



## Jacqueline Cochran

*Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)*

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May 4, 1906 - Aug 9, 1980

**BIRTHPLACE:** Pensacola, FL

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### SOLDIER DETAILS

**HIGHEST RANK:** Colonel

**DIVISION:** Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)

**THEATER OF OPERATION:** American

**MILITARY HONORS:** Distinguished Flying Cross  
Legion of Merit  
Distinguished Service Media

**HONORED BY:** The Eisenhower Foundation

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### BIOGRAPHY

Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran was an American pilot and business executive. She pioneered women's aviation as one of the most prominent racing pilots of her generation. She set numerous records and was the first woman to break the sound barrier on 18 May 1953. Cochran (along with Nancy Love) was the wartime head of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) (1943–1944), which employed about 1000 civilian American women in a non-combat role to ferry planes from factories to port cities. Cochran was later a sponsor of the Mercury 13 women astronaut program. After a friend offered her a ride in an aircraft, Cochran began taking flying lessons at Roosevelt Airfield, Long Island in the early 1930s and learned to fly an aircraft in three weeks. She then soloed and within two years obtained her commercial pilot's license. As war in Europe approached, Cochran was one of several women who felt women should be utilized in wartime aviation. In 1941, Cochran selected a group of 27 highly qualified U.S. women pilots to ferry military aircraft in Great Britain for the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), as most male military pilots were flying in combat. In 1942, Cochran, at the request of Army General Henry "Hap" Arnold, organized the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) to train civilian women pilots in anticipation of a similar domestic shortage of American military pilots during World War II. Based first at Houston and then Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas, the WFTD received primary flight training in military aircraft from military instructors. The WFTD soon merged with Nancy Love's Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron (WAFS, a group of experienced pilots) to form the civilian Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) with Cochran as director. From 1943 to 1944, 1,074 women flew over 60 million miles ferrying aircraft and personnel, towing targets, and other transport duties. The WASP flew every military aircraft including Boeing B-17 and B-29 bombers. The WASP were disbanded in 1944, and Cochran was at the center of complications that prevented the group from

being absorbed into the USAAF's Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The WASP finally received retroactive military status in 1977. Jackie Cochran's interest and involvement in politics led to a close friendship with Dwight D. Eisenhower. In February 1952 she helped sponsor a massive rally on General Eisenhower's behalf at Madison Square Garden in New York City. The rally was recorded and Ms. Cochran flew the film to France for a special showing at General Eisenhower's headquarters. The show of support was a major factor in convincing General Eisenhower to run for president in 1952. "Courtesy of the Eisenhower Library and airandspace.si.edu"