

**Interview of Devere Powell on her service in the
U.S. Army Nurse Corps during WWII**

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5 Betty Thompson: This is Betty Thompson again in Battle Creek with some more oral
6 history. I'd like to introduce Devere Powell who is with the Army Nurse
7 Corps, um, both in the states and overseas, and here she is to tell her story.
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9 Devere Powell: I joined the army in April of 1943. I wanted to be a flight nurse so I chose
10 Truax Field which was in Wisconsin about 5 miles west of Madison. And
11 I worked at the, uh, hospital. It was a station hospital. The, uh, [inaudible
12 00:46] was the radio operator's mechanics school. In, uh, May and June
13 of 1944, I did go to Bowman Field for flight nurse training. It was an 8
14 weeks course. Bowman Field was in Louisville, Kentucky across town
15 from Fort Knox. After the 8 weeks course was completed, um, returned to
16 Truax Field in Wisconsin and was there until April of, uh, '45 when I had
17 orders to go to the South West Pacific. We, uh, left San Francisco the, uh,
18 5th of May in 1945. The troops ships that was just coming back from the
19 South Pacific, uh, were in the San Francisco Bay and they, uh, hollered
20 over at us "don't go over there. You'll be sorry [or 01:46] the Golden
21 Gate in '48." [Chuckle] And about, uh, 2 days out of port the Tokyo Rose
22 told us that the USS General C. G. Morton which was the ship that I was
23 on would never, leave, reach its port.
24

25 Interviewer: Oh, that would make you feel really good.

26
27 Devere Powell: Yes. But we joined, uh, a convoy and zig-zagged across the Pacific, uh,
28 taking 30 days to arrive at our destination.
29

30 Betty Thompson: This was May '45?

31
32 Devere Powell: Mm-hm. And we did stop in, uh, Hollandia, New Guinea. Then went on
33 to, uh, Manila, the Philippines and then was transferred to our home base
34 which was on the Island of Laity in the Philippines. And from there we,
35 uh, from there we joined the [inaudible 02:43] First Area Evac Squad
36 which was composed of 25 nurses. We had 5 flight surgeons in our
37 enlisted personnel.
38

39 Betty Thompson: [02:53] Was there a group of you or?

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41 Devere Powell: There were 6 of us that joined. And, uh, replacing 6 of the nurses. And
42 when we, uh, worked we worked, uh, a nurse and a corpsman as a team
43 and we had, uh, either seats or stretches in the planes and we flew around
44 the Philippines, uh, transporting the patients, uh, from the Philippines

1 islands to, uh, Manila. And I made one trip to [inaudible 03:26] stopping
2 at [inaudible 03:27] made one trip back to New Guinea.
3
4 Betty Thompson: [03:32] These were causalities?
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6 Devere Powell: Yes.
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8 Betty Thompson: [03:35] From combat in the Philippines, right?
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10 Devere Powell: Yes. Uh, after V-J Day we were, uh, had temporary duty at Clark Field in
11 Luzon which is north of Manila and we flew, uh, to Okinawa. The Fifth
12 Air Force had brought the prisoners of war that had spent 3 years in, uh,
13 prison camps in Japan from, uh, Japan to Okinawa and we would transport
14 them from Okinawa back to Manila.
15
16 Betty Thompson: [04:07] What shape were they in?
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18 Devere Powell: The ones that, uh, we carried were mostly ambulatory. Very poor physical
19 condition. They looked like walking skeletons. The ones that were not
20 ambulatory had been put on hospital ships but the ones that we transported
21 were able to ambulate.
22
23 Betty Thompson: [04:27] How did they react when they saw you?
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25 Devere Powell: Well they were very happy. Uh, most of the, uh, a lot of the, uh, fellas
26 would, uh, had, uh Japanese souvenirs. I remember one, uh, soldier in
27 particular said I didn't bring anything with me. I don't wanna see any
28 more of, of, uh, Japan. No souvenirs from there. He said I'd rather have
29 your wings. We all wore flight wings. So I gave him my wings. I had
30 another pair, [chuckle], and, uh, was able to get more.
31
32 Betty Thompson: I'm sure that meant everything to him at that point.
33
34 Devere Powell: [Inaudible 05:11]. I don't even remember his name now. Uh, when they,
35 uh, started the point system after V-J Day of giving discharges. When the
36 points got down to 60 I, uh, had 60, uh, points. You get so many points
37 for each year in service and so many for each year over or each month
38 overseas. So I came home and, uh, arrived in, uh, San Diego December
39 21, 1945. We left Riverside I believe it was on, uh, Christmas Eve of that
40 year and I came to Fort Sheridan.
41
42 Betty Thompson: [05:59] When you arrived in the states, uh, where did you arrive?
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44 Devere Powell: San Diego.

