

Grade 7 - Informational

Evelyn Sharp 1919–1944

How often have you looked up and seen the trails of jet planes as they fly through the blue sky? Today, we take plane travel for granted. The sight of an airplane is common in the world today. There was a time in the United States, however, when a plane passing overhead brought people out of their homes, stores, and offices to catch a glimpse of it.

A Talent for Flying

In the 1930s, Evelyn Sharp, a young girl from Ord, Nebraska, became a pioneering aviator. Sharp's interest in flying began when a person staying at her family's boarding house gave Sharp flying lessons.

Sharp loved to fly. She showed an aptitude for flying. At the age of 16, Sharp earned an amateur pilot's license. Even though Sharp had a license to fly, her family was unable to help purchase a plane. Some business people from Ord raised money to make a down payment on an aircraft for Sharp. Sharp wanted to work to pay back the business people who helped her.

The Beginnings of a Career

Now that Sharp had a plane, she had a way to earn money. At 18, she became the youngest person in the history of the United States to receive a commercial pilot's license.

Sharp earned money by barnstorming at county fairs and rodeos in Nebraska and neighboring states. In those days, barnstorming meant pilots would fly to an event, perform aerial shows with stunt flying, and offer people the chance to purchase a plane ride.

Sharp began another endeavor when she became one of the youngest airmail pilots in the history of the United States Postal Service. She delivered mail from Ord to Grand Island in the central part of Nebraska.

Making Advancements in the Aviation Field

In 1939, the United States government was concerned about the outbreak of war in Europe. Qualified pilots were needed to train future aviators. In a time when women were not typically considered for positions like this, Sharp became a flight instructor. She trained more than 350 men to become pilots at bases in South Dakota and California.

Sharp's greatest contribution to aviation began when the United States Army Air

Corps formed a unit of women pilots. The unit was formed due to a shortage of male pilots who were stationed overseas. The job of a United States Army Air Corps woman pilot was to transport military planes from U.S. factories to shipping points all over the country.

Passing the Requirements

Being a woman pilot for the United States Army Air Corps was not easy. A woman needed a commercial pilot's license and a multitude of hours of flying experience. She had to be able to pass a physical exam and complete a number of other tests successfully. Despite Sharp's young age, she was in the first group of women chosen to perform services for the United States Army Air Corps.

An exact count of how many aircraft the women pilots of the United States Army Air Corps flew during the war is unknown. These women pilots were able to fly every type of military plane during that time period. A hero to the end, Sharp's service to her country ended with a crash in 1944. Sharp did not survive. At the time of her death, she was a squadron commander. After three more flights, she would have received the highest certificate available to women at that time.

Remembering a Great Aviator

Today, women pilots fly all types of aircraft. It is important to remember that Evelyn Sharp was a pioneer in her field who followed her dreams and paved a trail for thousands of women pilots who came after her.

Sharp continues to be honored by the city of Ord. A portion of the highway running through the town is called Evelyn Sharp Road, the local airstrip is named Sharp Field, and Evelyn Sharp Day is celebrated each year.

Timeline of Events in Evelyn Sharp's Life

1919	born in Montana
1924	moves to Ord, Nebraska
1935	receives first flying lesson
1936	becomes youngest American female pilot
1938	earns money by barnstorming at county fairs
1940	teaches Civilian Pilot Training Program
1942	joins the Women's Auxiliary Female Squadron (WAFS)