

# 807 MEDICAL AIR EVACUATION SQUADRON

## MISSION

## LINEAGE

807 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron

## STATIONS

## ASSIGNMENTS

## COMMANDERS

## HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

## EMBLEM

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## NICKNAME

## OPERATIONS

807th Sqdn. Naples-Foggia; Northern Apennines; Po Valley, Rome-Arno; Southern France. Received Meritorious Unit Citation for the period 6 Oct. 1943-15 May 1945. GO 147, Hq. 12th Air Force, 3 July 1945.

The radio was interrupted with the urgent voice of the announcer, "We have a message from the White House." Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt came on the air and in a very somber tone announced, "Dec. 7, 1941, a date that will live in infamy, the United States of America was

suddenly and deliberately attacked by Naval and Air Forces of the Empire of Japan." The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor!

I was a 21 year old senior nursing student in a large Detroit hospital. My future and that of thousands of registered nurses across the country changed with that announcement. The following 3 years were memorable because our generation was at war. On Oct. 5, 1942, I joined the AC and later became one of the first flight nurses to go through the School of Air Evacuation at Bowman Fld., KY. We were at war and war casualties were mounting necessitating rapid removal of sick and wounded from the battle areas. Air Evac was a new phase of caring for the wounded and was not readily accepted as an alternative to the established means.

Aug. 1943, members of the 807<sup>th</sup> MAES left the states in a convoy heading toward the Mediterranean Theater arriving at Bizerti, Tunisia, staying at the bivouac area at the City of Tunis, their destination was Sicily. They did air evac from Catania Main Airfield, Sicily to Bari, Italy evacuating the sick and wounded from the battlefronts to the rear hospitals. There was very heavy fighting in Italy and with the backload of wounded more teams of air evac personnel were being sent to the front lines. On Nov. 8, 1943, 13 nurses and 13 technicians plus a crew of 4 headed for Sari, Italy. They became lost and were forced to land in Albania in the Balkan Mts. in enemy territory and for the next 62 days, they criss-crossed those snow covered mountains in blizzards and snow storms, evading the Germans, who were searching for them.

The following day, more of us flew to Sari. The nurse's quarters in Barionly had six cots, so we figured we would be three to a cot! Upon our arrival in Sari, the Medical Officer wanted to know where the other nurses were as he had such a backlog of patients and the other plane load of air evac personnel did not arrive as expected. The next day, our CO, Maj. McKnight, met our plane and told us the plane was missing in the Balkans.

We had spent months in rigorous training in the KY hills to learn to do air evac in combat and here we had only been overseas three months and already 26 of our personnel were missing in action. It was devastating. For almost a month we waited and wondered and prayed for their safe return. On Dec. 2, 1944, the sqdn. was called together and we were informed that the C-47 had crash landed in Albania, there were survivors and the British would try to reach them. The Germans were also looking for them!

Our work with the 807<sup>th</sup> went on as usual but each day our thoughts and eyes looked east across the Adriatic Sea, praying for their safe return. The empty cots and vacant chairs in the mess hall were constant reminders of our loss. The war went on and casualties increased and 13 replacements were sent from Bowman Fld. in Dec. At noon Jan. 14, 1944, all our nurses were in the mess hall when the phone rang. Our CN, Lt. Grace Stakeman, answered. Then she informed the mess sergeant that there would be 13 guests coming for dinner! We became silent, glancing about with questions in our eyes; "is it them?"

Suddenly the jeep horn could be heard in the distance, we ran outside to see our long lost friends waving, smiling and crying, as were we all. Only ten nurses and the crew returned that day. The other 3 were still missing but in due time they returned to civilization and safety. This story is told by Agnes Jensen Mangerich in this book, so will not repeat it here. The enlisted men came home with the remaining three nurses. Many of the personnel had physical as well as emotional scars they were emaciated, one could not see and other disabilities. Their biggest problem had been fleas, they had not showered or shampooed in two months!

After rest and recuperation, all were returned to assignments stateside and could never return to the ETO as the Germans had pictures of them and if caught, they would be tried as spies.

No sooner had we gotten over this episode in our squadron's life than two weeks later on Jan. 30, 1944, three of our nurses were badly injured in a jeep accident. Mildred Wallace died a few hours later, Allen fractured her arm and Dottie Booth fractured her spine. Three weeks later on Feb. 24, 1944, Dottie, encased in a body cast was being evacuated stateside to recuperate. Elizabeth J. Howren, flight nurse and S/Sgt. William Fitzpatrick, technician were the evac crew; all 807th MAES. On the flight from Catania, Sicily to Algiers, North Africa one hour after take-off, the C-47 crashed into a Sicilian Mt., killing all on board. Our hearts were heavy as we followed the casket laden jeeps up the hillside where the American Flag was flying at half-mast and taps were being played in the background.

Three replacements arrived in early March Rae, Willy and Holly brought our numbers up to 25. At the end of March, the last of the missing nurses returned to us. They were in much better physical shape than the 13 had been. They had been hidden in various homes.

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Air Force Lineage and Honors

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Sources

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