

806 MEDICAL AIR EVACUATION SQUADRON

MISSION

LINEAGE

806 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadron
Redesignated 806 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron

STATIONS

Thermal AAF, CA
Dunnellon AAF, FL

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

In writing this brief history for this illustrious occasion, I have been confronted with statistics and memories, and the realization that in order to make this a short story, some things will inevitably

be left out. I have tried to recapture the essence of what was, to us, an education and a most memorable experience.

During December of 1942 while battles raged in North Africa, Guadalcanal, and Stalingrad, nurses from all over the United States began to arrive at Bowman Field, Kentucky to form the First Flight Nurses' Training School. After six weeks of training, the first graduation exercises were held on 18 February 1943. Brig. Gen. David Grant, First Air Surgeon, gave the main address and awarded to Lt. Jerry Dishroon a pair of gold wings for maintaining the highest average during the course of study.

The succeeding months were spent in more classroom instruction, marching and drilling (the weather being no deterrent), flying time, practical experience in plane loading and gas mask drills. We also had several bivouacs and went on maneuvers to Fort Bragg and Pope Field.

On July 5, 1943, the 806th left Bowman by train for Camp Shanks, New York, our port of embarkation for England. Forty-eight hours before we were to board the ship, the Army with its usual foresight suddenly issued us the new OD uniforms. Sizes were first-come-first-served, and there was a lot of frantic sewing and pinning in order to leave fully clothed and not too baggy. Jerry Dishroon never did find a belt for her raincoat and drove Miss Dunnam crazy for the next two years!

On the night of the 16th of July we went aboard the S.S. Thomas H. Barry, and early the next a.m., sailed for England and adventure!! The boat trip, as I remember it was notable for several things besides being our first trip across the Atlantic wonderful food, Lulu Chaloupka's porthole tan, "Mrs. Murphy-Tub 10," listening to rumors about submarines, learning shillings, pounds and pence and only one nighttime boat drill.

Early on the morning of the 27th, we landed at Liverpool and later left for Newbury and Welford Park. Being at Welford was memorable for several things that wonderful English countryside, double summertime when it stayed light till 7 p.m., our telephone code making us known as the "Gladstone Bags," trying to get those black boards up, marching to the mess hall, the RAF Mess, Gudobba's birthday cakes, learning to ride those English bikes with the handbrakes. We also had early morning calisthenics which were received favorably by everyone! After three months, we left Welford for Nottingham and Langar where we again established residence in the local Nissen huts. These lovely domiciles were noted for their lack of insulation, lack of heat, lack of comfort and plenty of air conditioning. Also, when it rained and the wind blew from a certain direction, they had a tendency to become flooded. I remember awakening one morning and seeing Dolly Vinsant's cot completely surrounded by water, with her shoes floating sadly alongside. There was also an awful lot of mud, Gudobba's garden, and our first encounter with the Asiatic Water Closet.

In early November, the 806th made its first history - Lt. Jean K. Bartholomew and a surgical technician evacuated twelve patients from the ETO to the United States. This was the first transatlantic Medical Air Evacuation from the ETO. Also during December, 218 patients were evacuated from North Ireland to England, and this was the first organized mass evacuation of

patients in the United Kingdom. In January, we evacuated 513 patients in some of the worst weather of the year.

All the while, of course, we were continuing to learn things - how to set up pup tents in the snow (Major Jordan's ideal), how to get coke to burn, lessons in English history, classes in emergency ditching procedures over at Coresmore, how to get a good night's sleep on biscuits and bolsters, and how to catch the train to London before our 48-hour pass actually started and how to get back at the last minute!

All of us during our tour so far had been constantly reminded of our need to prove Air Evac. It was really a pioneering job we were doing and along with a squadron in Africa and one in the Pacific, we were establishing a new concept of medical history. The problems which we had studied in theory, and some no one ever mentioned, were now to be faced in reality and by each as an individual. Air Evac is so completely accepted today and so vital a part of good medical care that it is difficult to believe its value was ever doubted, but as we all knew; it was. And we were among the Early Birds!

