

CHARACTER RESOURCE CARDS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION CARDS



Hazel, after receiving pilot's license, 1932.

Courtesy of Alan Rosenberg (NCPD.21.2004.121)

HAZEL YING LEE

BEFORE THE WAR

In 1912 Hazel Ying Lee was born in Portland, Oregon. Hazel learned to swim, play cards, and to drive—activities few women did then.

Few job opportunities were available for Chinese American women. After high school, Hazel could only find a job as an elevator operator. Instead, Hazel joined the Portland Chinese Flying Club and found freedom in flying.

The family struggled to make ends meet with the Great Depression. Hazel and three of her siblings moved to China to live with relatives. In 1932 Japan invaded Manchuria, and Hazel immediately volunteered to fly for the Chinese Air Force. In China she was told that women were “erratic in combat” and was denied permission to serve.

In those days jobs available to Chinese girls were only elevator operator or stockroom girl. Doing office work was just a daydream.

Elsie Chang,
Hazel's friend



Hazel and relatives, outside the Lee home in Portland, Oregon, ca. 1920s. Hazel is third from the right.

Collection of Frances Tong (NCPD.32.2005.15)

影攝生學期二一第校學空航僑華洲美



Hazel, (standing, seventh from left), and the Portland Chinese Flying Club, Oregon, ca. 1932. She was one of two women in her flying class.

Collection of Frances Tong (NCPD.32.2005.5)

Hazel just told my mother that she was going to learn how to fly. My mother said she was so ahead of her time.

Frances Lee Tong,
Hazel's sister

HAZEL YING LEE

DURING THE WAR

When 30-year-old Hazel Ying Lee learned of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), she immediately applied. As a WASP, Hazel ferried fighter aircraft from factories to shipping centers across the country. She was often the first pilot to fly the newly assembled planes. Once, Hazel was forced to make an emergency landing in Kansas. A local farmer mistook her for an enemy pilot, as few Americans knew that women were flying for the war effort.

In November 1944, severe storms brought heavy snowfall to the Midwest. When the weather cleared, too many planes attempted to land at Great Falls shipping center in Montana. In the confusion, Hazel and another pilot collided. She died from her injuries the following day.

Lt. Hazel Ying Lee...died Saturday at the Great Falls, Mont., East Base hospital of burns suffered when her plane collided in mid-air with another plane Thursday and crashed.

*Oregon Journal,
November 27, 1944*



Commander Charles Sproule reviews drills, Sweetwater, Texas, 1943. Hazel is in middle of back row.
The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS 250.8.5)



Faith Buckner, Hazel, and Grace Clark, (left to right), with BT-13 on the flight line, Sweetwater, Texas, ca. 1943.

The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS 250.8.1)

HAZEL YING LEE

AFTER THE WAR

Three days after Hazel Ying Lee's tragic death, her younger brother Victor was killed while serving in France. Their sister Florence approached Riverview Cemetery in Portland, Oregon, to purchase plots and was told that Asians were not welcome. Florence immediately wrote a letter to President Roosevelt to protest this injustice.

Worried about negative publicity, the cemetery allowed the Lee family to bury Hazel and Victor, and other Chinese American families followed suit.

Unlike the families of soldiers killed in action, the Lee family received no compensation for Hazel's burial from the Veterans Administration. Because women pilots served as civilians during the war, they were not granted military benefits or veterans' status.

