

Dorothy Ebersbach, RN The Nurse Who Flew

Sources:

Personal interview conducted July 15, 2010
Stein, Letitia. Honors at last for WWII's Women with Wings. St. Petersburg Times, May 30, 2010.

Born: December 9, 1914, Ohio
Family: unmarried, no children

Education:

Bachelor's degree in Education, Ohio University. About 1934
Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. 1954

Career:

Dorothy "Dot" Ebersbach did not follow the standard route into nursing. After spending her childhood in her home state of Ohio, she began working for her father's construction company. The job required her to learn to pilot an airplane. Ebersbach quickly took to flying. After the family moved to Florida in the early 1930's, Ebersbach logged over 200 hours flying out of the Tampa airport. When the United States became involved in World War II in 1941, Ebersbach noticed all the men enlisting and also wanted to be involved. She was selected to be a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs. She served in Texas and Arizona, doing test flights and towing targets so that soldiers could practice shooting. Her work stateside freed up men to fight overseas.

After the war ended, Ebersbach wanted to continue to fly with the military, but the WASP program was disbanded and the pilot market was flooded with men. Ebersbach looked around at her career choices. There was no one defining experience that led her to be a nurse, just her assessment that it "was a good profession and in demand". Ebersbach returned to Ohio for her nursing degree.

After graduation, Ebersbach sought employment in Tampa at the County Health Department. Bertha King was the director at that time, and she offered Ebersbach a job in Plant City. Ebersbach declined, it was a long drive back and forth in the 1950's. Ebersbach was then hired as a school nurse. In those days, the school nurse was assigned not only to the school but to the surrounding community as all schools drew their students from the neighborhoods immediately surrounding them. Ebersbach participated in giving immunizations, and co-authored a book on immunizations that was in use for several years. She also worked in several polio campaigns, which consumed a large amount of public health resources during that era.

Ebersbach conducted home visits for a variety of reasons, including newborn checks and follow-up of tuberculosis patients. She saw very poor patients at times, and those with little education. Once, Ebersbach made a home visit to a mother too poor to buy diapers for her baby, so she kept the baby on the floor. The family had only potatoes for dinner at night. There were few social service relief agencies to call



on so the nurses simply did what they could. Ebersbach also participated in issuing health cards to workers. There were two sets of doors for workers to enter for screening, just as there were two sets of water fountains. The state was still very racially segregated. However, all nurses, black and white, took care of any patients regardless of skin color.

Ebersbach considered public health nursing to be an excellent type of nursing, because it gave the nurse a chance to start working with people early on, before they got into too much trouble. Her work as a public health nurse in Hillsborough County was the only job she ever held as a nurse. She retired in 1975. Ebersbach continues to live in the same house in Tampa where her family moved in 1935.

Honors and Awards:

In Spring, 2010, Ebersbach was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian award, for her service as a WASP during the Second World War.

Author:

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