

Flightpath in Aviation – Kathy LaSauce

My Flightpath in Aviation was exciting and challenging - but not without some turbulent times. Like any flight unrealistic to expect smooth air and clear blue skies.

Not Barriers but opportunities and challenges:

I viewed problems as temporary headwinds and obstacles as challenges to overcome.

Positive attitude, sense of humor, hard work and determination to succeed - made my journey successful and rewarding.

I experienced the thrill, wonder and beauty of climbing thru and above the clouds - to view the majesty of shining stars and the rising sun.

Played with puffy clouds in a supersonic T-38 and flown to distant lands in the C-141 and VC-135.

I've seen a lot of this world and appreciate the quality of life and freedoms that we, as Americans, enjoy.

On November 20, 1975 Gen David Jones, AF Chief of Staff, announced the Air Force was "embarking on a carefully structured test program for the training and utilization of women as pilots."

ATC proposed on March 1, 1976 for twenty women to enter UPT in two groups of 10 at Williams AFB.

July 12, 1976 women candidates were selected - 15 line officers, 3 from medical branch, one each from AFR and ANG.

UPT was a "test program" and many did not want us to succeed.

- Every flight, test, and visit to the Flight Surgeon was documented and daily reports sent through Command channels to HQ ATC and HQ USAF.

Aircrew Survival /Escape & Evasion Training

- Unsure how to handle women
- As a 28 year old Captain - not good to be the senior ranking individual in a POW situation!!

C-141 Copilot 14 MAS Norton AFB

- **March 1978** Co -Pilot qualified on 10 day 807 Pacific mission
- well accepted by most - in spite of publicity
- Civic Leaders Mission - Col Cassidy & Capt. McNabb (nav) - taxied for the first time LAX/ left seat landing first time return to Norton
- Lack of crew rest accommodations for women made for a few challenges and some memorable moments
- Billeting often separated/isolated from the crew

Or

- Diego Garcia "No Women" - refused guarded lockdown preferred to stay in crew trailer of bunk beds (bottom bunk & borrowed tee shirt) one bathroom for all
- Chambers Hall Billeting (Germany) bathroom between the two rooms. Brushed teeth in shared bathroom sink when alerted for mission

- Woman's voice over radio so unusual - Korean Controller asked "confirm you are a women" easily recognized by other aircraft crew
- For years I was the only female voice heard on the radio and the first woman to land in most pacific locations. (1979 commercial airlines scheduled to move 6 women flight engineers into the copilot seat - domestic air travel.)

Aircraft Commander

- **Feb 1980** 15 day line check throughout the Pacific - so many mechanical malfunctions and weather issues
- Loadmaster told a reporter "only emergency she did not have was ditching in the ocean".

Travis visibility reported clear 7 miles vis - but fogged in required 45 minutes holding pattern

Alaska take-off for Japan smoke and fumes filled cockpit

Bleed valve/hot air from engine stuck full open position melting A/C ducting

Emergency return - icy runway & strong winds - determine how much fuel to dump to safely return to land

Two different take-offs (different locations & aircraft) - abort take offs on runway due to engine malfunctions

Reported Aircraft mechanical problems to Philippine command post - asked "want to declare an emergency?"

- Built my self-confidence but more importantly confidence of fellow crew members in my capabilities.
- Mission Controllers, weather briefers, flight line maintenance & support personnel brief other pilot - though I was a Major and the A/C or IP
- Never took it personally - not accustomed to woman in a Flight Suit, on the aircraft/flight line & over the airwaves.
- Space 'A" passenger saw me in left seat - didn't want to fly. My loadmaster (great sense of humor) told him this would be my first landing

October 1980

ATC Commander Roberts established a cap that limited the number of women allowed to enter UPT to 50 a year (ten at each of the five training bases) 2,300 men trained a year.

