



Smithsonian
National Air and Space Museum

Military Women Aviators Oral
History Initiative (MWAOHI)

Arranged, described, and encoded by Patti Williams, 2020.

2020

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Lieutenant Colonel Olga Custodio (Retired).....	4
Series 2: Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Deal.....	5
Series 3: Lieutenant Commander Tammy Duckworth (Retired).....	6
Series 4: Lieutenant Colonel Connie Engel (Retired).....	7
Series 5: Lieutenant General Stayce Harris (Retired).....	8
Series 6: Major General Jeannie Leavitt.....	9
Series 7: Colonel Abigail Linnington (Retired).....	10
Series 8: Colonel Nicole Malachowski (Retired).....	11
Series 9: Captain Patricia McFetridge (Retired).....	12
Series 10: Commander Claudia McKnight (Retired).....	13
Series 11: Colonel Sally Murphy (Retired).....	14
Series 12: Captain Joellen Oslund (Retired).....	15
Series 13: Lieutenant Commander Tammie Shults.....	16
Series 14: Lieutenant General Jacqueline Van Ovost.....	17
Series 15: Captain Lucy Young (Retired).....	18
Series 16: Colonel Kim "K. C." Campbell.....	19

Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	Military Women Aviators Oral History Initiative (MWAOHI)
Identifier:	NASM.2020.0005
Date:	2019-2020
Extent:	0.97 Cubic feet (2 letter document boxes.)
Language:	English
Summary:	This collection consists of interviews and related documents for each of the military pilots selected for The Military Women Aviators Oral History Initiative (MWAOHI).

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Monica Smith for NASM, Transfer, 2020, NASM.2020.0005

Processing Information

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Biographical / Historical

The Military Women Aviators Oral History Initiative (MWAOHI) was conceived by former National Air and Space Museum Verville Fellow, Lieutenant Colonel Monica Smith (Retired) in July 2018. Fifteen veteran women aviators participate in MWAOHI: five participants from the United States Air Force, five from the United States Army, four from the United States Navy, two from the United States Coast Guard

(both also flew in the Army), and one from the United States Marine Corps. Five are among the first military women to earn wings, seven are combat aircraft and/or combat zone aviators, and three are flag officers. The interviewees are as follows: Lieutenant Colonel Olga Custodio (Retired); Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Deal; Lieutenant Commander Tammy Duckworth (Retired); Lieutenant Colonel Connie Engel (Retired); Lieutenant General Stayce Harris (Retired); Major General Jeannie Leavitt; Colonel Abigail Linnington (Retired); Colonel Nicole Malachowski (Retired); Captain Patricia McFetridge (Retired); Commander Claudia McKnight (Retired); Colonel Sally Murphey (Retired); Captain Joellen Oslund (Retired); Lieutenant Commander Tammie Shults; Lieutenant General Jacqueline Van Ovost; and Captain Lucy Young (Retired). Additionally, a sixteenth interview of Colonel Kim "K. C." Campbell was conducted in January of 2020 by NASM curator Michael Hankins.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of the following digital assets: video, audio, photographs, and pdf files for each of the women interviewed by the The Military Women Aviators Oral History Initiative (MWAOHI). There is also a folder for each interviewee which contains a printed copy of the transcript and other related documentation.

Arrangement

Arrangement is alphabetically by interviewee's last name.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Aeronautics
- Oral history
- Transcripts
- Video recording
- Women and the military

Names:

- Campbell, Kim
- Custodio, Olga E.
- Deal, Sarah M.
- Duckworth, Tammy, 1968-
- Engel, Connie
- Harris, Stayce D.
- Leavitt, Jeannie Marie Flynn
- Linnington, Abigail
- Malachowski, Nicole M. E.
- McFetridge, Patricia A.
- McKnight, Claudia
- Murphy, Sally Dale
- Oslund, Joellen M. Drag

Shults, Tammie Jo, 1961-
Van Ovost, Jacqueline Desiree
Young, Lucy

Container Listing

Series 1: Lieutenant Colonel Olga Custodio (Retired)

Olga Estelle Nevarez Custodio was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Unsuccessful in her pioneering attempt to enter the ROTC program in 1969, Custodio persevered, receiving her Air Force commission in 1980 at her Officer Training School graduation. 2Lt Custodio completed U.S. Air Force Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laughlin Air Force Base, TX in Feb 1981. Graduating in the top 5% of Class 81-05, Custodio was the first woman T-38 instructor at Laughlin. Later, she became the first woman T-38 Pilot Instructor Training (PIT) instructor at Randolph AFB (1983), where she trained the instructor pilots. Custodio flew a number of first flights for women, including an all-female T-38 four-ship formation over the Indianapolis Motor Speedway on May 22, 1983. Custodio transferred to the Air Force Reserve in 1988 and became a pioneering commercial airline pilot. Lieutenant Colonel Olga Custodio retired from the Air Force Reserve in 2003.

