

819 MEDICAL AIR EVACUATION SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

819 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

We of the 819th MAES are well-aware of our good fortune in being assigned to what we consider to be the best squadron to leave Bowman Fld. in the past, present and future. Our CO is Maj. Emerson Kunda and our CN is 2nd Lt. Phoebe LaMunyan. We graduated from the S.A.E. 21 Jan. 1944, earning the right to wear our golden wings. We wear them with the knowledge we have successfully completed a difficult course.

The week following graduation, our school was honored by a visit from Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Roosevelt. She visited our classes, ate our chow, watched the parade in her honor and

We demonstrated plane loading to her. We read with interest her brief description of the school which appeared in "My Day" she spoke of the "Grim Litter Bearers."

No one knows just when we are leaving Bowman but rumors circulate daily. Suddenly, six of our girls left as replacements toward the Pacific Area. The morning of 14 Feb. 1944, we awakened to a base blanketed by several inches of snow. With full packs, helmets, gas masks and musette bags, we left Bowman accompanied by the 815th and 816th Sqdns.

15 Feb. 1944, we arrived at Camp Kilmer, NJ with the hope our stay would be brief. We attended lectures on subjects we had already spent hours studying previously. Military courtesy was lacking at Kilmer and we were subjected to whistles by the Ground Forces. After a week on a starvation diet, our meals improved a bit but not our relationship with the powers responsible for the abominable condition.

26 Feb. 1944, we started our long journey from Kilmer to the ship, H.M.T. Samaria, an old British boat, averaged and overcrowded. Midst music and doughnuts and thousands of fellow travelers, we boarded. 19 nurses were housed in two cabins. The officers had crowded quarters too but the enlisted men were placed in places unfit for pigs. A small epidemic of measles, mumps and meningitis broke out and the sick-bay was overflowing. With no isolation facilities available, we carried out our technique as best we could. Our free days began to grate on the nerves of the nurses working in the sickbay, so we gladly took over the nursing of the ship to pass the time away.

Our trip across the ocean was slow with no enemy intervention. After two weeks at sea, land looked inviting. a heavy fog made docking impossible so we sat for a day and a half in the Mercey R. Fri. 10 Mar. 1944, we pulled into Fort and watched the other units debark as the band played "Pistol Packin' Mamas." We debarked Sat. AM, were taken by truck to the R.R. station, put in our compartments and were fed doughnuts and coffee by the Red Cross.

Darkness found us in London with our destination still unknown. We finally spent the night at the Red Cross Club at 10 Charles St. We had seen London from the back of a G.I. truck in a blackout. We had a good meal, hot bath, comfortable beds and set forth the next morning on the final lap of our journey. We reached Aldermaston the morning of 12 March 1944. The ranking officers of the post had been removed to make room for us in the best Nissen Hut available. They took everything movable with them. We doubled up to make the largest room a lounge. Cold and shaking, we finally mastered the art of making a fire in an English stove with damp coke and wood. We found paint and redecorated with Patsy making couch covers for two cots. The Service Grp. located us a piano and it began to look like home. We even found time to plant a garden which thrived. We named our abode "The Last Resort."

When our bicycle issue came, we learned biking was more dangerous than flying! Everyone mastered the bicycle and we spent time cycling over the English countryside.

The 26 of March, Lois Roy went to the hospital with Mumps and two days later, Pearl Platt followed with the Measles. Fortunately, they were the only victims of the ship Samaria.

The month of May had passed quickly in spite of the fact our work has not started. We received 5 replacements for the 6 we lost at Bowman but Gertrude Berlings was transferred to the 806th. All of us had our turn at detached service at bomber bases with the 8th AF B-17 and B-24 varieties. We were expected to be on the line for all mission take-offs and returns and attended briefings. We flew in the bombers as much as possible to learn as much as we could about their equipment. The nurses at Old Bockingham were shown how to set up a B-24 for the evac of pts.

Jo Sansone of the 802nd visited our grp. and told us the practical aspects of Air Evac. Capt. Hatch taught us French and we had ditching procedure training. Our Sqdn. Softball team comprised of officers and enlisted men while not champions of the base, were in there pitching! Our pup, Winkie succumbed to a case of round worms and died! while under treatment of the vet. And just as he had learned how to bark and become housebroke almost!

