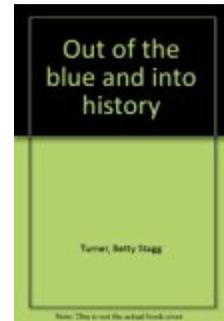


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Betty Stagg Turner. *Out of the Blue and into History: Women Airforce Service Pilots WWII*. Arlington Heights: Aviatrix Publishing, 2001. 576 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-928760-02-3.

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Pioneer Military Pilots

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines a pioneer as "a group that opens up a new line of activity." [1] Even before World War II started, women pilots were exploring the possibilities for military service. The all-male Army Air Force (AAF) was not interested; after all, women were not even allowed in the military except as nurses. As the need for combat pilots increased and the pilot shortage became acute, however, the AAF was galvanized into the precedent-breaking action of employing women pilots to fly military aircraft. The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) were, truly, pioneers.

Out of the Blue and into History by Betty Stagg Turner is an essential reference for anyone interested in the WASP or women's military history. Betty Stagg Turner relates the collected stories of 673 (out of 1,102) women who served in the WASP. [2] Compiling the book required several years of painstaking effort and involved an ongoing correspondence with hundreds of former WASP, their families, and friends. Most of the women were supportive and cooperated fully. Some of the women were extremely modest, while a few said that their lives "weren't exciting," and did not want to participate. Several were persuaded to change their mind, but a few declined to be included. Since approximately half of the WASP are deceased, Turner contacted spouses or others to get as many stories as possible. Over 200 sketches of women who are no longer living enrich the book. [3]

The WASP (or their family members) were asked to discuss the same basic information: date of birth, how they became interested in flying, how they heard about

the WASP, what they did in the WASP, and what they did after they were disbanded. Photographs of the women typically include one taken in their WASP uniform and often include a recent one. In addition, there are a number of photographs showing WASP activities. Given the necessity to be brief, each sketch is relatively short and there is much that is not covered. The value of the book comes from the consolidated information on a large number of women who have not written their own books or been discussed in other books. The author is a graduate of class 44-W-9 (September 1944). Although disbanded after only a few months of active service, she flew repaired BT-13 Valiants, a single engine training plane; was co-pilot on the B-24 Liberator, a heavy bomber; and, flew several other planes. After her WASP service, she married and raised a family. *Out of the Blue* is her second book; her first was a similar volume, self published in 1997, devoted to her class, *Class 44-W-9*.

Astronaut Cady Coleman, who has two space flights to her credit, writes in the foreword, "I wouldn't be who I am—or where I am without the women whose stories fill this book" (p. 10). Brigadier General Paul Tibbets, pilot of the B-29 Superfortress that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, writes in a second brief foreword: "Outstanding first-hand accounts. These women played a vital role in bringing the war to an end" (p. 10). When the B-29 acquired a reputation as being unsafe, then-Lieutenant Colonel Tibbets turned to WASP Dora Dougherty and Dorothea Johnson to demonstrate that it was "so reliable that even a woman could fly one," a remark that says a great deal about the sexism of the era as well as the abil-

ity of WASP pilots.[4]

A brief preface provides information on the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD), and discusses their consolidation in August 1943 into the WASP. Turner notes the reluctance of the U.S. Army Air Force to use women pilots in any role. Only the extreme shortage of qualified pilots led to the formation of the WAFS, and a few months later, to the establishment of WFTD. While the WAFS were considered qualified to assume their ferry duties after a brief orientation, the women who volunteered for WFTD underwent pilot training virtually identical to that given male aviation cadets (pp. 11-12). The major difference between the status of the aviation cadets, the AAF pilots, and the WASP was that men were in the AAF while women had Civil Service status, and did not receive military benefits such as medical care, life insurance, or the special pay and allowances given to military pilots. When they died in service, as thirty-eight did, they were not eligible for death benefits or a military funeral. By 1944, the need to train new pilots had decreased. Many male pilots were concerned that they would be drafted as infantrymen and waged a vicious propaganda campaign against the women that resulted in the decision to cancel the program in December 1944. The backlash after the war was strong, and only a few were able to pursue careers in aviation. It was not until 1977, with the passage of Public Law 95-202, that the WASP were finally granted veteran's status (p. 13).

