

303rd STATION HOSPITAL

MISSION

LINEAGE

303rd Station Hospital

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

In the spring of 1943, Major Thomas Thompson, an orthopedic surgeon at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, began recruiting personnel for an overseas medical unit. In July, 1943, the 303rd Station Hospital was formed at Camp McCall, North Carolina. Major Thompson was the original commanding officer of the unit.

1st Lt. Florine Thompson was assigned as Chief nurse. 2nd Lt. Gladys Gillilaud, head nurse of the enlisted men's orthopedic ward and 2nd Lt. Frances Nunn, head nurse of the Officers

Orthopedic Ward at Walter Reed received orders red border on 10 July 1943 to report to the 303 Station Hospital at Camp McCall. Additional female personnel assigned were a dietitian, physical therapist, and three Red Cross Workers.

During July and August engaged in overseas training including the infiltration course and the obstacle course. These exercises included the female personnel. Gas mask drills, many lectures and required swimming. During this training period major Thompson left the unit. LtCol. Smith was assigned as commanding officer of the unit.

On the 23rd of August 1943, the 303rd Station Hospital including thirty-nine male officers, five female officers, three Red Cross workers and 392 enlisted men were ordered "To proceed from Camp McCall to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, to arrive no later than 1600, 31st August 1943. This is a permanent change of station, movement by motor and/or rail." The entire unit less the advanced party left Camp McCall by troop train.

At Camp Kilmer joined by seventy-two 2nd Lt. Army Nurses. Twenty-two came from Camp Campbell, Ky, twenty-five from Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and twenty-five from Fort Knox, Ky.

The short time at Camp Kilmer was full of activity. The nurses exchanged their white duty uniforms for tan and white seersucker field uniforms and caps. Their Class A uniforms were exchanged for O.D. issues. Issued a set of fatigues and field equipment including gas masks, mess kits and canteens. By the time Squadron left to embark on the "Empress of Russia," Rumor had it the destination was "MURMANSK."

The "Empress of Russia" was a Canadian cruise ship. Left New York Harbor on 5 Sept. 1943, but had to return to port because we could not keep up with the convoy of troop ships. Finally on Sept. 8th-9th, sailed again as part of a convoy of ships loaded with war supplies. Were in the middle of the convoy and could see ships in all directions from us. Sailed the northern route and were on board a total of twenty-one days.

There was much fog on the trip and a constant zig-zagging to avoid the threat of submarines. Life preservers, "Mae Wests," were constant companions. Had many ship-board drills, and many rumors of ash cans being dropped. Finally landed in the Firth of Clyde at Glasgow, Scotland, where the squadron was met by a bag-pipe brigade as the squadron disembarked and a contingent of volunteers serving tea in new canteen cups.

The squadron traveled by train from Glasgow to Peterborough and to Thrapston, England, where the squadron were met by Ambulances that took us to the 303rd Station Hospital location. The first night the squadron slept in the hospital wards. The next morning, the nurses were taken to Lilford Hall where the nurses were quartered for the next two years.

Lord Lilford lived in one wing of the castle and was reported to have said he would just as soon have a Nazi bomb hit the castle as seventy-five American Army nurses. There was cold running

water in the castle and an abolition hut in the rear for bathing. The squadron first test of survival was to keep the fireplace burning as there was no central heating.

The squadron first task in organizing the hospital wards was to standardize them. The medicine cabinets, linen closets, kitchens, etc. were all set up the same so that nursing personnel could easily adjust from one ward to another. They were also standardized so that we could work with "torches," as the English called them, if it became necessary. Nursing personnel worked twelve hour shifts -- 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. and 7 p.m. - 7 a.m. with two hours off during the shift if possible. There was an occasional 48 hour V.O.C.O.

The squadron were originally designated as the 303rd Station Hospital with a 750 bed capacity. After D-Day we expanded the hospital to 1500 beds. This was done by erecting fifteen bed tents attached to the nissen hut wards.

The squadron had as many as three hundred patients arrive at one time. There were many patients with shrapnel wounds and many with frozen feet.

Col. Smith left the unit as Commanding Officer sometime during 1943. Col. Ira Abrahamson was assigned as Commanding Officer following Col. Smith. Col. Abrahamson was replaced by Col. Tillman A. Ragan who remained with the unit until the squadron were broken up sometime in the spring of 1945.

Some of the nurses were transferred to the 230th General Hospital for transfer to the Pacific Theatre. Following cessation of hostilities in the Pacific some of the nurses were assigned to various units for the Army of occupation or for transfer to the U.S.A.

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