



• Pilot

Hazel Raines

1916–1956

Inducted 1995

Hazel Raines was the first Georgia woman to earn pilot's licenses, both private and commercial. She rendered brave and sterling service in World War II and the Korean War. Given the lifelong pluck she exhibited, no one would have guessed that she had a weak heart which brought her life to an untimely end at the age of 40. In the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame, she is called "Georgia's First Lady of Flight".

She was born in 1916, in Waynesboro, and spent most of her childhood years in Macon. She graduated from Wesleyan Conservatory in 1936, already nursing dreams of an adventurous career in the air. Without making a fuss about it, she went into flight training soon after graduation and received her private pilot's license in short order. The commercial license with Eastern Airlines came a little later. Her small frame prevented her from reaching all the controls of the largest aircraft from the pilot's seat, but she learned to fly every sort of plane that she could possibly handle.

She did some barnstorming and stunt flying with the Georgia Air Races and Show in her early years. Then came an opportunity, under the Civilian Pilot Training Program, to train pilots for service in the Army and Navy Air Corps. (The Air

Force didn't yet exist as a separate branch of the Armed Services.) This is what she was doing at the time of Pearl Harbor, when the U. S. entered the war.

She was quickly recruited, as one of 25 American women pilots, to serve as a ferry pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary to the RAF in Britain. Perhaps "ferry pilot" sounds like a tame occupation, but it was not. Ferry Pilots flew without guns or ammunition in skies still dominated by the German Luftwaffe. They piloted damaged planes to factories for repair, and brand new

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– Hazel Raines

Spitfires from factories to the RAF airbases. Despite many close calls and having to cope with asthma and a heart condition, Hazel never bailed out of a plane. Once a Spitfire engine failed on her, and she came down on a thatched roof in an English village. Writing home about it, she described the thrill of the villagers on seeing a tiny American girl emerge from the wreckage. She doesn't mention that she was hospitalized for two months after that. Her story is told in a series of letters written to her mother, the late Mrs. Fred Raines of Macon, which will soon be published by members of her family.

Hazel was called back to the U. S. in 1943, to join the newly formed Women's Air Service Pilots – the WASPS – at an airbase in Texas. There she served as a test pilot, trying out damaged and repaired aircraft. As if that weren't dangerous enough, she also pulled flying targets for the training of young gunners using live ammunition.

After the war, Hazel returned to training pilots, this time for the Brazilian Air Ministry. With the outbreak of the Korean War, she was recalled to active duty. First she worked as a recruiter for the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and the Women's Air Force (WAF). Then she was sent on highly secret missions to NATO bases all over Western Europe. (That part of her story is still to be told.) Finally she was assigned to be a staff advisor to young women in the WAF.

She was serving in that capacity in London when she died of a heart attack in 1956. Putting her life on the line had been a pattern for many years. She had written to her Mother in 1942:

"Mother, if only you could know how happy I am when I fly a plane! I never feel so completely close to God as when I'm up in the blue. So if you ever get a message that I've been in a crackup and have been killed, don't grieve for me more than you can possibly help; just know I died the way I wanted to."

Additional Resources

Museum of Aviation
Warner Robins, GA 31088
(478) 926-6870