At Williams AFB - six classes of women graduated - total 34 earned their pilot wings (eight were eliminated)

Aircraft received: 2 T-38, 5 T-37, 1 T-43, 11 C-141, 11 KC-135, and 1WC-130 50 women completed raining

Total 50 women completed training and 85 currently in training

22 Navigators completed training and 15 in training

My success and career progression was extremely important to future generations of women who wanted to serve their country

- 1981 Flight Engineer/ loadmaster/ & other crew positions opened to enlisted women (prior service)

Instructor Pilot

- **April 1981** upgraded to Instructor Pilot (top 3%)
- My specialized maintenance training/experience an advantage
- Enjoyed instructing other pilots - especially on Aircraft Systems
- Newspaper Article headline "Wrench Bender Flies" - the Maintenance folks in MAC proud
- 1981 One of first Flight Engineers Jackie Mortenson(electrician) assigned to my squadron 14 MAS
- One of the first Loadmasters June Irby (security police) assigned to my squadron
- 1983 Chris Schott (C-9 AC) assigned to my squadron
- I declined request to Command an all-female C-141 crew (once Jackie upgraded to First Engineer & Chris assigned and another FE on base
- Wanted to be accepted and not cause problems for other women

Simulator Instructor /Flight Examiner Pilot

- **March 1982** Wing/Base Stan Evaluation (top 1 %)
- ONLY FE not allowed to be air refueling or CAM qualified "woman"
- C-141 Pleasure to fly!!
- Before GPS and INS - trusted navigator to determine our position with sextant using sun and stars

VC-135 Pilot 1st MAS Andrews AFB

- **Sep 1985** Aircraft Commander Line check (less eventful but no less demanding) than my C-141 A/C check
- 18day around the world (16 Aug - 3 Sep)
- Rep Rodino, Pat Schroeder & House Judiciary Committee
- Required 22 diplomatic clearances
- Last minute clearance into Hanoi required GOLD from embassy to pay for services (on ground 4 hours)
- Alaska, Tokyo Japan, Hong Kong, Beijing China, Seoul Korea, Hanoi Vietnam, Bangkok Thailand, Rangoon Burma, Calcutta India, Delhi India, Agra India, Peshawar Pakistan, Bahrain, Rome Italy, Madrid Spain, and Andrews Washington
- Agra, India limited support on ground 6 hours (Temp 100s) - safety of flight reasons decided flight deck crew remain in shorts & tee shirts keep door closed
- Flight Stewards appropriately dressed - Engine would not start - party watched me under engine in shorts help crew chief & Flight Engineer change the starter
- Rep Rodino so impressed rented small restaurant in Rome Italy - entire crew & party by bus to private dinner.
- One of the other pilots (Dale Grigg) sang Italian Opera (sang at my wedding)

Sophia Bulgaria, Prague Czech, Budapest Hungary, Yugoslavia, Athens Greece, Paris France, Brussels, Amsterdam, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Geneva, Peru, Panama, Ireland, Gander

1988 First Woman to Command an Aerial Port Squadron

1990 First women Air Force pilot selected for promotion to Colonel

Looking for Women pilots - they will either read about the WASPs or Fighter pilots. Anything about my class or women pilots of 1970s/1980s is nowhere to be found - until recently

If I did not succeed:

Woman would not fly combat missions or fighter aircraft

Not qualify as Test pilots or Pilot Astronauts

Opportunities for Air Force in Aviation would be limited

1992 Combat Exclusion Repealed - but AF Chief of Staff Mc Peak spoke out against it and requested a Presidential Commission on Assignment be formed to evaluate???

1992 I retired as a Lt Col (declined promotion to Colonel)

1993 Air Force Instructed by Sec of Defense Aspin to implement policy on assigning women to aircraft engaged in combat

My Advice:

Learn as much as you can about the systems of the aircraft - better able to handle any malfunctions or emergencies

Strive to be the best pilot you can be - but know the limitations of the aircraft & your limitations

Proper rest & preparation vital - your life & life of others in your hands - stay focused & alert

The Air Force Historical Research Agency Dr. Daniel Haulman researcher lists Women Firsts in the Air Force:

- Jul 1971 Brig Gen Jeanne Holm - first BG
- Jun 1973 Maj Gen Jeanne Holm - first MG
- 1993 Maj Susan Helms - first Fighter Pilot & Lt Jeannie Flynn entered F-15 Fighter Training
- Jun 1993 Lt Col Pat Fornes - first Commander Missile Squadron