

817 MEDICAL AIR EVACUATION SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

817 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 817th was organized 12 Nov. 1943 at Bowman Field, Ky. Early in March-14th -1944, sailing orders were given and the 817th proceeded by truck and train to Camp Kilmer, NJ; then by ship to Scotland, arriving 2 April 1944 where we were greeted by a chorus of bagpipes. We went by train to Barkston Heath, England near Grantham, arriving 3 April 1944. Quarters in England consisted of 2 open barracks with the most essential facilities across the street. It was cold and damp, our cots small and hard and orange crates became bedside tables. The comforts were few, but we were an eager and happy group.

After settling in at Barkston Heath, England, we began to explore the surrounding towns and villages. We were each issued a bicycle and we made good use of them to get around the Base and going to town for "fish and chips" or to a movie. We went on tours to Stratford-on-Avon to see Shakespearean plays, to London to view the historic places, and to Scotland for a boat trip on Loch Lomond. Gwen Ramsay Sheppard made a trip to North Wales to visit her grandmother and relatives.

Before D-Day, we evacuated patients from Ireland to England, England to Scotland and flew the transatlantic route.

During one of the transatlantic nights, we had our first casualty of 817th personnel. On a mission out of Iceland, July 26, 1944, Catherine Price was lost. It was a traumatic shock to all of us for we were a very closely knit group. A technician from the 816th MAES, Frank Sorrels was lost with Catherine.

We had a heroine in Ann Macek Kreuger. Her plane loaded with patients crash landed and burned at La Harve, France Dec. 44. Ann was awarded the Soldier's Medal for heroic achievement while evacuating patients from the plane after the crash. All on board were saved. D-Day was 6 June 1944 and on 10 June we made our first nights to France and landed at St. Marie gleees (sic). On 14 Oct. 44, we moved to LeMans, France. Our quarters previously occupied by the enemy and bombed out by our Air Force taught us to scrounge for the comforts of home. Because the runways were poor, we were soon moved to Dreux, France where we remained until May 1, and 1945. Here we lived more comfortably on the third floor of a former school dormitory. We evacuated patients from the front lines to Rheims and Paris and across the English Channel to southern England. On these flights, we usually carried jerrycans of gas, bombs or other supplies for the forward areas. Sometimes we had green, young soldiers going to the Front as replacements. Though these flights were dangerous, we had youth on our side, which simply meant we didn't know enough to be scared.

Dreux was only 40 miles from Paris and whenever our schedules permitted we would make the most of the Rue de la Paix, always in search of a better perfume. We worked the hardest right after each campaign and during the lull some of us were assigned TDY with ATC.

After we moved to France in Oct. 1944, it was not all work. We had R and R leaves on the French Riviera, to Switzerland, tours around Paris, to the U.K. and to Rome. We had 3 military weddings.

Our nurses married Troop Carrier Pilots. Rosemary Lodes married Jerry Paccassi Irene Wisti married Mike Wassil, and Ruth Cannon married Leo O'Conner.

The most memorable event for Ann Macek Kreuger was the Christmas party the 817th nurses gave for the French orphans of the Sisters of Charity. They were served in the GI mess, plates filled to capacity and each plate was cleaned of its last morsel. The party itself was held in the Recreation room complete with a trimmed tree and Santa played by 1st Lt. O. Miron, MAC

Adjutant. The nurses had saved their candy rations, purchased small gifts and what few toys that were available. All the girls would have given anything to be home with their families but the sparkling eyes, broad grins and the joy in the laughter of the children was the best present they could have had other than being home.

On 29 April we transferred to Toul moving us closer to the front lines for availability to evacuate from western Germany to hospitals in France and England. On one of these forward flights, Christine Gasvoda, flight nurse, lost her life near Patterborn, 16 April 1945 crashing into a mountain in Germany. This was the second stunning blow to our morale and her death saddened us all.

After V-E Day we continued to evacuate patients from prison camps, including German POWs. In May 1945 we moved to Paris (Orly Fld.), to fly the Trans-Atlantic missions evacuating "our boys" from Paris to the Azores, to Bermuda and on to Miami. Each of our nurses received the Air Medal and 5 Battle Stars for missions flown. Before the Japanese surrendered, all except one of the nurses volunteered to go to the Pacific. August found us in tents at a staging area in Rheims awaiting orders for Pacific duty. During this time, we were able to visit Switzerland and the Riviera, and then back to tents. Victory in the Pacific came before our shipping orders and by mid- September, we were Marseilles bound to await transportation home! The 2nd of Oct. '45, we boarded the Marine Angel, the Liberty Ship that would take 12 long days to sail us across the Atlantic. Within two days we were scattered to all parts of the country. These memories are ours, the 817th, to reflect on and to treasure for years to come. We were a close knit and compatible group and still enjoy our reunions.

Air Force Lineage and Honors
Created: 29 Jul 2020
Updated:

Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.