

## You would have enjoyed flying with Ruth Roberts – Minnesota WASP pilot

Who was Ruth Roberts? What did she fly and when? Between now and Memorial Day, we will feature stories of 6 Minnesota Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) who served in World War II flying many kinds of aircraft.

Over Memorial weekend, you'll have an opportunity to lay a wreath at the resting places of these six amazing women, to honor their service and contributions to advancing women in aviation. This article features Ruth Roberts from Mankato. Ruth was one of the early graduates of the WASP program, in the '43-W-6' class of 84 graduates on October 9, 1943. More than 25,000 women applied to the WASP program which had pre-requisites of a private pilot certificate and 500 flight hours. Only 1830 women were accepted into WASP training and 1074 women graduated.

So, who was Ruth Roberts? Ruth was born in Mankato in 1915. Her dad was an attorney. As a young man he served in the 13<sup>th</sup> Minnesota Infantry during the 1898-99 Philippines combat. Her grandfather was an officer in a New York regiment during the Civil War. Ruth enjoyed sports and played basketball while at Mankato High School. By 1940, at age 24, Ruth had earned an undergraduate degree. She was working full time as a 'retail store auditor or clerk' according to the 1940 census.

We don't know details of Ruth's initial pilot training but know she earned her private pilot license in April 1942 and flew the required hours before applying to the WASP program. Ruth completed WASP training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, TX, graduating on October 9, 1943.

In 1943-44 she flew 3 different aircraft that we know of – PT-17, BT-13 and the AT-6. She served at two Army Air Bases, Romulus in Michigan and Cochran in Macon, Georgia. We believe she ferried planes and flew cargo flights from those bases.



Boeing-Stearman PT-17



BT-13

While stationed at Romulus, Ruth was ordered to attend Officer Training School (OTS) in Orlando during which time she felt compelled to write a letter to the editor of Time magazine regarding inaccuracies in an article on women pilots. The article titled "Battle of the Sexes" stated WASP members were being sent to OTS before Congress had approved the funds and also stated women pilots were grounded several days out of every month due to menstruation. In her letter Ruth wrote "very few women have ever found it necessary to be grounded because of any affliction peculiar to their sex."

When the WASP program was discontinued in 1944, Ruth came back to Minnesota and earned a Ph.D. in Psychology with a focus on linguistics from the U of M. She was a counselor in the Student Counseling Bureau working primarily with foreign students and students who had difficulty reading. She retired as an Associate Professor in 1980 after 32 years. Ruth was described by friends as a strong, independent woman who actively supported nature and the arts with her activities and resources. She was an outdoor enthusiast who enjoyed her cabin on Lake Saganaga at the end of the Gunflint Trail where she spent summers canoeing, hiking and birding.

Ruth passed away on March 10, 2006 and is laid to rest at Lakewood Cemetery, Minneapolis. In 2010 she was awarded posthumously the Congressional Gold Medal. Ruth was a dedicated and successful pilot who helped pave the way for future women pilots. Would you have enjoyed flying with her? Absolutely!