

# Women in aviation: the impact of the past and the hope for the future



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper is to dissect and evaluate the role women have played in aviation from the earliest stages of flight to today's current status. The rise of aviation is, more often than not, always accredited to men, like the Wright Brothers, without the slightest regard for the role women had a part of. It wasn't until the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor that the rise of women in the aviation industry came to light. The roles and responsibilities men possessed during wartime were eagerly passed to the women surrounding them. As if the additional duties weren't enough, these women faced major challenges, such as sexism, cultural stereotypes, and physical limitations, which hindered their growth within the industry. Such setbacks are still present and often ignored in today's aviation society, especially within commercial and military flight. As fast paced as the aviation sector grows, the percentage of women continues to increase at a stagnant rate in comparison to then men within the field. Over the years an abundance of supportive organizations have provided the resources to encourage young women to enter the aviation industry. With these rising opportunities, it's safe to say that the future of flight is female.

*Keywords:* evaluate, aviation, sexism, roles, responsibilities

Women in Aviation: The Impact of the Past and the Hope for the Future

December 17, 1903 has become the universally known day of aviation taking flight, literally. That was the day the Wright Brothers, Orville and Wilbur, made history by flying a self-propelled, heavier-than-air aircraft a distance of one hundred and twenty feet in twenty two seconds. The first successful  
<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-aviation-the-impact-of-the-past-and-the-hope-for-the-future/>

flight used a combination of gasoline power and propeller controls, which allowed the brothers to make a total of four flights that day, increasing distance and time with every flight. Little did the Wright Brothers know that, in just twenty two seconds, the era of aerial transportation and the competition to create bigger and better aircraft would begin.

The birth of aviation captivated dedicated men that spent all of their time and effort designing a diverse range of aircraft models and finding new ways to use them. During this time, women also showed considerable interest in the development of aviation by learning, participating, and enjoying every experience that came their way. Unfortunately, these same intrigued women faced a variety of challenges prohibiting them from succeeding in any career within the aviation industry.

In this day and age, women choosing to pursue careers within aviation isn't as limiting as it has been in the past, but still faces certain setbacks that hinders their full potential in the industry. Resources like supporting organizations and scholarships have promoted increased female participation within aviation but still a list of questions and concerns arise. How have women in aviation, to include mechanics, pilots, etc., impacted the development of the booming industry? Why is it that the rate of female participation within the field continues to be slow? What is being done to counteract this problem? How are these concerns going to affect the future of aviation for women?

## The Rise of Women in Aviation

### Early 1900s

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-aviation-the-impact-of-the-past-and-the-hope-for-the-future/>

The Wright Brothers are credited for the first machine-powered flight, but their sister, Katharine Wright, is rarely recognized for her contributions to the flying invention. Katharine was the one that sought out help from teachers willing to entertain her brothers' experiments. Although it was years later until she finally started flying with her brothers, she was well equipped with the mechanics of their creations. In addition to supporting her brothers emotionally, she funded a large portion of their experiments with her savings. Katharine is considered to be the silent partner of the Wright Brothers.

An early aviation pioneer that became the world's first licensed female pilot in 1910 was Raymonde de Laroche. She is also credited as the first woman to fly a powered, heavier-than-air plane whilst setting new records for distance and altitude, 201 miles and 15, 700 feet respectively. During World War I, de Laroche served as a military chauffeur for officers on the front line. She later tried to achieve her goal of becoming the first female test pilot which regrettably led to her death after crashing upon landing.

Aviation culture shifted after World War I when both men and women were given the opportunity to purchase planes that were decommissioned or created out of surplus. This freedom created self-proclaimed pilots and daredevils that performed dangerous stunts and sparked the beginning of air races and record-breaking flying contests. In the late 1920s women were in the prime working as test pilots or stuntwomen. Female aviators such as Pheobe Fairgrave, Ethel Dare, and Pancho Barnes made recording setting flights involving parachute drops and walking from one plane to another.

The competition of holding woman's flying records for speed and altitude encouraged other women to participate. Aviators like Amelia Earhart, Louise Thaden, Harriet Quimby, and Blanche Scott were constantly challenging other women and always striving for better flights. Earhart, one of the more famous female aviators in history, taught students at Purdue University which was one of the few colleges within the states that offered aviation classes to women. In addition to urging young woman to become pilots, Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic by herself. Louise Thaden won the first women only race, the Women's Air Derby (Powder Puff Derby), which was held as a part of the 1929 National Air Races. Harriet Quimby became the US' first licensed female pilot and Blanche Scott was known for her daredevil stunts and mid-air circuses.

### Impact of Pearl Harbor

Before the start of World War II, the issue of a woman's place in the armed forces was always up for debate. The United States military had the pre-conceived notion that if a woman were to enlist, they would be better suited to fulfill non-combat jobs like nurses, mechanics, drivers, and journalists—just to name a few. It wasn't until December 7, 1941, that the reality of a woman's wartime role emerged with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After the attack, the sons, fathers, and brothers went off to support the war effort, and left the women behind to hold down the fort, both at home and in uniform. Though reluctant to enter the war, the US quickly rose to the occasion and committed to use all valuable assets, to include women. As the men fought downrange, the women proceeded to replace their men in defense plants and even volunteer for other war-related organizations.

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-aviation-the-impact-of-the-past-and-the-hope-for-the-future/>

Nearly 350, 000 women volunteered for various women's auxiliary groups working mostly office and clerical jobs. Some other jobs included driving trucks, repairing airplanes, working as laboratory technicians, rigging parachutes, operating radios, analyzing photographs, test-flying recently repair aircraft, and even training anti-aircraft artillery gunners by acting as flying target. About six thousand women like Patricia W. Malone taught male pilots how to read instruments and navigate the Link Trainer, a flight simulator. Everyday opportunities arose for these hardworking women like getting to work as scientists, analysts, and engineers for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA). Inevitably, sixteen of these brave women were killed from enemy fire and sixty-eight more were captures as Prisoners of War (POWs). Nearly two-thousand combat nurses were award merit decorations, Bronze Stars, and Purple Hearts for their efforts and sacrifices during wartime.

### Challenges and Setbacks

At the end of the war, most of the women, most of whom actually wanted to stay in the industry, were not able to due to the men returning from war to go back to their day jobs. This was just the start of the stream of setbacks women faced during this time.

### References

- Douglas, Deborah G. 1990. " United States Women in Aviation, 1940-1985." *Smithsonian Studies in Air and Space*. 1-142. <https://doi.org/10.5479/si.01977245.7.1>

- Earhart, A. 1977. *The Fun of It: Random Records of My Own Flying and of Women in Aviation*. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?id=OVeXAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Johnson Lewis, J. 2019, April. *A Timeline of Women in Aviation* . Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/women-in-aviation-timeline-3528458>.
- Meyer, D. 1942. "Needed—Women in Aviation" Retrieved from <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015064412888&view=1up&seq=7>
- National WW2 Museum . *History at a Glance: Women in World War II* . Retrieved from <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/women-wwii>
- Sato, C. 2000. Gender and Work in the American Aircraft Industry during World War II. Retrieved from <http://www.jaas.gr.jp/jjas/PDF/2000/No.11-147.pdf>
- Women in Aviation, International (WAI). 2007. Current statistics of women in aviation careers in the U. S. Retrieved from <http://www.wai.org/resources/facts/cfm>
- <http://www.women-in-aviation.com/Books/Biographies/>