Box 1, Folder 1 1: Transcript of interview

Box 1, Item 1 2: Recording of Interview

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Deal

Sarah Deal is the first United States Marine Corps woman aviator. Sworn into the Corps on March 16, 1991, the Kent State University graduate entered Officer Candidate School on June 10, 1991, then graduated from The Basic School in February 1993. Deal was enrolled in air traffic control school when Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced a change to Department of Defense policy regarding the restrictions to women flying in combat. Deal applied for flight training. Sarah Deal earned her wings on April 21, 1995 . She flies the CH-53E "Super Sea Stallion" and deployed twice to Japan (1996 and 1998), the USS Boxer (2003), and Resolute Support Headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan (2017-18). Deal asked to leave active duty for the Reserve in 2003. As of September 2019, Deal continues to serve in the Marine Forces Reserve as a lieutenant colonel.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Lieutenant Commander Tammy Duckworth (Retired)

Ladda Tammy Duckworth was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve while pursuing her PhD at Northern Illinois University. She entered flight training at Fort Rucker, AL in 1993 and later deployed in support of the following Operations: Bright Star, New Horizons, and Iraqi Freedom. On November 12, 2004, CPT Duckworth was flying as a UH-60 Blackhawk copilot when a Rocket-Propelled Grenade exploded, severely injuring both of her legs and her right arm, requiring a battlefield evacuation. Despite a remarkable recovery, and a demonstrated ability to pilot the aircraft in the simulator, her injuries rendered her nondeployable. Duckworth served a total of 23 years in the Army Reserve and the Illinois National Guard, retiring in 2014 at the rank of lieutenant colonel. Senator Duckworth is the first disabled woman veteran to be elected to the House of Representatives (2012) and the Senate (2016).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Lieutenant Colonel Connie Engel (Retired)

Connie J. Engel was the class leader, a Distinguished Graduate, and was awarded the ATC Commander's Trophy of Class 77-08, the first U.S. Air Force Undergraduate Pilot Training class to include women. Engel, along with the male and female members of Class 77-08, earned their wings on September 2, 1977. Engel entered the Air Force on November 4, 1971 as a nurse and later became the only OB-GYN nurse practitioner in the entire Air Force. After pilot training, she flew T-38s: first, as an instructor pilot at Williams AFB, AZ, then at Edwards AFB, CA, supporting a wide variety of flight test missions. Engel entered the Air Force Reserve in 1984 and retired in 1995 as a lieutenant colonel. Connie Engel, as a member of the first class of women Air Force pilots, was a 2016 inductee into the Women in Aviation Pioneers Hall of Fame.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Lieutenant General Stayce Harris (Retired)

Stayce Harris earned her commission from the University of Southern California Air Force ROTC detachment, entering active duty in April 1982. Harris rose to the rank of Lieutenant General, as the first Reservist to earn a third star beyond the position of Chief of the Air Force Reserve. Harris was the Air Force's second African American woman pilot; she became the U.S. military's highest-ranking African American woman pilot. General Harris served as the Mobilization Assistant to the commanders of three organizations with global reach: US Africa Command, 18th Air Force, and Air Mobility Command. Harris' many firsts include the first Black woman to command the following: a flying squadron, a flying wing, and a Numbered Air Force. She was also the first African American Assistant Vice Chief of Staff, Air and Director of the Air Staff. Lieutenant General Stayce Harris was the Inspector General of the Air Force before retiring March 1, 2019. General Harris is a 2017 Women in Aviation Pioneer Hall of Fame Inductee.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Major General Jeannie Leavitt

