



**Name in English:** Hazel Ying Lee  
**Name in Chinese:** 李月英  
**Name in Pinyin:** Lǐ Yuèyīng  
**Gender:** Female  
**Birth Year:** 1912-1944  
**Birth Place:** Portland, Oregon

### **WASP Pilot, Aviation Pioneer**

**Profession:** Military Pilot

**Education:** Commerce High School, High School Diploma, 1929; Pilot's license, 1932

**Awards:** 2004, Oregon Aviation Hall of Honor Member, Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum

**Contribution (s):** During a time of rampant anti-Chinese bias and discrimination against women, Hazel Ying Lee defied the odds as one of the first Chinese American women to get a pilot's license and later the first to fly for the U.S. Army. When she obtained her pilot's license in 1932 only one percent of American pilots were women and only a handful of them were Chinese American women.

In 1943, Lee became the first Chinese American woman to join the "Women Airforce Service Pilots" (WASP) program created to replace male pilots needed in combat with women. By American law and custom of the time, women weren't allowed to hold military jobs that could potentially involve combat, although quite a few military nurses did come under enemy fire during World War II. Previously, Lee had volunteered to join the Chinese Air Force twice to help the war effort and to join her husband already serving with them. Although the Chinese Air Force needed pilots, Lee was rejected each time because she was a woman.

Lee was one of the first women to pilot fighter aircraft for the U.S. Army under the WASP program, but work for the WASP program was often dangerous and exhausting with seven-day work weeks. Female pilots like Lee delivered military aircraft from their manufacturers to airfields across North America. Delivering aircraft that were fresh from the assembly line, WASP pilots were often the first to discover malfunctions. Lee died in 1944 when her plane collided on a runway with a malfunctioning plane whose radio had failed. Both planes had accidentally been directed to land on the same runway at the same time. Hazel Lee was one of the last of the 38 WASP's killed during the war.

After Lee's death, the Lee family went through a lengthy but ultimately successful battle with a Portland cemetery that refused to bury any Asians. Lee was laid to rest in a non-military funeral, since WASP pilots were classified as civilians during WWII, and did not receive military benefits or military funerals. Lee and other WASP pilots would not be recognized with military status until 1979.

Lee showed that Chinese American women could compete as equals in aviation with any man. She was a woman who knew what she wanted and chased her dreams to fly even at the cost of giving her life for her country.

**External Links:**

[http://asiancemagazine.com/apr\\_2007/in\\_pursuit\\_of\\_a\\_dream](http://asiancemagazine.com/apr_2007/in_pursuit_of_a_dream)

<http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=1556>

<http://www.portlandonline.com/omf/index.cfm?a=148528&c=44053>

<http://www.mocanyc.org/collections/highlights>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazel\\_Ying\\_Lee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazel_Ying_Lee)