Our greatest opportunity came after D-Day and in the months of war that followed while stationed at Grove with the 31st Air Transport Group. On 11 June 1944, Lt. Grace E. Dunnam made the first authorized evac trip to Omaha Beach and brought back 18 litter patients.

Then during June, July, and August, with the 31st, we evacuated 20,142 patients and received two letters of commendation from Wing Headquarters for this.

Our adventures in Scotland began next. We moved to Ayr on the 28th of August and began transatlantic flights from Prestwick in C-54's with the ATC to Iceland, Newfoundland, Labrador and the Azores. As usual, we took advantage of our new location and visited Edinburgh and Glasgow and enjoyed the hospitality and friendliness of the people of Ayr.

Then 5 December was our first permanent move to France; to Orly and who among us can forget that lovely building we fell heir to! It had everything except heat, hot water and window panes. (The warmest place was outside in the snow). On the 7th of December 1944 Lt. Flo E. Twidale and T/3 David Winston made the first evac of American wounded from the continent for a transatlantic flight the plane was a C-54 and there were 16 litter patients. During the months of December and January with ATC, 4,928 patients were evacuated.

Many of these flights were to the Azores, where we enjoyed the warm weather and hot water and got our washing and bathing done. While back at Orly, on our days off, we volunteered to work at the 1st General Hospital in Paris. We also kept our bags packed since the Germans had begun the Ardennes offensive and had hopes of being in Paris by Christmas. A common sight at that time was the individual German paratroopers who landed near Orly and were captured none, by the 806th! A short move occurred in January. We moved from Orly back to Welford and as soon as it was certain that we had all our Class A's in the cleaners, and all the electrical appliances had been converted back to English current, we got orders to move back to France.

This move made necessary our tenth traditional "Mood to Move" Ceremony a toast to mobility and mellow friendship. Strictly a squadron affair at tended by all the faithful, it was carried on (and on!) with great dignity and solemnity with a small libation from time to time! This was followed by the writing of the Round Robin letter to some lucky guy who usually spent the next few days trying to read it.

During our stay at Melun and later Villacoublay, France, in the months of 1945, there was much hard work and many changes. A short tour of duty with a tent hospital near Le Mans preceded our real work, and after the Rhine paradrop in March, we began the Germany to France flights with the 436th T.C. Group following General Patton and the Third Army in their sweep across Europe.

In April 1945, the 806th set a world-wide record, which still stands, by evacuating 17,287 patients during that one month. This was more patients than had ever been evacuated in one month by any squadron in any Theatre of Operation. We received a letter of commendation from Major General Paul Williams of the Ninth Troop Carrier Command for this effort. And to tell the truth, I think we deserved every word of it!

Also in July we made the first Air Evac of patients from Berlin, Germany "Hawksie-Mae" did this. Four of us, along with Major Cannon, had been assigned to Berlin in order to evacuate by air any personnel attending the Potsdam Conference.

On 8 May 1945, the war had ended in Europe and tho' our hard work continued, the winds of change were in the air. As in life itself, our days at Melun and Villcoublay were some of the loveliest and some of the saddest times together. We had great fun getting Jerry and Bill, and "Guff and Dick, married and we mourned the loss of three friends Sgt. Arthur Steiner, Lt. Dolly Vinsant, and Sgt. William McMullan.

806th Sqdn. - Central Europe, Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland. Received a letter of commendation for its record achievement of evacuating 17,266 patients during the month of April 1945. Commendable also is the fact that 16,997 of these patients were flown directly from front lines.

June 11: Official aerovac began on D+5 when 2d Lt. Grace E. Dunham, chief nurse of the 806th MAES, flew into Normandy in a C47 that was still painted with invasion stripes. Upon landing, she jumped from the airplane wearing her oversized flight suit, provided care to the wounded, and flew with them to England. By the end of the month, flight nurses had helped evacuate about 7,500 patients from France to England. 1944

Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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