

The Ninety-Nines, Inc.,® International Organization of Women Pilots®

# Aviation Adventure Guide

## Module 2 - Women's Aviation History



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# Women's Aviation History



"Poncho" Barns - Powder Puff Derby Racer, pioneer aviatrix and founder of the first movie stunt pilots' association.



Balloons were manned flight before airplanes. **Letitia Ann Sage** was the first woman to fly a balloon. It was in England in 1785. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women all over the world had flown balloons.

**Raymonde de Laroche** was a French pilot, thought to be the first woman to pilot a plane. She became the world's first licensed female pilot on March 8, 1910. She was also a race car driver.



**Harriet Quimby** was the first certificated American woman pilot in 1911 and the first woman to fly solo across the English Channel. Quimby joined the Moisant International Aviators, an exhibition team, and made her professional debut in 1911, earning \$1,500 in a night flight over Staten Island before a crowd of almost 20,000 spectators. As one of the country's few female pilots, she capitalized on her femininity by wearing a plum-colored satin blouse, necklace, and antique bracelet, with more practical trousers and high-laced boots. She drew crowds whenever she competed in cross-country meets and races. A native of Michigan, she wrote several screenplays.





**Katherine Stinson** was the fourth woman to earn a pilot certificate. It was 1912 and she was 21. She is the first women to open a flight school in 1915. She set flying records for aerobatic maneuvers, distance, and endurance. She was the first female pilot employed by the U.S. Postal Service and the first civilian pilot to fly the mail in Canada. She was also one of the first pilots to ever fly at night and the first female pilot to fly in Canada, Japan, and China. In 1918 she was the first woman commissioned to fly regular air mail routes.

**Elizabeth "Bessie" Colman** was the first African American and Native American pilot. US flight schools would not admit African American students, so she learned French and travelled to France to earn her pilot certificate on June 15, 1921.



In 1927 **Phoebe Omlie** became the first woman to obtain an airplane mechanic license and transport pilot certificate. She was an experienced barnstorming pilot. She was also the first woman to be appointed to a federal position in the aviation field. In this position, she saw the need for WWII pilots. She established 66 schools in 46 states. One of the schools was located in Tuskegee, Al. Because of segregation, African American pilots were not allowed in the army. Tuskegee Army Airfield became the home of first US African American Army Air Force flying unit.

## Air Racing Air Race Classic, Inc. (ARC)



Following the successful 1929 Powder Puff Derby where 20 daring female pilots “broke the mold” and competed in their own air race from Santa Monica, CA to the National Air Races in Cleveland, OH, women’s air racing was here to stay. ARC was started by former All Women's Transcontinental Air Race (AWTAR) racers to keep transcontinental racers flying.

ARC brings racing into a new era while continuing the long-established traditions. Racers fly the latest commercially manufactured aircraft showcasing new technologies. Women of all ages and experience levels gather from all over the world to compete in this annual event.



A wide audience follows the race preparation and the four-day event, both at the enroute airports and through the internet. Racers are role models to Girl Scouts and other youth groups as well as to college students seeking aviation as a career.

## Women Air Force Service Pilots

Women Air Force Service Pilots (W.A.S.P.) were organized to fly non-combat missions during WWII, leaving the male pilots free for combat missions. These women flew missions in the US as well as overseas. Their duties included testing, ferrying aircraft, training and towing targets. Of the 1047 women who completed the training, 38 died during their service.



## Famous Pilots of the 1920s and 1930s

**Louise Thaden** earned her pilot certificate in 1928. She was the first woman pilot in Ohio.

Thaden rapidly became a major figure in the aviation world and set many world performance records and won many major flying events. In 1929, she became the first pilot to hold the women's altitude, endurance and speed records in light planes simultaneously. Thaden set the women's altitude record in December 1928 with a mark of 20,260 feet. In March 1929, she set the women's endurance record with a flight of 22 hours, 3 minutes, 12 seconds.

In 1936, Thaden won the Bendix Trophy Race in the first year women were allowed access to compete against men. She set a new world record of 14 hours, 55 minutes from New York City to Los Angeles, California.



