The Careers of the first four Female Naval Aviators in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Women in Naval Aviation

The history of the first four women to go through the pilot program

**Barbara Allen Rainey**

She was the first of her class to earn her Gold Wings and was designated the first female naval aviator in history in ceremonies at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas, on February 22, 1974. She was assigned to fly C-1s in Alameda, California with a transport squadron and became the first jet qualified woman in the U. S. Navy flying the T-39.

Allen married John C. Rainey, whom she had met during her flight training. While pregnant with her first daughter, she transferred to the Naval Reserve in November 1977. She remained active in the Naval Reserves and while pregnant with her second daughter, qualified to fly the R6D (DC-6).

1981, with the Navy experiencing a shortage of flight instructors, she was accepted for recall to active duty as a flight instructor and was assigned to Training Squadron Three (VT-3) based at Naval Air Station Whiting Field, flying the T-34C Mentor. On July 13, 1982, Allen, along with her trainee Ensign Donald Bruce Knowlton were practicing touch-and-go landings at Middleton Field near Evergreen, Alabama, when the aircraft banked sharply, lost altitude, and crashed. Allen and Knowlton were both killed in the crash. Barbara is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

**Rosemary Bryant Mariner**

Rosemary Bryant Mariner joined the Naval service in 1973 after being selected as one of the first eight women to enter military pilot training. She was designated a naval Aviator in June 1974, one of the first six women to earn their wings as a United States Naval Aviator. Mariner was among the first female military aviators to fly tactical jet aircraft, the A-4E/L Skyhawk, in 1975. In 1976, she converted to the A-7E Corsair II, the first woman to fly a front-line light attack aircraft.

In 1990 Mariner became the first military woman to command an operational aviation squadron and was selected for major aviation shore command. During Operation Desert Storm, she commanded Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron Thirty Four (VAQ-34). Mariner was president of the Women Military Aviators organization from 1991 to 1993. Mariner retired after twenty-four years of military service, a veteran of seventeen carrier landings with over 3500 military flight hours in fifteen different naval aircraft.
Judith Neuffer Bruner

She was the first female Navy pilot to fly through a hurricane, and ultimately attained the rank of Navy Captain. She currently serves as a senior manager at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, where she has led numerous large programs. Neuffer was assigned to the P-3 aircraft commonly used for submarine patrol and weather surveillance, including hurricane reconnaissance. She was the first female to fly the P-3. During her Navy flying career, Neuffer logged several thousands of hours piloting the P-3, and became the first female P-3 Aircraft Commander and the first woman to pilot an aircraft through the eye of a hurricane.

Judy Neuffer Bruner served a total of 28 years in the United States Navy. During her 10 years on active duty, her tour included numerous flying assignments and a tour at The Pentagon. During her 18 years in the Naval Reserves, Judy held three Commanding Officer positions and also served as the Director of the Navy’s Science and Technology Reserve Program. She received numerous Navy awards including four Meritorious Service Medals and the Navy Commendation Medal. Neuffer retired from the United States Navy in 1998 having attained the rank of Captain.

Bruner began her career with NASA in 1981, working first as a contractor for UNISYS Corporation as a Senior Systems Analyst on the Hubble Space Telescope mission. Judy formally joined NASA in 1989 working two years as the ground system Implementation Manager on the Earth Observing System satellite missions. Judy was then selected to head the Spacecraft Control Center Branch. In this capacity, Judy was assigned the responsibility for the development and implementation of all satellite control centers for missions at the Goddard Space Flight Center.

Jane Skiles O’Dea

She was designated a naval Aviator in April 1974, one of the first six women to earn their wings as Navy pilots. During her naval career, O'Dea spoke of her frustration with Congressional mandates that prevented military women from serving in combat. Because of the no-combat rules, the female pilots' opportunities for career advancement were somewhat limited. "It's very discouraging to know the best you can play on is the junior varsity team no matter how good you are," she said in a 1984 interview.

O'Dea retired from the Navy with the rank of Captain on April 11, 1997. She had logged over 3,000 hours in the C-130, C-1A, T-34, and EC-130Q while assigned to VR-24, VT-2, USS Lexington (AVT-16), and VQ-4.