Jeannie M. Leavitt is the first U.S. military woman certified to pilot a fighter aircraft. Born and raised Jeannie Flynn in St Louis, MO, she earned her commission through Air Force ROTC as a 1990 Distinguished Graduate at the University of Texas, graduating summa cum laude. After completing a master's degree at Stanford University (1991), Leavitt began her military career at Laughlin AFB, TX in early 1992. One year later, she was a Distinguished Graduate, finishing at the top of UPT Class 93-04; she also received the ATC Commander's Trophy. After gender-restrictive DoD policy changed, the Air Force granted Leavitt her first aircraft choice: an F-15E Strike Eagle. She completed F-15E training at Luke AFB, AZ in April 1994. Leavitt is also the first woman fighter track graduate of the Air Force Weapons School (June 1998), where she later instructed. General Leavitt has commanded a flying squadron, two fighter wings, and worked in a variety of staff assignments. Major General Leavitt assumed command of the Air Force Recruiting Service in June 2018.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Colonel Abigail Linnington (Retired)

Abigail Linnington entered the United States Military Academy at West Point on July 1, 1991. She was commissioned a second lieutenant on June 3, 1995, then completed Initial Entry Rotary Wing training at Fort Rucker, AL in 1996. Linnington flew the OH-58A Kiowa at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, GA before competitively transitioning to the UH-60 Blackhawk in the late 1990s. She completed the Advanced Course at Fort Rucker from 1999-2000, then rotated to Korea where she commanded a UH-60 command and control VIP support company. Colonel Linnington taught at West Point, worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, directed the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Action Group, and was a Senior Fellow at the National Defense University before retiring from the Army in November 2019.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 8: Colonel Nicole Malachowski (Retired)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 9: Captain Patricia McFetridge (Retired)

Patricia Ann McFetridge is the first woman in the U.S. Coast Guard to be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the first woman to command USCG Air Station Borinquen. After taking flying lessons from her father, she earned her private pilot's license in 1980. She graduated from SJSU in 1981 and enlisted in the Army as a PFC on March 17, 1982. She joined the Warrant Officer Flight Training class 82-43 in July, and earned her Army wings in May 1983. McFetridge flew the UH-1 in South Korea, and the UH-1 and OH-58 at Fort Hood before joining the Utah Army National Guard in 1987. Accepting a direct commission into the Coast Guard in 1989, McFetridge flew a variety of rotary and one fixed-wing aircraft at assignments in Alaska, California, Florida, North Carolina, and Puerto Rico. Captain McFetridge served as Liaison to the FAA until her June 2019 retirement.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 10: Commander Claudia McKnight (Retired)

Claudia Van McKnight logged 4,800 hours as an Army and Coast Guard pilot from 1985-2008. She entered the Army from ROTC in 1984, was an Honor Graduate of Initial Entry Rotary Wing class 85-24, then flew UH-1 helicopters in Germany before returning to Fort Rucker as an IERW instructor pilot. McKnight applied for the US Coast Guard Direct Commission Aviator program and was sworn into the Coast Guard on October 1, 1990. While assigned to North Bend, Oregon, McKnight flew the HH-65 on search and rescue and medevac missions, and she also deployed to Alaska for fisheries enforcement. As the Engineering Officer, McKnight flew Arctic (AWS-96) and Antarctic (DF-98) missions in the HH-65 with the Polar Operations Division out of Mobile, AL. Other deployments (from Port Angeles, WA) included a drug interdiction mission aboard USCG Cutter Mellon off Central America. Additionally, McKnight flew more than 800 hours in the HU-25 Falcon jet while stationed at Cape Cod, MA. Commander McKnight retired in Aug 2008 after 24 years of service.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 11: Colonel Sally Murphy (Retired)

Sally Woolfolk Murphy entered the Women's Army Corps by direct appointment in 1972 and reported for duty at Anniston, AL in January 1973. While training as a cryptographer, the Army opened flight school to women, and Murphy applied. On June 4, 1974, 2LT Sally Murphy graduated from Initial Entry Rotary Wing Class 74-14 at Fort Rucker, AL, becoming the Army's first woman aviator. After flying TH-55s, OH-58s, and UH-1s during training, Murphy was assigned to a Guardrail unit in Germany, flying the RU-21 and serving as the battalion intelligence officer (S2). As a Military Intelligence officer, she flew the UH-1 and commanded the 78th AVN Bn (Provisional) at Camp Zama, Japan. At the Pentagon, Murphy served on the Army Staff where she authored the first Joint Requirements document for unmanned aerial vehicles. On the Joint Staff, LTC Murphy was a team chief in the National Military Joint Intelligence Center. After completing Army War College, Colonel Murphy served on the Army Staff as the G-2 Congressional Liaison before retiring on July 1, 1999.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 12: Captain Joellen Oslund (Retired)

Joellen Drag Oslund was one of eight women selected in 1972 to enter Navy flight training. She enlisted in January 1973 and received her commission through Women Officer School in May. Oslund earned her "Wings of Gold" in 1974, becoming the Navy's first woman helicopter pilot, and the Navy's fourth woman aviator. Oslund was one of six plaintiffs in the *Owens v. Brown* suit (1978 decision) that successfully challenged the Navy's gender-restrictive assignment policies. She was the first woman helicopter aircraft commander, the first woman aviator assigned duty aboard a Navy ship, and the first Navy woman Combat Search and Rescue aircraft commander. She transitioned to the Navy Reserve in November 1979. Captain Oslund retired in 1998, after 25 years of service.

