

Eula “Pearl” Carter Scott, the first Native American Pilot

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At age 12, the average American is starting middle school. At age 13, the average teen is getting their first phone. At age 14, the average student is starting high school. But that was not the case for Eula “Pearl” Carter Scott, the youngest American pilot. Scott was born on December 9, 1915, to George W. Carter, a wealthy businessman, and Lucy Gibson Carter, an original enrollee (member) of the Choctaw Nation who resided in the Chickasaw Nation.¹ Lucy was a full-blooded Choctaw and Eula was half Choctaw. Since the family lived in Marlow, Oklahoma, part of the Chickasaw Nation, Eula is listed in Chickasaw sources.²



Eula ‘Pearl’ Carter Scott with her Curtiss Robin plane.
Photo: San Diego Air and Space Museum

Scott learned how to navigate vehicles at a young age. She received her first car, a Durant Sport Roadster, when she was 11 years old and taught herself how to drive it by age 12. Scott’s sense of independence at a very young age may seem strange for the modern-day person, but for the Scott family, it was normal. George Carter lost his eyesight at the age of 16. As a result, Eula served as his eyes, doing whatever he could not do.³ This included reading the paper or driving him places. But even with her responsibilities at home, Scott was not confined to the ground, she was destined to take to the skies.

Wiley Post, aviation pioneer and one of the country's greatest aviators, was a longtime family friend of the Carter family.⁴ Post’s brother lived across the street from the Carter residence. Every time Post visited his brother, he would land in one of Carter's pastures at the Carter Airport.⁵ During one of his visits in 1927, he took Pearl on her first plane ride. Scott immediately fell in love with aviation and flight. She recalled, “I knew right then, while I was in the air with Wiley that first day, that I would fly someday. I asked him a hundred questions while we were up in the air, and as soon as he set the plane down, I ran over and told Daddy that I wanted to learn to fly.”⁶ From then on, Post became her flight instructor, and by age 13, Scott received her pilot’s license.

After receiving her federal license, her father bought her a Curtiss Robbin monoplane for \$4,500.⁷ Scott was surprised by her gift. She recalled, “You have to remember, that was in 1928. That was an awful lot of money back then. I had never wanted anything that my Daddy didn’t get me, but even I was a little surprised at getting my own airplane. Enormously exciting.”⁸ Scott used this airplane to accomplish her most remembered feat, her first solo flight at age 14 on September 12, 1930, making her the youngest American aviator at the time.⁹

Although Scott remembered her historic flights as “enormously exciting,” she did not consider them “her greatest achievements.”¹⁰ After her first solo flight, Scott flew as a stunt pilot, traveling across Oklahoma as part of a barnstorming show. Yet, even though she became a famous aviator, Scott still went to school and participated in other activities. She attended Marlow High School and Bloomfield Indian Academy, won violin awards, and was an officer of the Junior Woodmen of the World.¹¹ She, however, still served as her father’s eyes, accompanying him on trips and flying him in his Curtiss-Robin plane.¹²

She continued to fly after getting married at age 16 to Louis Scott and having her first child. But after having her second child, she abruptly stopped flying, realizing that “if anything at all happened, I’d have two babies who would have to grow up without a mother.”¹³ For Scott, “the greatest thing [she’s] done in this life, and the most exciting, was to be a mother to [her] three children. Being a mother was so much more important than flying an airplane, and a lot more dangerous at times.”¹⁴ She only flew one more time after ending her career, when Wiley Post allowed her to pilot his famous “Winnie Mae” Lockheed Vega airplane.¹⁵



Post’s Winnie Mae Plane
Photo: National Air and Space Museum

In 1972, Scott began her public service career after studying at the Desert Willow Indian Training Center, becoming one of Chickasaw Nation's first community health representatives and one of the first seven paid employees of the nation.¹⁶ In 1983, she was elected to the Chickasaw legislature, becoming the first woman legislator of the Chickasaw Nation.¹⁷ During her three-term tenure, she oversaw growth in tribal operations and service.¹⁸



Photo: Chickasaw Hall of Fame

as well as a charter member of the National Museum of the American Indian.¹⁹ She was also inducted into the Chickasaw Nation Hall of Fame in 1995 for her public service for the nation.²⁰

Even after her death on March 28, 2005, Oklahoma and the Chickasaw Nation continued to remember her. In 2010, the Chickasaw Nation produced the film “Pearl”, which covered Scott’s teen years. The film won multiple awards from the Indie Fest and the International Cherokee Film Fest, as well as showcased at the Center Film Festival and the American Film Institution

Dallas International Film Festival.²¹ The Chickasaw Heritage Series also produced an episode on Scott titled “Pearl Carter Scott: On Top of the World.”²²

Endnotes

¹ Lucy was a full-blooded Choctaw and Eula was half Choctaw. But since the family lived in the Chickasaw Nation, Eula is listed in Chickasaw sources.

