

Ellen Church Marshall

Terre Haute, Vigo County

September 22, 1904 – August 22, 1965

On May 15, 1930, Ellen Church became the first airline stewardess (flight attendant) to fly on a Boeing Air Transport.

She was born in Cresco, Iowa. After graduating high school, she became a registered nurse as well as a licensed pilot. After working in a San Francisco hospital, she approached the manager of the San Francisco office of Boeing Air Transport to inquire about being hired as a pilot. When her request was declined, she suggested that the airline put nurses aboard the airplanes to care for the passengers. She was hired and recruited seven other women for a three-month trial period. The requirements to become a stewardess was that each had to be a registered nurse, “single, younger than 25 years old, weigh less than 115 points, and stand less than 5 feet, 4 inches.” In addition to attending to the passenger, they were expected to help with hauling luggage, fueling, and assisting pilots to push the aircraft into hangars.

On her first flight, Ellen served on a 20-hour flight from Oakland/San Francisco to Chicago with thirteen stops and 14 passengers. The experiment was a success and other airlines followed the example over the next few years. Unfortunately, a car accident injury forced her to end her career after eighteen months. She later obtained a bachelor’s degree in nursing education and resumed nursing. During World War II, she served as a captain in the Army Nurse Corps. She cared for soldiers who had been evacuated by air from North Africa and the Mediterranean areas. She also trained flight nurses for the upcoming invasion of Europe on D-Day. She earned an Air Medal for her service in the military.

She moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, where she became director of nursing and later an administrator of Union Hospital. In 1964, she married Leonard Briggs Marshall, president of the Terre Haute First National Bank. However, she died in a horse riding accident on August 27, 1965. She is buried in Highland Lawn Cemetery in Terre Haute, Indiana.



Photo Courtesy: Women in Aerospace History



For more information about Ellen Church Marshall, go to:
<https://www.womeninaerospacehistory.com/15-may-1930-ellen-church/>

References will be published at the end of Women's History Month.