

# Jacqueline Cochran

1912–1980



**WHY SHE MADE HISTORY** Jacqueline Cochran was a pioneer in aviation. She was the first female pilot to break the sound barrier. During World War II, she headed the Women Airforce Service Pilots.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Jacqueline Cochran's passion for flying encouraged her to accomplish all that she did.*

Jacqueline Cochran was born in Muscogee, Florida. Both of her parents passed away when she was an infant, so Cochran was raised by foster families. She joined her foster families as they worked in lumber mills. By the age of 15, she had worked in a Georgia cotton mill and had learned how to cut hair in a beauty shop.

After moving to New York in 1932 to work as a beautician, Cochran met her future husband, Floyd Odlum, a banker and **industrialist**. It was through Odlum that Cochran was introduced to aviation. Soon she took her first flying lesson, and shortly thereafter she received her pilot's license. Cochran began entering air races and competitions and was usually the only woman to compete.

In 1935, while Jacqueline Cochran's career as a pilot was taking off, she also started her own cosmetics business. It grew quickly and soon included a chain of beauty shops, a lab, and outlet locations all over America. To manage her business, Cochran simply flew her plane to her destinations, traveling as much as 90,000 miles a year.

In 1937 alone, Cochran set three records for speed and was awarded the Harmon trophy as the outstanding woman aviator of the year. Cochran



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## VOCABULARY

**industrialist** a person who owns, controls, or has an important position in the management of an industrial enterprise

**Distinguished Service Medal** awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces for exceptional service to the government

became the first woman to pilot a B-17 Bomber to England. At the request of the U.S. military, she recruited 25 female pilots to ferry bombers across the Atlantic, freeing male pilots to fly front-line missions. In 1943 Cochran was named head of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). She managed over 1,000 women who worked to fly aircraft for service in Europe. She was the first civilian woman to receive the **Distinguished Service Medal**.

After the war, Cochran became a test pilot for jet airplanes. She became the first woman to break the sound barrier in 1953. She continued to set aviation records, including being the first woman to fly at twice the speed of sound (1960) and setting the women's world speed record of 1,429 miles per hour (1964).

Jacqueline Cochran was inducted into the International Aerospace Hall of Fame in 1965 and into the U.S. Aviation Hall of Fame in 1971. At the time of her death in 1980, she held more aviation records than any other pilot in the United States.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What were two of Jacqueline Cochran's greatest accomplishments?

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2. **Analyze** How were the WASPs an integral part of World War II?

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### ACTIVITY

3. Use an encyclopedia or online resource to research one of the awards Jacqueline Cochran received. Find out more about another aviator who received the award and write down three facts about that person.