² “Enrollment for Choctaw Census Card by Blood 233,” National Archives. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/218544604>; “‘Pearl’ Carter Scott: Hall of Fame,” “Pearl” Carter Scott | Hall of Fame (Chickasaw Hall of Fame), accessed June 8, 2022, <https://hof.chickasaw.net/Members/1995/Pearl-Carter-Scott.aspx>.

³ Heide Brandes, “Grandmother Still Flying High,” *Sapulpa Daily Herald*, November 12, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/662185129/>.

⁴ Roger Connor, “Remembering Wiley Post and Will Rogers,” National Air and Space Museum (National Air and Space Museum, August 16, 2013), <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/remembering-wiley-post-and-will-rogers>; “National Native American Heritage Month – Eula ‘Pearl’ Carter Scott, Pilot,” Transportation History, November 28, 2018, <https://transportationhistory.org/2018/11/28/national-native-american-heritage-month-eula-pearl-carter-scott-pilot/>.

⁵ Brandes, “Grandmother Still Flying High.”

⁶ “National Native American Heritage Month – Eula ‘Pearl’ Carter Scott, Pilot.”

⁷ Roy Deering, “Love for Flying Helped Woman Make History,” *The Oklahoman*, March 31, 2005, <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2005/03/31/love-for-flying-helped-woman-make-history/61948802007/>.

⁸ Deering, “Love for Flying Helped Woman Make History.”

⁹ “Marlow Girl, 14, In Solo Flight,” *The Marlow Review*, September 18, 1930, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/787346235/?terms=%22eula%20pearl%20carter%22&match=1>. Secondary sources say the flight was in 1929, but primary articles date the flight to 1930), making her the youngest American aviator.

¹⁰ Deering, “Love for Flying Helped Woman Make History.”

¹¹ “Junior Woodmen Chose Officers,” *The Marlow Review*, June 20, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/786831071/?terms=%22eula%20pearl%20carter%22&match=1>; “Marlow Girls to Chickasaw School,” *The Marlow Review*, August 25, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/786831617/?terms=%22eula%20pearl%20carter%22&match=1>; “Woodmen Invited to Duncan Picnic,” *The Marlow Review*, June 20, 1929, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/786831100/?terms=%22eula%20pearl%20carter%22&match=1>.

¹² “Files to Ardmore,” *The Marlow Review*, January 8, 1931, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/787350495/?terms=%22eula%20pearl%20carter%22&match=1>.

¹³ Deering, “Love for Flying Helped Woman Make History.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “National Native American Heritage Month – Eula ‘Pearl’ Carter Scott, Pilot.”

¹⁶ “‘Pearl’ Carter Scott: Hall of Fame,” “Pioneering Female State Aviator Dies At 89,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 30, 2005, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/452655386/?terms=eula%20pearl%20carter%20scott&match=1>.

¹⁷ “Eula Pearl Carter Scott (1915-2005) - Find a...,” Find a Grave, Accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13035545/eula-pearl-scott>.

¹⁸ “‘Pearl’ Carter Scott: Hall of Fame.”

¹⁹ “National Native American Heritage Month – Eula ‘Pearl’ Carter Scott, Pilot.”

²⁰ “‘Pearl’ Carter Scott: Hall of Fame.”

²¹ “‘Pearl’ Begins Weeklong Run in Moore,” *The Daily Oklahoman*. n.d., <https://www.newspapers.com/image/452619961/?terms=eula%20pearl%20carter%20scott&match=1>.

²² “Pearl Carter Scott: On Top of the World,” CNTV, Accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.chickasaw.tv/episodes/chickasaw-heritage-series-season-1-episode-1-pearl-carter-scott-on-top-of-the-world>.

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