

World War II flight nurse preserves special stories

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By SHARON LONGMAN

World War II flight nurse Dorothy White Errair, 91, of Waterford Township is the national president of the World War II Flight Nurse Association and has stories to tell about what she and other flight nurses experienced as they pioneered the intensive care of wounded GI patients in flight during World War II. Errair was only two months away from graduating from nursing school in Detroit when Pearl Harbor was bombed. She knew nurses would be needed and she wanted to serve her country. At 22, she became a flight nurse with the U.S. Army Air Corps 807th Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadron. Flying in a C-47 airplane that landed directly in combat zones, Errair would quickly load soldiers onto the plane, administer medications, provide preliminary wound care and stave off emergencies while in the air until soldiers could be transported to hospitals. Her squadron was stationed in North Africa, later moved to Sicily and then Rome. She said her job was to keep patients alive until they arrived at the closest hospital. Flights could last up to eight hours and during more than 800 hours of flights, she never lost a patient she cared for. Between 1942 and the end of 1944, 1,514 flight nurses were trained at Bowman Field in Louisville, Ky., and 18 medical air evacuation squadrons were formed that transported more than 1,172,000 sick and wounded soldiers, Marines and sailors in Europe, the Pacific, China and Burma. Aboard airplanes, used as flying hospitals, they flew with skill and courage to all corners of the world caring for sick and wounded GIs to bring them home

safely. "We had no special training, we were all registered nurses, that was the only requirement," Errair said. "No one had ever done that work before." Errair said flight surgeons would talk to them, but they didn't know what to teach them. They didn't know what the nurses could do and no one knew what was going to happen. "We had to figure out the how by ourselves," Errair said. "The more we got into it, the more involved we got in making sure it was done right. Get a bunch of nurses together and they'll work things out. We just did what we had to do. Someone had to do it." After the war, Errair realized that no one knew about what they had done. She made a promise to herself to tell everyone, to preserve the flight nurses memories to share with current and future generations. "There's so many wonderful stories of what we did and I want people who never heard of us to be aware of what we did," Errair said. For many years Errair attended World War II nurse association meetings all over the country. When she became older and needed help in traveling to her meetings and reunions, her daughter, Melinda Bruckman, of Waterford Township, stepped up to help. She told the members that if they would hold the offices, she would run the association. She wrote their newsletters and accompanied them to reunions. How to get their stories to the world in the best way became a concern. In summer 2010, Bruckman's grandsons offered some ideas. A.J. Feole, now 18 and a senior at Clarkston High School, suggested she create a website and put all the stories there for the world to read, and Andrew Feole, now 14 and a freshman at Waterford Kettering High School, suggested she call it The Legend of the Flight Nurse of World War II, since they were the first ones. "I'm documenting their stories for their grandchildren's grandchildren," Bruckman said. "I receive stories in the mail every week from a flight nurse or family of a flight nurse so it can be added to the website. I know in future years families will be tracing their roots or family tree and there will be more stories added. It means a lot to our family and their families and I'm glad I can help." There are more than 1,350 flight nurses listed on the website and it includes a book about air evacuation, a list of books written by flight nurses and newspaper articles and documents. Errair's story includes her military orders, a video interview and many newspaper articles. After the war, she married, had six children and continued her career in nursing and has 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. Bruckman is looking for World War II flight nurses from any branch of the service to add their stories to the collection on the website. Anyone having information to add, update or correct, can contact her through the website. Bruckman would like to give credit to E.P. Wyss who scanned all the documents and to Kevin Robson of www.businessmasters.net who designed the site. The site is continually updated. For more information, visit www.legendsofflightnurses.org. **Veterans Service Organization Information Seminar** The Southfield Veterans Commission sponsors a Veterans Service Organization Information Seminar from noon to 4 p.m. Friday at the Southfield Parks and Recreation building, Room 115, 26300 Evergreen Road. Commanders of various veterans' service organizations will provide information about member benefits and current services available to veterans and their families. All veterans are invited to attend. For more information, call 248-796-4838. **Miracle Quilts** The Miracle Quilts made by Desert Angels group will meet from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, at Independence Village, 701 Market St. in Oxford. The quilter's group creates patriotic quilts for our wounded

troops. Volunteers may attend anytime from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or sew at home. For more information, call 248-321-8669 or email MiracleQuilts@att.net. **VFW Post hosts pig roast fundraiser** VFW Highland–White Lake–Milford Post 9914 hosts a pig roast beginning at 2 p.m. Saturday, at 3200 N. Duck Lake Road, Highland. Cost is \$6 for a meal. There will be 50/50 raffles and Minute to Win-It games begin after 6 p.m. This is a fundraiser for holiday baskets for the community. Donations are appreciated. For more information, call 248-887-9914. **VFW Dunham-Ray Post presents Fall Festival** VFW Dunham-Ray Post 2645 hosts a Semi-formal Fall Festival from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday, at 24222 W. Nine Mile Road, just west of Telegraph Road. The event includes dinner and music. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children under 12. For more information, call 248-356-9453. **Veterans Career Fair** There will be a Veterans Only Career Fair from noon to 2 p.m. and a Collegiate and Professional Career Fair from 3 to 6 p.m. Tuesday, at Cleary University, Livingston Campus, 3725 Cleary Drive, Howell. For more information, contact careerservices@cleary.edu The Oakland Press is interested in all veterans events in Oakland County. Please send info in the body of an email with subject line “Veterans Affairs” to Sharon Longman at sslstart@aol.com. Allow two weeks’ notice for scheduled events and include a phone number for readers to call for more information.