Military momentum was reaching its peak. We could feel it and sensed it as new outfits Anti-Aircraft, Field Artillery, Airborne Infantry moved in. Restrictions were on again; off again something had to be cooking.

June is ushered in with mystery and tension. Combat groups and squadrons were sealed in their areas. Our only glimpse of men aside from the Chaplain and Base Surgeon were brief glimpses of the solemn faces of the columns marching to and from the mess hall and briefings.

The evening of June 5th 1944, Maj. Finkelstein, Base Surgeon announced that O-Day had arrived and we were permitted to go to the line and watch the takeoff and sweat out the returns. Time dragged as we counted the stream of red and green lights from a neighboring grp. flying toward the English Channel. We watched our own C-47's and gliders take off, circle the field forming a beautiful tree formation and fly off into the moonlight. We retired to our respective tents and tried to sleep until time to count the returning planes. We were seeing history in the making.

The next few days were spent in waiting for the announcement that evacuation by air had begun. We learned of this from a glamorous picture of girls from a neighboring field with their arms filled with poppies shown in the Stars and Stripes. Our battle for Air Evac had slipped a trifle. The picture left Flight Nurses wide open for ridicule we were called the "Poppy Girls."

The 819th started its official evacuation 14 Jan. 1944. The 4 of us, who were fortunate enough to take part, returned to our base filled with high hopes of doing our part in our country's enterprise. We didn't know that we would appear almost as an excess sqdn. which specialized the entire month in being alerted and unaltered. We set new world records in dressing and undressing.

Strawberry season arrived and we discovered 2 large patches of them within the confines of the base. We ate berries and even made homemade jam. For occupational therapy, we were presented a loveable little pussy cat, which we named Chloe. Seeking to keep her happy, we found a "Good Polish" kitten to keep her company, named Elmer.

Our month of June ended on a disappointed note. We were fast losing all hope that someday we would be allowed to take part in our primary mission Air Evac. The 819th welcomed July bored, restless, and irritable and resigned to the fact we were champion Goldbricks. Gertrude Van Kirk and Margaret Murphy arrived on the 4th to complete our quota. But just as we were reconciling ourselves to a life of laziness, the unexpected happened we started flying and we loved it. We flew daily, weather permitting into Normandy. Our trips were comparatively uneventful as far as enemy hazards were concerned. Roy's ship was fired upon by sniper fire but was not hit; Rice hit Air Evac Strip #1 just in time for an air raid; Murphy's plane skidded sideways and blew a tire while landing with a full load of pts.; Pejke prepared for a crash landing but the plane landed safely. Just as we settled in, rumors of our going to Prestwick for the North Atlantic flights surfaced, with transfer imminent. We decided to give a cocktail party for some of our friends. Col. Whitacre contributed a ham which Blackie, the mess Sgt. baked to perfection. Our 8th AF buddies parted with a portion of their whiskey stash. The party was a success but the evening ended on a somber note when June Sanders, our Sqdn. poet and historian, was in a jeep accident, suffering multiple rib fractures, fr.vertebrae, brain concussion and internal injuries. We held our breath and prayed for the next few days. Mary Graton was sent TOY to replace June. The next day, we were told we were to start taking at a brine and not to reveal this to anyone. When we took off for the southern tip of England, everyone realized we were leaving the British Isles and the ETO. But for where? Our trip was speedy, pleasant and uneventful except for a forced landing after the plane's hydraulic system was shot by a sniper at Casablanca. By July 25, 1944, we had reached our destination never dreaming we would see Casa Blanca, Algiers and Naples. Lido de Roma, our new home, was at one time Mussolini's playground. We had a large apartment house without windows, lights or plumbing. We plundered for furniture, built a crude fireplace in the backyard to heat water for showers and the techs built us a unique shower.

Soon after arriving, we started working it was regular but not as pleasant as runs to Normandy. Runways were dusty and evac records were obsolete. Many of the pts. were British, Arab and Indian. We were not flying near the front lines as in Normandy and the pts. were not newly wounded. We enjoyed the work and especially Lido de Roma with its sandy beach, beautiful sea and gorgeous moon. We have Italian maids, cannot converse with them. We were still anxious to return to England and our friends.