After the place of women in the military was formalized by the Armed Forces Integration Act (1948), some WASP served as officers in the Army, Navy, or Air Force, but they were not allowed to serve in the military as pilots. It was only in 1974 that the first women received their military pilot's wings.[5]

Out of the Blue is organized by class, with the twenty-eight WAFS listed first in a separate section. Following them, each class is listed in order, starting with 43-W-1, and concluding with the final class, 44-W-10. Basic information on each class is given at the start of the section. This includes the number of women entering training, the number graduating, the date of graduation, and the field(s) where they trained. The graduates for each class are listed on the introductory page in alphabetical order by name used during WASP service. Married names, where applicable, are given in parentheses. This book includes only those who graduated from pilot training. Approximately 800 additional women entered train-

ing, but did not graduate.

It is not possible in a brief review to do justice to the individuals in the book, but a few arbitrarily selected highlights may hold the reader's interest. Byrd Howell Granger earned a doctorate in English from UCLA before learning to fly in 1938. With over 300 hours in her flight log, she was a member of the first WFTD class, 43-W-1. She was a WASP squadron commander in the 21st Ferrying Group at Palm Springs, California. After deactivation, she was a member of the faculty at the University of Arizona until her retirement in 1977. She is the author of eight books, including several on Arizona, as well as *On Final Approach*, one of the most detailed histories of the WASP (pp. 34-35).

Dora Dougherty (Strother), mentioned above in connection with General Tibbet's preface, was a member of class 43-W-3. She was twenty-one years old when she was chosen to fly the B-29. After deactivation, she earned two doctorates, one in psychology and one in education and aeronautics. Unlike so many of her colleagues, she continued her career in aviation, working for Bell Helicopter as a human factors engineer. She accepted the Air Force offer of a commission and remained in the reserves retiring as a lieutenant colonel (pp. 59-60). Katherine Applegate Dussaq was a member of class 44-W-1. Before the war, she developed a specialty detecting fraudulent documents, owned her own laboratory, and served as an expert witness in court cases throughout the United States. She was stationed at Sioux Falls Army Air Base in South Dakota and was killed in late November 1944 when her AT-6 Texan, a single engine advanced trainer, crashed in Ohio (p. 292). Mary Anne Showers (Richey), a member of Turner's class, 44-W-9, served only briefly in the WASP. Later she attended law school at the University of Arizona where she was the only woman in her class. She served as a prosecutor, state court trial judge, and was the only woman appointed to the federal judiciary by President Ford. President Reagan considered her for appointment to the Supreme Court (p. 520).

Reading through the pages, I was struck by the wide variety of backgrounds, the different flying experiences, and the often incredible lives that followed wartime service. Their compelling desire to fly coupled with their dedication to their country, even when their service was made difficult and their program was ultimately canceled, are awe-inspiring. The book does have weaknesses and suffers from the absence of a good editor. Organization challenges the reader. While the list of graduates at the start of each section is in alphabetical order, the

stories that follow are arranged at random. To find if a woman is (or is not) included, you have to scan each page. An indication, in the list of graduates, would have been helpful to point the way. The index, which would partially overcome this problem, is not complete. The WAFS, for example, are not included nor are some members of the classes. Byrd Howell Granger's outstanding book, *On Final Approach*, is a good companion to *Out of the Blue* as it points the way by identifying the class for each WASP. These issues are frustrating, but the book is still useful as a research tool.

While the individual stories are all-too-brief, Betty Stagg Turner's book provides fascinating glimpses into the lives of these remarkable women. I highly recommend adding it to your reference shelf.[6]

Notes

[1]. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam Company, 1981), p. 866.

[2]. A great many books have been written by and about the WASP. A few that are especially useful include: Byrd Howell Granger, *On Final Approach: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II* (Scottsdale: Falconer Publishing Company, 1991); Molly Merryman, *Clipped*

Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and Marianne Verges, *On Silver Wings: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944* (New York: Ballantine, 1991).

[3]. Telephone interview between Pat Jernigan and Betty Stagg Turner on January 12, 2003.

[4]. Adela Riek Scharr, *Sisters in the Sky: Volume II: The WASP* (Tucson: Patrice Press, 1988), pp. 654-655.

[5]. Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps 1945-1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), p. 272; and Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982), p. 320.

[6]. *Out of the Blue and into History* can be purchased directly from the author by writing to her at PO Box 643, Mason, OH 45040-6434. Two excellent websites include: the Woman's Collection on the WASP, Texas Woman's University, at: www.twu.edu/wasp/; and, Nancy Parrish's web site, "Wings Across America," at: www.wasp-wwii.org/wasp/store.htm. *Out of the Blue and into History* can also be purchased at this latter website.

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