femininity and looks covered *instead* of their superior skills—which both downplayed their important contributions and undermined their existence—something women still face today.

The book also contains a number of pictures and infographics on various people and events (e.g., 9/11 vs Pearl Harbor, Hitler, racism, the Great Migration, Amelia Earhart, Bessie Coleman, female African-American pilots, and more), that provide a bigger picture of America before and during WWII and give context for what was going on and the decisions that were made.

All in all, the book highlights the unspoken heroism of the 1,102 women pilots who flew over 60 **million** miles in 78 different types of aircraft (most male pilots only specialized in *one*) in the two and a half years they were operational—and they flew these planes safer, faster and more efficiently than most of their male counterparts. It's a very quick, well-written and informative book that shows women can do anything they set

their minds to—and they have.

I received this book from NetGalley for an honest review.

Kate says

3.5 stars. This is a great, detailed book for middle school. I appreciated that some harder topics, like segregation, were not glossed over. The framed text inserts are equally detailed and well organized. I would actually rate the text at 4 stars, however, I had to take a half star off my final rating for several other reasons. One, the quality of the pictures and maps was horrible. The maps are almost illegible and the pictures are grainy. I pulled some other books from our library shelves and found some of the same pictures but with much better print quality. The WASP acronym was also in lowercase in various places in the book, sometimes appearing twice in the same sentence twice with one in caps and the other not. Overall, I would recommend this book as great tag-along to learning about WWII.

Jill Adams says

I appreciated learning some new things that I hadn't heard about before--
