



Freydis Sharland

Mrs Shay's inspirational woman is Freydis Sharland, a First Officer who delivered 110

new Spitfires, and many other aircraft, from factory to airfield in the last two years of the Second World War. She joined the elite women pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary, who flew every machine that men did, and was one of those lucky enough to receive equal pay with men for their daring after a campaign in Parliament at last in 1943 rectified earlier injustice.

The ferry pilots faced a death rate of one in 10, one of the conditions imposed being to fly without using instrument-landing techniques or radio. They also flew unarmed, with the constant hazard of being mistaken for enemy aircraft by their own side, or attacked by Luftwaffe intruders. They were supposed not to set off unless the cloud base was at least 800 feet, and horizontal visibility 2,000 yards.

After the war Sharland became a freelance commercial pilot and in 1953 flew a Tempest aircraft from Britain to Karachi in Pakistan. On arrival, after enduring privation for two weeks on the many stops on the way, she was denied access to the pilot officers' mess because she was a woman. The following year she echoed her father's winning streak – his Olympic gold was won at the 1936 Games, in Kiel, Germany, on his yacht Lalage – when she became the first female British Air Racing Champion.