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2 Betty Thompson: [06:06] How, what reception did you get? [Inaudible 06:10]
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4 Devere Powell: Oh, the Red Cross was there with donuts and coffee.
5
6 Betty Thompson: Oh, they did.
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8 Devere Powell: Mostly for the, uh, GIs but they did [inaudible 06:18].
9
10 Betty Thompson: [Inaudible 06:18] Because I understand some of the returning nurses were
11 more or less ignored while the GIs were being served.
12
13 Devere Powell: Yeah, they did get the most attention. And it was, San Diego in December
14 and one would have thought it was warm but it was raining and cloudy.
15 And coming from 110 degrees in the shade I was never so cold in my life.
16 [Chuckle] First time in my life I think I have been cold.
17
18 Betty Thompson: Not what you'd expect in sunny California.
19
20 Devere Powell: No. So I arrived at Fort Sheridan on, uh, December 28 of '45 and then got
21 my discharge and, uh, arrived home on December 31.
22
23 Betty Thompson: Had we only known our paths almost crossed. I got out of Fort Sheridan
24 in, uh, December of '45 also.
25
26 Unidentified Speaker: So did I. [Inaudible 07:16]
27
28 Devere Powell: Had my father not died while I was overseas I'd probably would have, uh,
29 uh, signed up again and stayed in. But I was anxious to get home.
30
31 Betty Thompson: And I'm sure your mother and family was most anxious to have you back
32 safely in the U.S.
33
34 Devere Powell: That, uh, was my overseas service.
35
36 Betty Thompson: [07:47] Um, did you feel you were well-treated or differently treated
37 because you were a woman or did you feel you got better treatment?
38
39 Devere Powell: No. I think, uh, it was, uh, pretty much equal. We, uh, were treated very
40 well. I think, uh, [engineers 08:09], uh, built our quarters. We had,
41 compared to the [ground force 08:15] nurses, I think we had fairly, um,
42 elite quarters. We had quarters [inaudible 08:26] to a tent which was, um,
43 plywood mounted on, uh, barrels with, uh, corrugated sheet metal siding
44 and we had the regular tent top to that.

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2 Betty Thompson: [08:41] Did you have cots or regular beds?
3
4 Devere Powell: Yes. We had cots.
5
6 Betty Thompson: [08:46] Uh, what, you went in as a second lieutenant?
7
8 Devere Powell: Yes.
9
10 Betty Thompson: Came out as...
11
12 Devere Powell: First.
13
14 Betty Thompson: First. [09:00] Did you have any, uh, close calls?
15
16 Devere Powell: Uh, just one. After having, uh, delivered our, uh, mobile patients, we were
17 on our way back from Manila to Clark Field and, uh, the pilot put the, uh,
18 landing gear down and the one wheel would not lock. So, uh, we decided
19 to, he decided to, uh, crash land rather than run out of gas. Land that way.
20 So we, uh, fastened our seatbelts and, uh, landed and of course when the
21 wing tip hit the, uh, ground but swung around and, uh, I had my overnight
22 bag sitting on [inaudible 09:53] plane. The, um, overnight [inaudible
23 10:00] flew across the end of the plane and I hollered out "oh my
24 perfume." [Chuckle] I had a big bottle of perfume wrapped up in my
25 pajamas and, uh, the, uh, plane crew said afterwards here we were afraid
26 of the plane catching on fire and here she hollers for her perfume.
27
28 Betty Thompson: She's worried about her perfume. [Chuckle] [10:21] Did it break?
29
30 Devere Powell: No. But we didn't know how, uh, long we were going to have to be over
31 there. It said 18 months and you couldn't get the perform over there.
32
33 Betty Thompson: [Laughter] Right. That was an important item especially if you're
34 [inaudible 10:37] like some did.
35
36 Devere Powell: That's right. But, uh, I was treated very well I think.
37
38 Betty Thompson: [10:49] And you'd do it again?
39
40 Devere Powell: Yes. Not at this age.
41
42 Betty Thompson: No. [Laughter] [10:55] How many flights do you think you made?
43

1Devere Powell: I don't know. I think I still have my notebook in my old footlocker
2 somewhere of the hours we logged. I'll have to dig it out some day and,
3 uh, count them up.
4

5Betty Thompson: Look it up and we'll make an addendum to this.
6

7Devere Powell: Okay.
8

9Betty Thompson: Thank you very much. Bye.
10

11Devere Powell: Good bye.
12

13Betty Thompson: Something I forgot to ask Devere was what she has been doing since but
14 since I've known her for a long time I'll fill this in. She worked for
15 several local eye doctors, um, for many years and then bought a house and
16 went out to the VA to finish her working [throat clearing] career there
17 where she also worked in the eye clinic and as of the end of 1983, um, has
18 permanently retired or at least from going to work every day. She is very
19 active in her church and, uh, does a lot of personal service for, um, many
20 people. Has a sister who is ill and she, uh, lives next door to Devere so
21 she has that responsibility in the summertime. Does many things probably
22 unknown to, to most of us. That is, she does many things for, um, people.
23 Does a lot of service as is spelled out in [her 12:43] purpose for needy and
24 [for 12:48] friends for church for the mission. All sorts of good works.
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