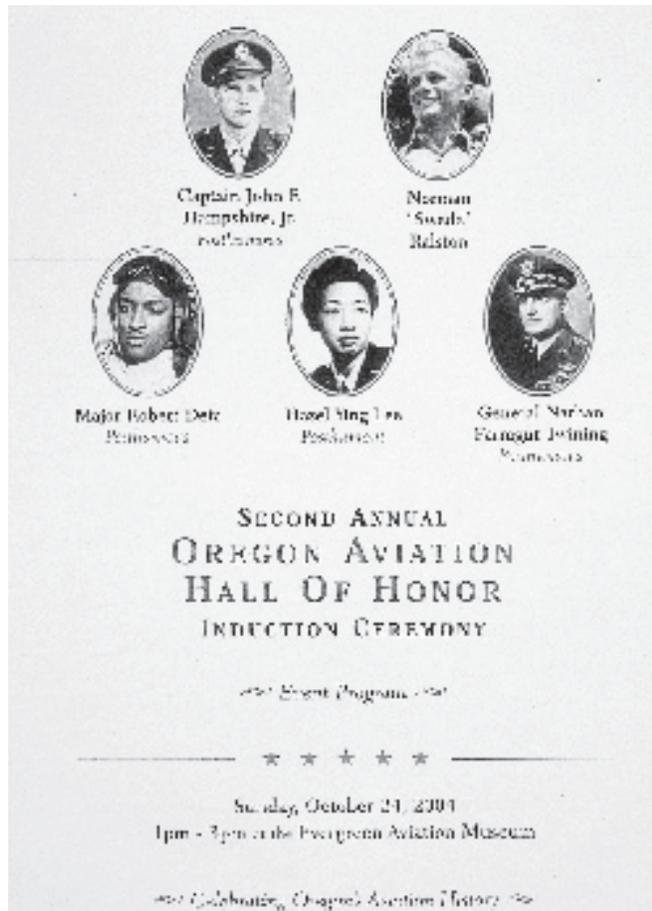
*We were raw civilians though.
We didn't get the pay, we didn't get
life insurance, we didn't get anything.
We worked for a lesser salary than
the second lieutenants, which was
the lowest grade of the pilots.*

Women Airforce Service Pilots veteran



Hazel Ying Lee's burial plot, Riverview Cemetery, Portland, Oregon, 2005.

National Center for the Preservation of Democracy



Hazel Ying Lee is inducted into Oregon Aviation History, Evergreen Aviation Museum, McMinnville, Oregon, October 2004. Her sister Frances attends to receive the honors.

Collection of Frances Tong (NCPD.32.2005.2.1r)

BEFORE WORLD WAR II

BARRED FROM ENTRY

In the early 1860s, Chinese immigrants were brought to the U.S. as cheap labor, used in railroad construction, mining, and plantation labor. Anti-immigrant sentiment led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. However, those who claimed residence through paternal lineage or American birth could still immigrate.

As a result, many “paper sons”—Chinese men who pretended to be the children of American residents—entered by way of Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, California. Awaiting interrogation, immigrants were detained for weeks, months, and even years in prison-like quarters.

YOU EARN LESS PAY...

Many women of color supplemented their family’s income by working as domestics, seamstresses, or factory workers. These young women were placed in entry-level positions with little job mobility and less pay.

Hazel grew up at a time when revolutionary turmoil in China drew attention to the new, independent Chinese working woman. This resonated particularly with American-born Chinese women, who wished to free themselves from their parents’ expectations that they become dutiful wives and mothers.



Rows of beds for detained immigrants inside Angel Island Immigration Station barracks, San Francisco Bay, California, ca. 1920s.

Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (BANC PIC 1980.098.42—PIC)

When we arrived, they locked us up like criminals in compartments like the cages in the zoo. They counted us and took us upstairs to our rooms. Each of the rooms could fit twenty or thirty persons.

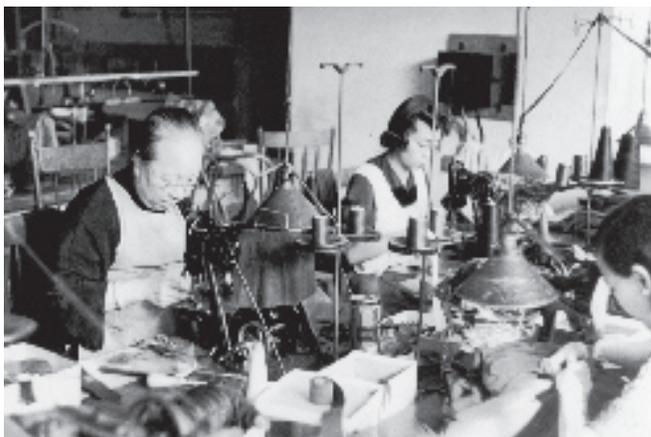
Chinese immigrant detained at Angel Island



Two immigration officers process entry papers of Chinese immigrants, Angel Island Immigration Station, San Francisco Bay, California, ca. 1925. State Museum Resource Center, California State Parks (231-18-037)

Barred from land, I really am to be pitied. My heart trembles at being deported back to China...

**Excerpt from poem,
unknown author**



Chinese American women factory workers, San Francisco, California, 1940s.

