



AVIATION and WOMEN IN EUROPE
2007 CONFERENCE
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www.aweu.org

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PRESS RELEASE

BARONNESS THATCHER MEETS DELEGATES AT THE AVIATION AND WOMEN IN EUROPE CONFERENCE

Baroness Thatcher was the surprise Guest of Honour at the Opening Reception at the House of Lords for speakers, delegates and sponsors of the Aviation and Women in Europe Conference - the first to be held in the UK. The former British Prime Minister - one of the best known women internationally - achieved the near impossible when her entry silenced dozens of women who were busy talking aviation and networking.

Lady Thatcher, whose attendance was kept a closely guarded secret, was introduced to as many of those present as possible before she had to leave after another busy day. The reception was sponsored by executive recruitment company Odgers Ray & Berndston.

Jane Middleton, Chairman of the Conference Organising Committee, said she was delighted to note that, despite stories in the media, Lady Thatcher was as sharp-witted as ever.

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“There is no doubt that Lady Thatcher’s presence at our reception provided a huge inspiration to our conference. Although our delegates came from countries as far afield as India, America, Canada, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, there wasn’t a person there who wasn’t thrilled to meet one of the world’s most renowned and most successful women.”

The conference, which was the third such event to be organised by the European chapter of Women in Aviation International, attracted sponsorship from a number of well-known companies ranging from Boeing, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, J P Morgan, Towers Perrin and Rockwell Collins to Pooleys Flight Instructor School, SEI and Marlborough Aviation Executive Search.

Their backing enabled the organisers to offer six free places to students who were able to enjoy mixing with high achieving women from many different countries.

The three-day event began with aviation visits to the Air Accident Investigation Branch and Flight Safety International, the world’s largest flight simulator company, both based at Farnborough, before a speedy turnaround to travel to London for the welcome reception.

The following day, keynote speaker Judith Moreton, Managing Director of Bombardier Skyjet International, told delegates she was very excited to be addressing a conference almost exclusively made up of women - a comment echoed by other speakers.

The theme of her talk was the importance of understanding different cultures to enable aviation companies to win business in an increasingly competitive world.

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Gretchen Burrett, the first female Director of Safety at National Air Traffic Services, said she had initially wanted to become an ice skater but her father, fed up with paying the fees, suggested she went to the Air Force Academy which was free!

She recalled being left in charge of a Minuteman inter-continental ballistic missile centre when she was “a baby second lieutenant” with the job of designing the human interface. From that point onwards, she became fascinated with the human aspects of aviation.

Squadron Leader Sue Freeman, who is in charge of ensuring all RAF F-3 pilots are adhering to the correct standards, described how she took part in a “quick reaction alert” at RAF Leuchars when some Russian aircraft recently appeared on the scene.

“The Russians seem dreadfully interested in what we are doing. I looked at them and they looked at me and we flew alongside them until they departed,” she said.

Deanna Amos, an engineer on the Boeing 777 at Heathrow, amused the conference by describing what it was like working in a dominantly male environment. She soon got used to having broken nails and oil in her hair as well as having “vanity case” written on her tool box. She advised delegates never to give up, never to show weakness, adding that women relied on men to give them their break.

Bristow Helicopter search and rescue pilot Marjolijn de Greef from Holland told how she herself had to be rescued from the North Sea after an hour in the water without a life jacket when the cyclic controls of her Puma helicopter had jammed.

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Although as duty captain, she had had to ditch on a cold winter's night with the temperature of the water at 9°, everyone on board - including the 17 passengers they had airlifted off an oil rig during a black-out - were rescued. After she and her co-pilot were cleared of any suspicion of reckless flying, she returned to duty with no ill effects from the trauma she had endured.

Jo Salter, the first woman to fly a fast jet in the RAF and now a successful motivational speaker and author, amused delegates with the story of how she solved the problem of flying for eight hours across the Atlantic in a Tornado without any toilet facilities. The solution was a package of incontinence pads and plastic underpants!

She advised delegates wanting to succeed in aviation to “practice the law of abundance” by having a “glass half-full” approach to life, being positive and having fun.

Jenny Payne, Director of Product Marketing and Product Analysis at Boeing Commercial Airplanes, explained how Boeing's new 787 aircraft was more environmentally friendly because of its use of composites which weigh less than aluminium, resulting in less fuel burn. Its Rolls Royce engines were also more efficient. Boeing had been working hard to overcome passenger problems such as dry eyes, headaches, fatigue and nausea, she told the audience.

Commander Trish Beckman, formerly with the US Navy and now a navigator with Boeing, described her role in the 777's round-the-world flight, which took her to dozens of countries, while triple round-the-world pilot Jennifer Murray showed a series of stunning slides from her record dual helicopter flight from Pole to Pole.

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She paid tribute to her co-pilot Colin Bodill, who, despite a broken back and other severe injuries, had saved their lives after they crashed in a whiteout in Antarctica on their first attempt in 2003.

“Heroes don’t come bigger than Colin Bodill,” she said. “Practically his first words to me afterwards were ‘We have to get another helicopter’!”

The Conference was closed by Dr Peggy Chabrian, founder and president of Women in Aviation International, which has 14,000 members.

The final day of the conference was a visit to the RAFA Shoreham Air Show where delegates were delighted to see Carolyn Grace begin the programme with a beautiful aerobatic display to music in her Grace Spitfire.

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NOTE TO EDITORS

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