

## Women in War

The idea of women in war combat is not new. The Amazons of Greek mythology, the Viking women, Molly Pitcher in the American Revolution, Pauline Cushman in the American Civil War, the Russian women's battalions during the Russian Revolution, and all of the women that served and helped fight two world wars were known for their courage. Their stories are often lost in the major battles and events.

During World War II, a group of women did a valuable service to the side of democracy. They were the WASPs who flew and trained male pilots. They ferried planes to the war effort in Europe across the Atlantic Ocean, allowing male pilots to fly missions over Germany. Two of these women were Dorothea Johnson Moorman and Dora Daughterly Strother, who played an important part in the war effort. The new and bigger Boeing B-29 Superfortress was being placed in service with little of the testing that the Flying Fortress B-17 had. The length of the B-17 was 103 feet and 9 inches, with a wingspan of 74 feet and 9 inches. The B-29 was 99 feet, with a wingspan of 141 feet and 3 inches—a much bigger plane than any before. The B-29 had a number of problems to work out. A major one was that the engines would catch fire sometimes before taking off. The flight training commander—Lt. Col. Paul Tibbets, who flew the Enola Gay—was getting resistance from the new male pilots who did not want to fly the B-29 because of its problems.



In June of 1944, Lt. Col. Tibbets put a plan in place with the two WASPs. He trained them how to fly the B-29 without telling them of the problems, and after four days of training, they were ready. Tibbets had them fly B-29s from Birmingham, Alabama, to Clovis, New Mexico, with male crews. If two women could fly the plane, so could the new male pilots. That little

stunt did not sit well with the upper levels of the military. Orders were sent down the line that women were not to fly B-29s anymore.

The war in Europe had won control of the skies by late 1944, and the demand for pilots diminished. The WASPs were disbanded faster than they were formed. While they were active as flying officers, they did not get the distinction of Army officers or military rank. They were still civilians in uniform. After the war, veterans organizations did not recognize them as veterans. Those B-29 Superfortresses were the planes that dropped Fat Man and Little Boy on Japan, ending the war.

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