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Sgt. Jeanne Kuenzig Power, U.S.M.C.

Jeanne Power

In 1943, I was Sergeant Jeanne Kuenzig, United States Marine, and I helped train Marine pilots to fly at night. To do this, I used a Link Trainer.

At that time, most people had not heard of “flight simulators” until the term, shrouded in secrecy, was used decades later in connection with the space program in the 1960s and popularized in the 1980s by photos of the iconic Krista McAuliffe and movies on the training of Top Guns. Nowadays, you can use flight trainers on your PC and learn to fly—and crash—in the comfort of your Barcalounger.

Starting a new business in 1929, Edwin Link, a Binghamton, NY organ manufacturer, created a machine that could simulate being in a plane. It was used by amusement parks as a fun ride and secondarily to teach flying techniques. A series of night and bad weather accidents while delivering mail in 1934 suggested a new application of the flight simulator, resulting in the Link Trainer for teaching “blind” navigation. The first customer of this training machine was the United States Army Air Corps (the second customer was the Japanese Imperial Navy), and nearly every air force in the world was using the Link Trainer by 1940.

I was responsible for training pilots to navigate planes at night or in bad weather using radio beacons from known locations. One of the pilots going through the program at the Marine Air Station at Cherry Point, NC was a new recruit named Tyrone Power.



BAMs (broad-axle marines) at an inspection with their Link Trainers.

At the time, the most obvious application for the Marine Corps was for the night ferrying of planes to the West Coast: in 1943, there were no radio beacons showing the way from our Pacific Coast to Japan, and no surface ship would risk alerting an enemy to its presence by broadcasting location markers. Later, I realized that my aviators on night operations might have been using beacons set on islands by reconnaissance troops or placed at sea on buoys released from our submarines.

Before the war, the Marines had a cadre of just over 19,000 officers and enlisted men; by mid-1942, the population of the Corps was over 143,000, and the Joint Chiefs projected a population of nearly 310,000 in June of 1943. The Marine Corps and its tradition of being “elite troops” would be tested by this call to double its already-large size.

To ease this situation and to also meet the conditions of the recently established Fair Employment Practices Commission, Lt. General Thomas Holcomb, the Commandant of Marines, instituted a program popularly called “Free a Marine to Fight”—he would use women Marines to fill continental non-combat positions, thus making men available for the Pacific theater.

Naturally, there was resistance to breaking this tradition by introducing women Marines, and people started to think of Marine acronyms to compete with WACS, WAVES, and SPARS. General Holcomb put resistance to rest in a statement published in the March 27, 1944 issue of *Life*: “They are Marines. They don’t have a nickname and they don’t need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere at a Marine post. They inherit the traditions of the Marines. They are Marines.”

The initial effort called for 1,000 officers and 18,000 enlisted women (this is the same size as the entire Marine Corps in 1939). By the end of the war, 965 officers and 22,000 enlisted women had freed a like number of men for battle, and all courses on the Link Trainers were conducted by women Marines after the first of August of 1944.

Corporal Catherine Kaufmann (now Catherine White) and I experienced similar events:

- we both graduated in 1940
- went to business school and into the job market
- were social women
- volunteered as Marines in the summer of 1943, went through boot camp, and completed advanced training
- were subsequently successful in skilled areas within the Marine infrastructure

I have never met a veteran of this program who regretted the decision to join or felt that the time in uniform was anything less than a time of pride and purpose. Personally, the only regret that I have is for a road not taken—I will always wonder what might have been had I re-upped in 1945.



PFC. Kuenzig, now Jeanne Power, at her graduation from boot camp at Camp Lejeune.



On a personal note, I married Paul Power in Pittsburgh in 1946. Over the following years, we had two children—Peggy Gifford of Clifton Park and Pat Power of Stamford—and spent a lot of time abroad including 7 years in Frankfurt, Germany. We moved to Stamford in 1964 and were in the military food brokerage business until retiring in 1995. I currently work at the Stamford Village Library. For more information, see *Women Marines: The World War II Era* by Peter A. Soderbergh, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992).

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March 4, 2010

