

Paton Field Centennial Moment—October

Aviatrices at Paton Field

The airport's history includes female aviators who distinguished themselves and served as models for others.

Frankie Renner



Rick & Karolyn Gardner
Collection

After learning to fly at Stow Field in 1929 and being among the first in the area to qualify for her various licenses, Renner's role at Robbins Flying Service grew. She instructed at Akron's Aviation College, assisted in the demonstration and sale of Waco airplanes, and regularly performed acrobatics at area fairs. She received notoriety in 1931 when she made a courageous, but failed, altitude record attempt. At Stow Field, she experienced two hangar fires and served as its last airport manager. Renner's prominence as a female aviator highlighted new roles women could play. She was reported to have said that "women will eventually drive airplanes as casually as they now drive automobiles."

Mary Sherriff



Stubbs Family Collection

A decade later, Mary Sherriff was one of the four women first accepted into Kent State's federal Civil Pilot Training Program (CPTP). Her skill at flying led to her being the first woman to solo at Kent State and the first in Ohio to earn her private pilot license through the CPTP. Although women were included in CPTP classes, they were disparaged by many instructors for lacking the necessary temperament. Sherriff was seen as an exception. Wishing to continue with a career in aviation, she pursued becoming a stewardess, as women were not hired as pilots. Sherriff took a position with Pennsylvania Central Airlines, the only airline that at that time did not require stewardesses to be nurses.

Ruth Sitler



Kent State University Airport

Ruth Sitler learned to fly through the KSU Flying Club, earning her license in 1964. Sitler was a member of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of female pilots. Flying in a Cessna 172 in the Powder Puff Derby in 1959, she and her partner finished third in the small plane category. Her work as a flight instructor at Kent State led to Sitler being named a Master Flight Instructor by the National Association of Flight Instructors in 1990. Her Ph.D. dissertation explored gender differences in learning to fly and cited role models "as one of the avenues to learn and reinforce skills needed for combating sexism." Ruth Sitler was herself a role model for many.

Lt. Col. Sarah Deal Burrow ('92)



United States Marine Corps

Sarah Deal Burrow made history by becoming the US Marines' first female pilot. As a flight student, she worked the flight line at the airport, was a member of the Precision Flight Team, and was a flight instructor. Along with fellow students, Burrow protested the threat to end the flight program in 1989-90. After graduation, she was the first woman selected by the Marines to attend flight training, earning her "wings of gold" as a naval aviator in 1995 and promotion to first lieutenant. Her deployments have included the Middle East and Afghanistan. She flies the Super Stallion CH-53 helicopter. Burrow's advice to others: "Be strong. Do your job. Don't expect anything special. And...know who your friends are."

Capt. Stephanie Malby Johnson ('91)

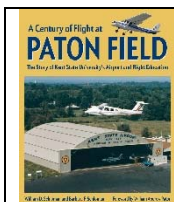


Stephanie Malby Johnson
Collection

Stephanie Malby Johnson followed her dream to fly and is now Delta's first female African American captain. As a flight student, she joined in protesting the shutdown of the flight program in 1990. Following an internship with United Airlines and then graduation, she worked as a flight instructor. She was hired as an airline pilot with Mesa Airlines in 1995. Johnson joined Northwest Airlines as their first female African American pilot in 1997. After Northwest's merger with Delta, Johnson was a first officer on the 757/767 and then became Delta's first female African American captain in 2016. She is active in the Aviation Career Education Academy, working to introduce diverse students to opportunities in aviation and aerospace.

DID YOU KNOW?

Growing enrollment in 1970 created serious crowding in the terminal, leading to a "temporary" trailer in the parking lot for simulators, a classroom, and briefing/debriefing space. A double-wide trailer was added in 1986. In 1981, a trailer was placed to serve as the FAA examination center. This continued to be referred to as the "FAA trailer," although testing moved to campus in 1996. All three trailers were removed in 2019 for parking lot expansion.



Excerpted from *A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University's Airport and Flight Education* by William D. Schloman and Barbara F. Schloman. (Kent State University Press, 2019). Used by permission. Available at the Kent State University Airport, from the [Kent State University Press](https://www.kent.edu/press/), and wherever books are sold.