Another invasion was approaching, everyone could feel it but when the day we arose to find our neighbors, and the Paratroopers had disappeared leaving us their prize furniture and adorable Sicilian mongrel, Julie. In spite of this, the invasion came as a surprise. We heard about it on the streets of Rome; it was a success with few casualties and it appeared once again the 819th was not needed!

We went swimming, got a tan, saw Rome, had an audience with the Pope, saw St. Peter's Cathedral. We visited the catacombs and some investigated the catacomb the Germans had turned into a tomb for several hundred Italians a few weeks before. By this time, the heat, unsatisfactory messing facilities, too much C Ration hash, lack of mail, or the unsettled circumstances under which we were living had gotten to us and for the first time our sqdn. began to squabble amongst ourselves. Therefore it was with unbounded joy that we learned we were being returned to England. We left Lido de Roma 22 Aug. bright and early taking off from Oran. The PX there had bountiful rations and everyone stocked up. In Casa Blanca, we had some free time so decided to shop. We were dressed in slacks and wondered why so many men were overly familiar. It turned out any woman on the streets in slacks was considered a prostitute. By the afternoon of Aug. 25th we were all back in England with hot water and a bath tub again.

We were stationed at Prestwick to make the North Atlantic hops. The girls, who had made the trip to Newfoundland and returned, were thrilled with the work. Those who flew on to the states were too. The nurses lived in an old hotel which was crowded but not too bad, protected by a Sgt. After arriving, the work load decreased. Was it possible that once again the 819th was not needed!

We were into Sept. and broke. Our money has not caught up with us and everyone is broke. And nothing is free. Three complete squadrons had arrived in Prestwick and Evacs were down. Our social life had dwindled we were forced to "knit two, perl two." The news of the Holland Invasion reached our knitting circle and we sweated the boys out for casualties were heavier. While the girls knitted, the enlisted men were discovering the Scottish girls, who were cute and good dancers. They took in old movies and danced at the Bobby Jones Ballroom.

Our work was scanty but the North Atlantic run was a long hard grind. Many pts. are seriously ill and required lots of nursing care. The sickest pts. are accompanied by the Flight Surgeon and nurse. When critical cord pts. were evacuated, doctor, nurse and tech accompanied each ship. It's on runs like those when one realizes they're helping carry out air evac. All the nurses had had one trip across the ocean and some reached NYC. They were overcome by the bright lights, steaks, ice cream, milk and no shortages.

We moved to Westfield by the Sea in Scotland. We were miserable; what with our overbearing Sgt., overcrowded rooms, oversized rats, drafty ventilation, overactive fleas, too few bathrooms made us dislike Scottish castles.

Nov. has 30 days and that was enough! The plane one of our officers was scheduled to fly in returning from NY crashed in Newfoundland. Lt. Hickey circled for hours; finally landing in England with 20 min. of gas left Eichelberger, a tech on TDY in France rode a plane to earth leaving a much torn ground but survived. We continued to fly to the states and a new stop was, Fort Totten out of this world. No one there had been taught Military Courtesy; our techs had to work in the permanent personnel's mess hall on KP. Then our routine was changed and we

only flew to the Azores. They were not well organized, food was unpalatable, quarters for transients were inadequate not enough beds. They did have ice cream, lines, fresh fruit, leather goods, and watches at reasonable prices. Nov. was over and it marked the 1st anniversary of the activation of the 819th. We had grown a lot, traveled a lot and had had our ups and downs. We are more united than ever before a complete sqdn. and proud of it. We are praying for a transfer.

The New Year 1945 finds us on the move again. The 806th left for Orley to open a new base in Paris. Some of our Christmas pkgs. arrived in time, others were stranded. Life continues in its slow monotonous fashion. We gave a party and had a great time. It was good to be all together again. Christmas day, Betty Rice was stricken with a queer type of paralysis, affecting partially the entire left side of her body but she is gradually improving. Christmas was celebrated with too much emphasis on the day.

819th Sqdn. Central Europe; Normandy; Rhineland.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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