

Top GunHers: From the amazing Amazon women warriors of Pontus who pioneered the role of women in combat in 800 BC Greek mythology, to the latest amazing first UAE woman combat pilot of the 21st century, the list and the legacy of amazing women top gunners in-between is nothing short of - Amazing.

Harriet Quimby was the first U.S. woman to receive a pilot license and was the first female to fly the English Channel in 1912. But Quimby's U.S pilot licensing was preceded by two European female pilots; Raymonde De Laroche of France, and H el ene Dutrieu of Belgium, reputedly the first female pilot to fly with a passenger and the first to fly a seaplane.

During WW I (1914-1918) military female pilots were recorded in Europe: Five from Russia, and Dutrieu who volunteered for war service with France's Air Patrol and was accepted. Of the American women pilots who volunteered during WW I, none was accepted.

During the early years of WW II in 1941 Europe, women pilots flew with male squadrons and three Russian regiments of female pilots were organized. The Germans dubbed the Russian women the "Night Witches" for their aggressive bombing tactics.

When America entered the war, there were not enough U.S. male pilots. Still, the all-male U.S. military would not accept female pilots, albeit women pilots still volunteered. Thus, a program of civilian female pilots known as, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), was established by Jacqueline Cochran in 1943.

Julie Stege, remembering her days as a WASP said how the guys didn't like us at all. They were so humiliated that these women could fly a fighter plane. The WASP were not allowed military status, were warned to refrain from publicity, and told to reserve the glamour and glory stories for their front-line brothers.

Still, virtually every plane flown by U.S. military male pilots during WW II, was flown first by WASP female test pilots to insure the safety of the plane and the safety of the male military pilot. The mind set according to Stege was: If something went wrong, better to lose one of those dames than one of the guys.

Stege recalled that the guys even wrote their Congressmen to get rid of us. In 1944 unemployed male pilots complained that women pilots had taken their jobs. That year the WASP program was abruptly ended.

Three years later in 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act that, now by law, prohibited women from flying combat aircraft or serving on combat Naval ships.

Thirty years later in 1974, four women became the first U.S. Naval aviators: LT. Barbara

Allen, became the first Navy woman to earn her wings along with, Ensign Jane M. Skiles, Lieutenant Judith A. Neuffer, and Ensign Kathleen L. McNary.

That same year 1974, Col. Sally D. Murphy became the U.S. Army's first female helicopter pilot. Col. Murphy joined the Women Army Corps (WACS) in 1972 and entered aviation school in 1974 when women were first accepted. Previously Hanna Reitsch of Germany is recorded as the first woman to earn a helicopter pilot license in 1938.

The U.S. Air Force admitted women to their pilot training program in 1976. But by virtue of existing policies, women pilots were limited to non-combat missions and kept out of the cockpits of combat aircraft from 1976-1993. During that period in 1986, six U.S. Air Force women served as pilots, copilots and boom operators on KC-135 and KC-10 tankers that were used to "refuel" FB-111s during the raid on Libya.

Ironically, during that same period in the 1980s, the USAF trained female pilots of other NATO nations to fly its combat aircraft. Canada, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, and Portugal did not have combat gender exclusion laws and by 1987 Canada had opened all of its aircrew positions to women.

It has been noted that in 1989 women aviators flew during Panama, Grenada and Desert Storm albeit details of their inclusion data seems to be excluded from combat records. But, as the realities of women's roles in the Persian Gulf War became evident, gender-banning statutes were reconsidered.

In March 1991, the year the ban barring women pilots from combat missions would be lifted, Major Marie T. Rossi, was the first woman pilot to die while flying in a combat "zone" when the helicopter she was piloting during Desert Storm, crashed in Saudi Arabia. But thirteen more years would pass until the first American female pilot could fly a combat "mission."

Asian American Lt. Col. Tammy Duckworth was a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Reserve in 1992 and chose to fly helicopters because it was one of the few combat jobs open to women. Duckworth, severely injured in a helicopter crash, was the first female double amputee from the Iraq war.

November 1992 elected a new commander-in-chief in the United States.

December 1992, 2nd Lt. Jeannie Flynn Levitt became the first woman to become a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot. In her class of 15 men and one woman, she graduated first and as such, earned the right to the first choice of an aircraft to fly. She wanted the F-15 Strike Eagle, a combat aircraft. All knew the combat aircraft she wanted and all knew women still were not "allowed" to fly combat aircraft. Her name was called first, she stood and voiced her choice. The Air Force responded, NOT AN OPTION, MAKE ANOTHER SELECTION.

2nd. Lt. Jeannie Flynn Leavitt USAF



April 1993 President Bill Clinton announced that he was ordering the military services to open combat aviation to women and would also ask Congress to repeal the law banning women from serving on Navy warships at sea, the only other gender exclusion statute still on the books. That year, Lt. Kara Hultgreen was selected to be among the first female pilots to undergo F-14 Tomcat training at NAS Miramar, CA.

Summer 1994 Lt. Hultgreen, age 29, became the first "combat qualified" female Naval aviator. In October that same year, Lt. Hultgreen sadly became the first woman combat pilot to die in service when her Tomcat went down into the Pacific Ocean. Albeit 31 male pilots had died in Tomcat accidents, Lt. Hultgreen's gender and its inability to be a combat pilot was cited. Claims were made that the Navy lowered its standards for women, claims disputed by the Navy.

July 2004, thirteen years after the statute barring women from military combat was lifted, U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Martha McSally, took command of the 354th Fighter Squadron and flew an A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft to become the first woman to fly in combat, as well as serve as a squadron commander of a combat aviation squadron.

October 2014, as part of the U.S. led international coalition designed to halt the advance of ISIS, Maj. Mariam Al Mansouri, age 35, the first female fighter pilot in the United Arab Emirates, flying an F-16 "Desert Falcon" fighter jet, led a squadron of UAE F-16 jets over Islamic State strongholds in Syria.

Maj. Al Mansouri, who aspired to be an air force pilot as a teen, served in the UAE army until 2007, the year women were permitted in the Khalifa bin-Zayed Air College of the UAEAF for pilots, where she became the first woman to attend and to graduate.

Geographically, Maj. Al Mansouri's 2014 Syrian bombings took place south of the modern day Turkey/Syria border, as well as south of the northern Turkey/Black Sea border where once stood the 800 BC city of Pontus, home of the amazing Amazon women warriors - Amazing!

Sources: Alice W.W. Parham, The Quiet Revolution: Repeal of the Exclusionary Statutes in Combat Aviation - What We Have Learned from a Decade of Integration, 12 Wm. & Mary J. Women & L. 377 (2006), <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmjowl/vol12/iss2/5>
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