**Amelia Earhart** is probably the most famous of the early women in aviation.



### Amelia Earhart Notable Achievements

First woman pilot to fly solo over the Atlantic Ocean-1932

First pilot to fly solo from Hawaii to California-1935

First pilot to attempt to fly around the world at the equator-1937



Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan disappeared over the Pacific Ocean during her 1937 attempt to fly around the world.

The two were last seen in Lae, New Guinea, their last land stop before Howland Island, where they were intending to refuel. It is generally believed that they ran out of fuel before they found Howland Island, only one square mile in size, and crashed into the ocean near their destination. Nearly one year and six months after she and Noonan disappeared, Earhart was officially declared dead. She would have been 40 years of age.

The mysterious nature of Earhart's disappearance has caused much public interest in her life. Her airplane was never found, which has led to speculation and conspiracy theories about the outcome of the flight. Many books have been written on the subject.



**Helen Richey** in 1934 she was the first woman airline pilot hired in the US. In 1934 she applied to Pennsylvania Central Airlines, who were competing for contracts with another carrier. They saw her as a positive publicity opportunity and hired her to draw attention to the new airline. The airline restricted her to daytime and fair weather flying. She was only scheduled to fly twice a month. That is when newspaper reporter Ernie Pyle broke the news that Richey's hiring was a sham from the start, and the Department of Commerce was in on the scheme. She was only supposed to be employed for a couple of weeks, before being transferred to another role. She quit. It was not until 1973 that the second woman airline pilot was hired.

**Jacqueline Cochran** started flying in the 1930s. By 1938 she was considered the best woman pilot in the world. That year she won the Bendix Race, setting new transcontinental speed and altitude records. At the time of her death in 1980 she held more speed, distance, and altitude records than any pilot in history. In 1953 she was the first woman to break the sound barrier and was the first woman to land on an aircraft carrier. She headed up the formation of the W.A.S.P. and sponsored the Mercury 13 program. This program evaluated the ability of women to be astronauts. Thirteen women passed the same preliminary tests as the men.



**MERCURY 13:** The Mercury 13 were a group of ladies who underwent the same physical and psychological tests as the male astronauts during 1959-1960. Although the women passed the tests, they were not permitted to fly as astronauts. The "Mercury 13" were: Myrtle "K" Cagle, Jerrie Cobb, Jan Dietrich, Marion Dietrich, Wally Funk, Sarah Gorelick (later Ratley), Jane "Janey" Briggs Hart, Jean Hixson, Rhea Woltman, Gene Nora Stumbough (later Jessen), Irene Leverton, Jerri Sloan (later Truhill), Bernice "B" Steadman



# MORE CURRENT WOMEN PILOT FIRSTS



**Valentina Tereshkova**, a Russian cosmonaut, was the first woman to fly in space in 1963.



**Emily Howell Warner** was the second woman pilot to be hired by an airline since 1934. She was hired by Frontier Airlines in 1973. She became a captain in 1976. By 1978 there were three hundred women airline pilots.



**Jeannie Leavitt** joined the USAF in 1991. In 1993 she became the first USAF fighter pilot. She was the first woman to command a USAF combat fighter wing.



**Sally Ride** was the first woman NASA astronaut and the first US woman to fly in space. She was a physicist and the youngest astronaut to fly in space at age 32.

In 1995 **Eileen Collins** was the first woman to pilot the space shuttle and command a space shuttle mission. She was an Air Force pilot who joined the pilot astronaut program in 1990.



**ACTIVITY** - Match the pilot's name with their accomplishment in aviation.

- Harriett Quimby
- Elizabeth "Bessie" Coleman
- Phoebe Omlie
- Louis Thaden
- Amelia Earhart
- Jacqueline Cochran
- Emily Howell Warner
- Jeannie Leavitt
- Sally Ride
- Eileen Collins

First woman to fly solo over the Atlantic \_\_\_\_\_

First US woman pilot \_\_\_\_\_

First US woman to fly in space \_\_\_\_\_

First woman mechanic \_\_\_\_\_

First woman airline captain \_\_\_\_\_

First African and Native American woman pilot \_\_\_\_\_

First woman to win the Bendix Air Race \_\_\_\_\_

First woman fighter pilot \_\_\_\_\_

First woman space shuttle pilot \_\_\_\_\_

First woman to break the sound barrier \_\_\_\_\_