



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



August 2023 Her Story ENewsletter Armed Services Leaders

In July 2023, it was announced that Admiral Lisa Franchetti was going to be nominated as the Chief of Naval Operations. If confirmed, this would make her the first woman to be a Pentagon service chief and the first female member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In August 2023, Franchetti will become the acting Navy Chief. The second woman to be promoted to four-star admiral in the United States Navy, Franchetti was a member of the Naval ROTC while she was a student at Northwestern University. She was commissioned in 1985 and has risen steadily through the ranks. Franchetti stands on the shoulders of other women leaders in the military and associated with the military including Jackie Cochran and Sheila Widnall.



The efforts of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (**WASPs**) were significant during World War II. The WASPs, over 1,000 strong, flew American military aircraft in noncombat service missions during the war. They were the first women trained to fly military aircraft. Regrettably, during the war they were not treated fairly. They had to pay for their own uniforms and transport. After the war they did not receive Veteran's benefits. It wasn't until 2009 that President Obama signed legislation awarding the WASPs the Congressional Gold Medal.



The WASPs were led by Lieutenant Colonel **Jacqueline (Jackie) Cochran**. Cochran earned her pilot's license in 1932 and associated with Amelia Earhart, among others. In 1934, she entered her first air race. In June 1941, Cochran became the first woman to pilot a bomber across the Northern Atlantic. In 1942, as Director of Women's Flying Training for the United States, she welcomed the first class of women pilots at the Houston Airport. In 1943, she was appointed to the General Staff to oversee all operations of the WASPs. The first woman to enter Japan after World War II, in 1953, she became the first woman to break the sound barrier. The first woman inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame, Cochran has also been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



The first female Secretary of the Air Force and the first woman to lead an entire military branch in the Department of Defense, aeronautical engineer **Sheila Widnall** was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1993. Widnall received all three of her degrees from MIT; she was named an Institute Professor in 1998. Her research has focused on fluid dynamics, especially in the areas of aircraft turbulence and spiraling airflows. In addition to her election to the National Academy of Engineering and numerous other awards, Widnall has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Jackie Cochran and Sheila Widnall are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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