Captain Oslund, as a member of the first class of women Naval Aviators, was a 2017 Inductee into the Women in Aviation Pioneer Hall of Fame.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 13: Lieutenant Commander Tammie Shults

Tammie Jo Shults was a pioneering US Navy aviator, and among the first women to fly tactical fighter jets. Graduating from AOCS class 1685 on 21 Jun 1985, Shults entered flight training at NAS Corpus Christi, flying the T-34, then the T-2 and A-4 at NAS Beeville, TX , graduating second in her class. She was the only woman in her squadron during T-34, T-2, and A-4 training. Shults earned her Wings of Gold on April 17, 1987, and was selectively retained as a T-2 instructor. Her assignments included NAS Chase Field in Beeville, TX, and NAS Lemoore and Point Mugu in California. She was assigned to VAQ-34 when Captain Rosemary Mariner was the commanding officer. Shults and Pam Lyons encountered intense opposition when they transitioned to become the Navy's first women F/A-18 pilots. Shults entered the Navy Reserve in a non-flying capacity in March 1993, and the airlines in 1994. Lieutenant Commander Tammie Jo Shults resigned her commission and separated from the Navy Reserve in March 1995. On April 17, 2018, as a B-737 Southwest Airlines pilot, Captain Shults led SWA 1380 to a safe landing after a catastrophic engine failure caused a rapid decompression.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 14: Lieutenant General Jacqueline Van Ovost

Lieutenant General Jacqueline Van Ovost is the fourth Air Force woman test pilot; she has logged over 4,200 hours in more than twenty different types of aircraft. She grew up around aviation, earned her private pilot's license at 17, and became commercial and instructor rated at 18. She is a 1988 U.S. Air Force Academy graduate, a distinguished graduate of class 89-12 from Air Force undergraduate pilot training, and a member of class 93B from the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base, CA. Van Ovost has commanded a KC-135 tanker squadron and two flying wings, including the presidential airlift wing at Joint Base Andrews. General Van Ovost served as Vice Director of the Joint Staff before joining the Air Staff; she is currently the Director of the Air Staff at the Pentagon.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 15: Captain Lucy Young (Retired)

Captain Lucy B. Young earned her wings in Oct 1977 and became the Navy's first woman TA-4J Skyhawk instructor in May 1981. She earned her carrier qualification aboard the USS Lexington in May 1982. Young left active duty for the Navy Reserve in July 1983, where she flew C-9s. She joined an airline in May 1986. In 1991, Young, along with other naval women aviators, lobbied congressional staffers in a successfully effort to repeal the Combat Exclusion Law. Young amassed approximately 20,000 flight hours (including 4,163 military hours) in T-28, T-44, TA-4J, C-9, B-727, B-737, B-757/767, Airbus 320, and civilian craft, including Gulfstream, Maule, and Piper aircraft as the FAA's first woman test pilot. Captain Young retired from the Navy Reserve on Aug 1, 1998, and she retired from American Airlines on Sept 9, 2019, after 33 years of service.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 16: Colonel Kim "K. C." Campbell

Colonel Kim N. Campbell is the Chair, Airpower Innovation & Integration, Department of Military and Strategic Studies, U.S. Air Force Academy. Colonel Campbell was commissioned in 1997 as a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy with a Bachelor of Science degree in space operations. She is a Marshall Scholar with two master's degrees, one in business administration from the University of London, and one in international security studies from the University of Reading, England. Colonel Campbell is qualified as an instructor pilot and flight examiner in the A-10, a ground attack and close air support aircraft. Her operational assignments include duty as a flight commander, A-10 test program manager and division commander, director of operations, squadron commander, and group commander. She has also served as Air Force Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and as Military Assistant to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. She is a command pilot with over 1,700 hours in the A-10, including 375 combat hours. She has flown combat missions in Operation Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

This interview was the sixteenth interview, and conducted in January of 2020 by NASM curator Michael Hankins.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)