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Review of *Absent Aviators - Gender Issues in Aviation* by Donna Bridges, Jane Neal-Smith and Albert J. Mills

Reviewed by

***Catherine Mavriplis
University of Ottawa, Canada***

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REVIEW

This spring brought international praise to the US Navy's first female F-18 pilot, Tammie Jo Shults, as she calmly landed a severely damaged Southwest Airlines 737 from 32,000'. The audio from her communications with Air Traffic Control reveals a cool, calm and collected pilot "just doing [her] job", as put in her own words. No doubt many of the passengers may have been surprised to know the plane was piloted by a woman, but every one of them expressed their admiration and thanks for what she accomplished, saving their lives. Reading up on Tammie Jo, we learn she grew up on a ranch, watching Air Force dogfights overhead, and when she inquired about becoming a pilot, she was told that there were no professional women pilots. Lucky for Southwest and the passengers on Flight 1380, the Navy did accept Tammie Jo and she went on to fly F-18s and train male pilots while not being allowed to fly in combat herself.

Southwest is thus a far cry from Pan Am of the day, as we see from the opening chapter of 'Absent Aviators – Gender Issues in Aviation', a 2014 collection of articles addressing the underrepresentation of women in aviation, edited by Donna Bridges, Jane Neal-Smith and Albert J. Mills. The first article in the book takes an academic gender studies view of the junctures of intersectionality in the development of the very successful Pan American Airlines from 1929 to 1989. Viewed from our modern day, the statements and decisions of Pan Am are indeed shocking. The analysis provided in the chapter forms a nice framework for other possible studies in this area.

Much of the rest of 'Absent Aviators' is a little easier to read, as many of the articles focus on women's experiences in becoming or not becoming pilots, practical studies of gender differences in piloting, and gender in the cockpit including those equipped with new technologies such as the glass cockpit.

Although some of the chapters are modified versions of earlier studies, the volume offers a rare collection of studies on women pilots, both commercial and military, in Australia, the US, the UK and South Africa.

Many of the studies in this volume come to us from Australia, offering a unique glimpse of a world of which we, in North America, hear little. Growing up on a farm, for instance, seems to be a contributing factor to girls seeking experiences and careers in non-traditional sectors such as aviation: on the one hand access to local airstrips and small planes, and on the other, the non-gendered work roles of farmers seem to have played a role in attracting more than half of the 75 Australian women pilots interviewed by Deanne Gibbon, as reported in Chapter 2. An article by Tracy Smart outlines the psychological, physical, medical and cultural issues of women flying fast jets in the Australian Air Force. Interestingly, we learn of the (few) differences in women and men withstanding G-forces and consider the effect of poor design in G-suits and other safety equipment as well as newer fly-by-wire technologies that can mitigate these differences.

Several chapters address women in the military and get to the nitty-gritty of issues there: in particular, sexual harassment and abuse are examined through semi-structured interviews of Australian military pilots, revealing that, often, the abuse came from "alpha" males who were struggling themselves." This volume also offers a glimpse of 20 women's experiences in training to become commercial pilots in the UK, addressing the barriers they encountered and how they creatively overcame them.

As advanced glass cockpits evolve and become a new way of operating for pilots, one wonders how the designs for the modern screen displays, moving maps and alert systems affect pilot performance. With so few women pilots and engineers, it's evident that these systems are made by and tested by mostly men. An Austrian study in Chapter 10 looks at gender differences in performance in glass cockpit simulators. An interesting result shows that women rated themselves more focused and forgetting less than men did during normal operations in automatic mode, whereas men reported forgetting less during abnormal (with a component failure) operations. It seems Tammie Jo wouldn't be representative of this result.

The volume includes a report on a study of gender-based attitudes of US pilots in Chapter 4. The data show that men's perceptions of female pilots' flying proficiency were more negative than women's, however those with more years of piloting experience had more positive perceptions than those with fewer years. I wonder what they would say about Tammie Jo.

The book closes with two very useful chapters: the first addresses the Australian Air Force's program to increase the number of women pilots, offering a multi-pronged "holistic" approach to addressing barriers, attracting, recruiting and empowering aspiring women pilots. The model provides a good start for other organisations to consider as they confront the needs to diversify their workforces along gender lines or other forms of diversity. The second (and final chapter of the book) offers a top ten list of barriers that stop women from learning to fly and 101 ideas to increase women's success in general aviation. Whether you're into aviation or not, these lists truly provide something for everyone from organisations to instructors, mentors to designers.