

## *Pamela Pearson Phillips-Eckle, Debutante, Canadian Royal Air Force Corporal*

Pamela Constance Pearson was born in Boston on July 14, 1924 to Marmaduke (Duke) Pearson, a Canadian-born executive in the leather industry, and Glaswegian Constance Bell Pearson. She grew up in Montserrat, MA, and followed her parents to West Newbury in the 1950s, raising a family at Arrowhead Farm on Turkey Hill Road. During WWII, she served as a Corporal, one of some 17,000 women in the [Royal Canadian Air Force \(RCAF\)](#).

Pearson's youth in Montserrat featured summers at the Beach Club in Magnolia and the Essex County Country Club. A member of the Boston Junior League, she made her debut during the 1942-43 season. Her Canadian roots ran deep: she attended [Ovenden College](#) in Barrie, Ontario. Her [uncle, Lester Pearson](#), was a Canadian statesman who served in many roles, including Ambassador to the US and Prime Minister. His work with the UN to resolve the Suez Crisis earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957.

In the mid-1940s as World War II raged, Pamela Pearson left life as a Boston debutante for service in the RCAF Women's Division. When Canada entered the war in 1939, women were barred from enlisting. Manpower shortages combined with the arrival of female British air training instructors led to the [RCAF's acceptance of women in 1942](#). It was the [first branch of Canada's military to recruit women actively](#).

[RCAF women](#) came from the British Caribbean, the US, and around the world. They served in Canada, the US, and Britain. [Many were decorated for their service; 28 died or were killed during active duty](#). Initially the women were paid two-thirds of the salary provided a man doing the same job, on the theory that it took three women to do the work of one man. In 1943, the RCAF increased the fraction to [four-fifths of equivalent pay](#).

Although Pearson [earned her pilot's wings](#) during her two years in service, she could not have flown planes while on RCAF duty. As reflected in their motto, "We Serve That Men May Fly," RCAF women were not permitted to work as pilots. Females in the RCAF could work in [sixty-nine trades](#). These included many varieties of clerks, as well as jobs ranging from wireless operator to "aircraft helper."

A very few [Canadian women pilots](#) in the [British Air Transport Auxiliary \(ATA\)](#) were permitted to ferry (and test fly) many different types of planes, often direct from the factory to the front. The [Attagirls' piloting prowess](#) was legendary. According to an aviation historian, "This new bomber would fly in—a big four-engine bomber—and a single pilot would get out: a five-foot [tall] woman would be flying it, and [the men would] be amazed."

Women were no longer welcome in the RCAF after the war. The last discharge occurred by the end of December 1946. As Canada's NATO responsibilities expanded during the Cold War, women were again permitted to join the RCAF in 1951. In 1980, females were allowed to serve as military pilots. Eight years later, [Canada became the first Western nation to accept women as fighter pilots](#). It is [now said](#) that the Canadian Air Force "enrolls women in all occupations, which includes operational trades such as pilot, air combat systems officer, aviation technician, and aerospace control operator. In all of these occupations, airmen and airwomen are selected for training and promotions, postings and all career opportunities in exactly the same way, which is based on rank, qualifications and merit."

After the war, Pamela Pearson returned to Montserrat. In 1949 she married Windsor Martin Phillips, an Eastern Airlines pilot who had served in the Army Air Corps during WWII. Her parents purchased [Roland Hayes' Crane Neck Street home](#) in 1953, retiring to West Newbury. [In 1955](#), W. Martin and Pamela Phillips bought the [Brown family homestead](#) on Turkey Hill Road, which had been in that family for centuries. There, the Phillips raised a girl and two boys.

Pamela Pearson Phillips was a [force in this community](#). She served in several offices at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Newburyport. A life member of Newburyport's American Yacht Club, she sailed and raced with her husband Martin along the New England coast. Almost two decades after she was widowed, she married George Martin Eckle, another former Eastern Airlines pilot and Army Air Corps veteran, in 1999. By then she was a snowbird, summering in West Newbury and wintering in Stuart, Florida. Pamela Pearson Phillips-Eckle died there on June 1, 2008. She was 83 years old.

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Pamela Constance  
Pearson in  
RCAF uniform  
Source: [Boston Globe](#)



Source: [Wikipedia](#)



*"Familiarization flight." Women employed in technical duties fly to get the feel. They enjoy it, and no compulsion is needed. (Royal Canadian Air Force Photograph.)*

Source: Wadge, D. Collett, ed.  
[Women in Uniform](#)



Royal Canadian Air Force  
Women's Division Insignia  
"An Albatross on Her Shoulder"

Source: Skaarup, Harold A.  
*Women in the Canadian Forces:*  
[RCAF Women's Division \(RCAF WD\)](#)