



SPITFIRE WOMEN OF WORLD WAR II

by

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“At long last these magnificent women have the tribute they deserve.”

Sir Ranulph Fiennes



What induced a beautiful young woman from New Orleans to drive to Montreal and take a steamer through the U-boat lines to Liverpool in 1942? What made the daughter of a South African diamond millionaire take up flying lessons on her father's sofa? And why did Mary de Bunsen have to find a doctor who was 'accustomed to the idea of women pilots'?

They wanted to fly Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancasters, and they came to England from every continent to do so. Gifted, determined and astonishingly brave, the women of the **Air Transport Auxiliary** were the unsung heroines of World War II. Though not allowed to fly in combat, what they did was nearly as dangerous. Unarmed and without instruments or radios, they delivered planes to the RAF bases from which male pilots flew into battle. At the mercy of the weather and long-range enemy aircraft, fifteen of those women died – among them legendary Amy Johnson.

Sixty years on, Giles Whittell travelled to the USA, Chile and South Africa to track down more than a dozen survivors of this most exclusive wartime sisterhood and woven their stories into a riveting account of white-knuckle flying, late nights, soaring hopes and heartrending loss. Some of the **ATA** women have never spoken publicly about their flying before, yet all were revolutionaries in their way. Written with wit, style and genuine affection, *Spitfire Women* is a fitting tribute to their courage and pioneering spirit.

In his research, Giles Whittell consulted the extensive ATA archive held by **Maidenhead Heritage Centre & Museum**, close to ATA's headquarters airfield at White Waltham, 30 miles west of London.