

The Legacy of Geraldine “Jerry” Hardman Jordan: A Nevada Wing Treasure

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Who am I? What do I want to accomplish in life? Can I really accomplish what I want even with so many hurdles in my way? Do these questions sound familiar? These are questions many young and grown adults ask themselves every day. Every day, we wonder what the end goal is for our lives and what destiny is ours to fulfill. The answer to these questions became apparent one day in 1927, to a young girl named Geraldine “Jerry” Hardman, who would one day become one of Nevada Wing’s Treasures as a famed World War II Women Airforce Service Pilot (WASP).

Geraldine was born in 1922 and grew up in Reno, Nevada. She was only five years old when she knew exactly what she wanted out of her life. While news spread that Charles Lindberg successfully embarked on a flight across the Atlantic ocean, she looked at the skies above and spoke the famed words “That’s what I want to do.”

At 15, she worked countless hours, days, and months to get her flight journey started. She also knew the importance of her grades and often made the semester honor roll at Reno High and graduated early to fill the position of Secretary for the President of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). Without these efforts, she would not have gotten the chance to participate in UNR’s Civil Pilot Training Program. By luck, only 19 slots were filled by the male applicants on campus, so she filled the last slot. Through the program, she achieved her Private Pilot’s license in 1939.

In 1941, the United States entered World War II, and immediately after the events of Pearl Harbor, Jacqueline Cochrane pulled together a group of female pilots to fly for the British Air Transport Auxiliary when the United States Air Army Corps rejected them. A year later, Nancy Harkness Love, guided the first 25 pilots into the new Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) as part of the Women’s Army Corps(WAC). Both Cochrane and Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold were convinced WAFS could not supply enough pilots for the war effort and were not supportive of female pilots entering the WAC because of the limitations on its female pilots. So in that same month that WAFS was formed, Cochrane established the Women’s Flying Training Detachment(WFTD). It was a huge step for female pilots since the pilots in the WFTD did more than just transport aircraft, they also played a huge role in testing and checking new planes. Eventually, on August 5th, 1943, the WAFS and WFTD merged into WASP and this is where Geraldine comes back into the picture.

The war effort called on experienced female pilots to help support the fight. Jerry found herself in the fifth class for WASP training in Sweetwater, Texas. The training was so rigorous, that many of the women washed out; only 1,047 women graduated out of the 25,000 that applied. Geraldine was persistent and focused. She made a name for herself as she and her friends endured over 22 weeks of elite training. Her graduation in 1943 marked a historic day as it led her and her classmates to begin the journey as some of the first female service pilots.

The journey for WASP pilots was never easy and soon enough the arrangement with the US Army Air Foxes ended on December 20, 1944. By that time, Jerry had flown just about everything from Douglas C-47 transports to B-25 "Mitchell" bombers. She eventually resigned from WASP when she became pregnant with her first child but went on to become a member of the Civil Air Patrol's Reno Air Squadron (now Reno Composite Squadron) and supported the local Ninety-Nines chapter.

It was beyond anything for the female WASP pilots to experience going through rough training, enduring constant doubt, biased treatment, and even giving the ultimate sacrifice. When WASP disbanded, they did so with little recognition or fanfare. It was not until the early 1970's that the WASPs would be recognized as veterans and be awarded for their service. In 2010, the WASP pilots were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to make things right. More than 200 WASPs attended the event, many of them wearing their World War II-era uniforms.

Through my research into her life, and understanding her struggles, I have gained knowledge beyond my years. What she was able to accomplish despite her male counterparts and the military telling her she could not simply because she was female is empowering as both a young female pilot and as a fellow Nevada Wing Member. She knew what her goal was at such a young age and never let anything stop her from reaching her dream. Along the way, she paved a path for future generations of all aviators, both male, and female, sending a message to let our passions be strong. I hope by sharing her story, we as members of the Civil Air Patrol can continue to represent and pay forward what pilots like Jerry gave to us today. She continues to inspire and motivate pilots as they push through their challenges so to live their dream.

If you have yet not answered the question of who you are or what your destiny is, just by simply giving your life every single ounce of effort you have, you can accomplish so many things no matter who thinks you can't. Jerry's legacy lives on through us and now it's time to create our own.

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