

JOAN MARY ALLEN

A.T.A. FEMALE PILOT AND FREQUENT VISITOR TO R.A.F.

LICHFIELD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

We know very little about Joan Mary Allens early life. We do know that she was born into a very wealthy family somewhere in England, in 1914. She then went on to went to a “finishing school” in Switzerland and went to live in Singapore., Here at the age of 21, she began to learn how to fly.



She also met her first husband. He was serving in the Royal, Air Force and was also in Singapore. They had a son called Christopher.

When war broke out, Joan's husband was fighting against the Japanese and was sadly killed. It seemed like Singapore was going to be invaded by the Japanese and Joan was advised to return to Britain as soon as possible. Taking her small son with her, she managed to escape on one of the last boats to leave. It was a very long and dangerous journey and her son became very ill and died.

When she finally arrived back in Britain, she wanted to help in the war effort. As she could fly, she decided to join the Air Transport Auxiliary, which were ferry pilots, many of which were women who flew damaged aircraft to Maintenance Units, like M51 at R.A.F. Lichfield. They also flew new aircraft as well. They were fitted out inside and checked over, before they were flown to the various R.A.F. bases around the country.

Mary regularly flew Spitfires from R.A.F. Cosford to Lichfield. It was a very busy and dangerous life. She could have been shot down at any time by enemy aircraft. She had to fly in all weathers. She would have had no navigation and had to use landmarks like rivers or railway lines to find her way. In total, she flew 44 different aircraft

She stayed in the A.T.A. until it was finally disbanded at the end of the war in 1945. She then decided to return back to Singapore where she met her second husband. In 1958, she came back home again to England, and this time stayed for the rest of her life. She died at the age of 80, in 1994.

No one would have known anything about her story, if her step daughter Jill, had not discovered a small tin box tucked away under the stairs at Joan's house when she died. It contained details of her career in the A.T.A. together with her flight records and pay slips.

On the 9th of July, Jill and her husband, planted a tree in memory of Joan at the National Memorial Arboretum near Alrewas, Staffordshire.