Courtesy of Labor Archives & Research Center, San Francisco State University (LARC Photo Collection #4, ILGWU)

DURING WORLD WAR II

THE FLY GIRLS

As men were shipped overseas, women pilots took to the skies. Over 1,000 Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) “ferried” Army planes from factories to shipping centers, towed targets for firing practice, conducted test flights, and played the role of enemy pilots to train troops.

Initially, Army officials doubted whether women could handle the big, fast planes. However, because of their remarkable record, women pilots flew every type of Army plane available. The WASP served as civilians who were ineligible for military benefits and paid less than male pilots. Thirty-eight women pilots were killed while serving their country.

NOT ALLOWED TO FLY

Skilled African American women pilots were not allowed into the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. Only a handful of Asian American and Native American women were accepted.

One of these women was Native American Ola Rexroat. Pilots at a local airport had once refused to teach her how to fly because she was a woman, but Ola was determined to learn. She heard of the WASP and applied. After basic training, she flew planes towing targets for anti-aircraft practice in Eagle Pass, Texas, an especially dangerous assignment.



Eileen Roach heads out on a tow target mission to train ground troops in anti-aircraft fire at Camp Davis, North Carolina, ca. 1943-44.

The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS 250.18.11)

The absolute thrill, exhilaration, and freedom—utter freedom—when you are up there in an airplane flying alone across the country. It was just heaven.

Women Airforce Service Pilots veteran



Betty Roth and Ola Rexroat upon graduating at Sweetwater, Texas, September 1944.

The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS.250.10.39)

It was kind of a scary business, tooting around up there. We often didn't have anything but a compass, a map, and a watch to figure out how in the heck to get where we were going up there in the big sky.

Florene Miller Watson,
Women Airforce Service Pilots veteran

AFTER WORLD WAR II

FIGHTING TO BE EQUAL

The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program was disbanded in December 1944. These pilots were encouraged to return home to care for their families.

In the 1950s, WASP Dorothy Olsen requested a hearing aid from the Veterans Administration, but her request was denied. The women pilots were fueled to fight for their right to be called “veterans,” speaking at gatherings and collecting signatures for petitions. In 1977 President Carter signed a bill granting them military status, and the following year the WASP received honorable discharges.

Since 1978, women in the military are no longer placed in separate ranks from men. Today 14 percent of the Armed Forces are women.



Bee Haydu, (second from right), president of the WASP organization, presents to representatives of Congress the signatures of over 22,000 people who had signed petitions requesting that WASP be recognized as veterans, Washington, D.C., September 20, 1977.

The Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University (MSS 293.7.13)

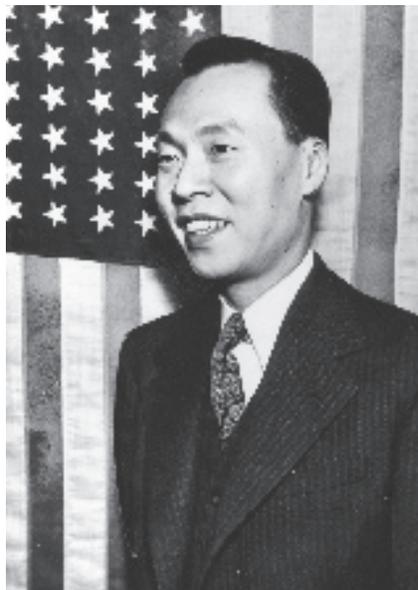
Frankly, I didn't know in 1941 whether a slip of a young girl could fight the controls of a B-17... Well, now in 1944 we can come to only one conclusion—the entire operation has been a success. It is on record that women can fly as well as men... Every WASP has filled a vital and necessary place in the jigsaw pattern of victory.

**General Hap Arnold,
Commander of Army Air Forces, 1944**

BY REASON OF ANCESTRY

During the war, China and the U.S. were allies, leading to the first rollback of anti-Asian exclusionary laws. After 60 years, the Chinese Exclusion Act was modified to allow 105 Chinese immigrants to enter and permitted those living in the U.S. to naturalize.

However, during the Cold War, Congress passed the Emergency Detention Act of 1950, where any American could be imprisoned by reason of ancestry. In March 1956, government agents in search of Communist activities raided Chinatowns across the U.S.



Stanley Chan, professor of Oriental Studies at Loyola University, was the first Chinese American to be naturalized following the repeal of the 60-year-old Chinese Exclusion Act, Los Angeles, California, 1943.

Chinese American Museum and El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument (NCPD.37.2005.1)

