

SMS 48

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Tawnie Mizer

COCHRAN, JACQUELINE
1906-1980

Linear ft.: .1
Approx. no. pgs.: 165

Collection Date: 1942-1987

Biographical Note

Jacqueline Cochran was born around May 1906 in Florida to Mary and Ira Pitman, a skilled millwright. There is some dispute concerning her birth and early childhood, as some claim that she was an orphan and the Pitmans were her foster family. She married Robert Cochran in 1920, and the couple divorced shortly after. They had a child that tragically died around five years old. In 1929, she moved to New York City where she became a beautician and later a hairstylist at Saks Fifth Avenue with dreams of starting a cosmetics line. She continued to make inroads into the industry and was making good money. In 1932, on a trip to Miami, she met and married millionaire Floyd Bostwick Odlum, founder and CEO of the Atlas Corp. Soon after, she became interested in flying. Though the exact story of how she became interested is in dispute, she began flying in the early 1930s and obtained her pilot's license three weeks after her instruction.

In 1938, she became the first and only woman to win the Bendix cross-country race, receiving the William Mitchell Memorial Award for the most outstanding contribution to aviation during a given year. At the beginning of the 1940s, she went on to win many accolades and awards for breaking altitude, speed, and aviation records. She set records for being the first woman to break the sound barrier, to fly a jet across the ocean, and to fly a bomber across the Atlantic.

Around this time, she went on to work with Wings for Britain, which sent American military aircraft to the United Kingdom. She also volunteered with the Royal Air Force and the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), which recruited qualified women pilots in US and brought them to Britain to join the ATA. She began to contemplate the idea of a woman's flying division of the U.S. Army Air Force. Women pilots would fly military aircraft in support of non-combat general operations, freeing more men for combat. She prepared a proposal for President Roosevelt, Col. Robert Olds, head of Ferry Command for the Army Air Force, and General Hap Arnold, head of US Army Forces. They asked her to travel to England to observe how female pilots were aiding the British war effort. Upon her return in 1942, General Hap Arnold asked her to organize the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) to train women pilots to handle basic military

flight support. A year later, when America entered World War II, Arnold appointed Cochran as head of women's flight training and officially established the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs). The WASPs consisted of two groups: the aforementioned WFTD and the Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron (WAFS). The WASPs were essential to the war effort by transporting planes overseas, testing military aircraft, teaching aerial navigation, and providing target towing, among other tasks. However, they were disbanded in December 1944 due to complaints of male pilots being put out of work. Under Cochran's direction, the organization grew to over a thousand trained women pilots who delivered approximately 12,650 planes and flew more than 60 million miles in its brief existence. For her efforts, Cochran was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Distinguished Service Medal, the first civilian woman ever to be awarded this honor.

In the 1950s, Cochran continued racing and setting aviation records. She also continued to advocate for women in the US Air Force. She was hired as a magazine reporter to cover postwar issues and was present for many important historical events, including the Japanese surrender in the Philippines and the Nuremberg Trials in Germany. In the 1960s, as the space program was taking form, she began advocating for women to become astronauts; however, the idea never materialized due to the political volatility surrounding the issue. She continued flying and setting speed records as a test pilot for Northrop and Lockheed until the 1970s when she began to suffer from health issues. Jacqueline Cochran died in August of 1980 at home in Indio, California. She was buried in the Coachella Valley Cemetery.

Over the course of her long aviation career, Cochran set many records and amassed many awards. She met and became friends with many famous people and military leaders, including Amelia Earhart, General Hap Arnold, Chuck Yeager—the first man to break the sound barrier—and Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom she convinced to run for president. She was instrumental in advancing the cause of women in aviation. She was inducted into the International Aerospace Hall of Fame in 1965 and the U.S. Aviation Hall of Fame in 1971.

Note: The biographical info was taken from notes in the donor file. A printout of a Wikipedia entry on Jacqueline Cochran and an article on Jacqueline Cochran from the U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission. This can be accessed at https://www.centennialofflight.net/essay/Explorers_Record_Setters_and_Daredevils/cochran/EX25.htm accessed 11/9/21

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains material concerning Jacqueline Cochran and her work founding and directing the Women of Air Force Service Pilots (WASPS). The collection consists of two series. The first series is divided into one folder and the second series is located either in the Gimbel Room or with the Dean of Faculty at USAFA. The collection donation date and donor is unknown.

Series 1) Printed Matter Folder 1 contains final WASPS reports, a finding aid for her collection in the Dwight Eisenhower presidential library, her statement on eliminating sex discrimination for admission into service academies, and a duplicate of Jacqueline Cochran's Oral History transcript. The Original transcript is located in USAFA's Oral history interview collection and index.

Series 2) Artifacts contains a globe located in the Gimble room. Also contains Jacqueline Cochran's military uniform and other military and personal memorabilia from her career, currently on display with the Dean of Faculty.

Keywords and Terms: 1942-1987; World War II; Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPS); H.R. 9832; eliminating sexual discrimination; Jacqueline Cochran Papers; oral history interviews; reports; military uniforms; finding aids

Names: Cochran, Jacqueline; Batson, Nancy; Odlum, Floyd B.

Places: Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS, United States

Arrangement and Description

SERIES ONE PRINTED MATTER

Box 1

Folder 1

"Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), Final Report, 1942-1944," 2 copies, the original put in plastic sleeves, and one copy

Part of a finding aid for the Jacqueline Cochran Papers 1932-1975 collection "Air Transport Auxiliary Series" held at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, KS

Jacqueline Cochran's statement for H.R. 9832 Hearings to "eliminate discrimination based on sex with respect to the appointment and admission of persons to the service academies" July 1975

"P-38 got WASP in society columns" World War II Times Vol. 2 #5 by Nancy Batson Sep 1987

Duplicate copy of Jacqueline Cochran's Oral History interview transcripts. Original is located in USAFA's Oral history interview collection and index

SERIES TWO ARTIFACTS

Located in the Gimbel Room

Globe on a sterling and quartz crystal base, standing 19" high; given to USAFA in honor of Floyd B. Odlum for his significant contribution in making possible the Atlas missile, which took our first man into space.

On display with the Dean of Faculty

Jacqueline Cochran's military uniform and other personal and military memorabilia