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Date: 10/3/2007 6:58:33 PM Eastern Daylight Time  
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Forwarded Message:

Subj: **flight nurse column**  
Date: 10/3/2007 9:59:35 AM Eastern Daylight Time  
From: [Vanharl](#)  
To: [AdnileM49](#)

## WW II FLIGHT NURSE

The movie *Saving Private Ryan* looked real to her and Army Air Force Flight Nurse Lieutenant Merilys Brown would know since she was one of the first females on Omaha Beach just days after the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of France. As soon as the Allies got a toe-hold the combat engineers with their bulldozer tanks started to blade out a crude airstrip just above the beach. They laid down the metal interlocking Marston matting and the first US combat runway was put into action on French soil. Because the C-47s hauled in combat troops and equipment they could not paint red crosses on the sides of the planes. So when the aircraft lifted off of Omaha Beach they were not protected under the Geneva Convention as non-combat medical planes. The dreaded German 88mm artillery continued to fire onto Omaha Beach even days after they had been routed from the waterline. A makeshift tent hospital was set up next to the runway and the injured allies, as well as German troops were triaged to determine who was seriously wounded enough to be flown back to England, but not so serious that they would die in transit. Medical evacuation from the battlefield by air was brand new to the Army. Prior to WW II the wounded were taken from the fight in trucks, field ambulances, and even the venerable old two wheeled handcart. The primary problem with these older forms of transport was the lack of speed in getting the injured to the rear area. Moving the wounded to hospitals that had surgeons, life saving drugs and cleanliness—something that could not be found in an active combat zone. The first class of Army Flight Nurses completed training in February of 1943. Aeromedical Evacuation was used by the US military in North Africa but the wounded troops were picked up from rear area hospitals out of harm's way. The landings on Omaha Beach were the first time in the European Theater that C-47s with one Flight Nurses and one medical technician was flown into a hot combat zone to get the wounded out of France and back across the English Channel. Some wounded were flown to Allied hospitals in England but many of the airfields were too busy with bomber and fighter missions being flown



round the clock to deal with the off loading of the injured. A thousand bed field hospital was established in Prestwick, Scotland and the C-47s were flown directly to it after clearing French airspace. In the first days after D-Day a single C-47 Air Evac crew could fly three missions off Omaha Beach in a day. Lieutenant Brown was temporarily posted at Prestwick to fly C-54 Air Evac missions out of Scotland using that vital air bridge, transporting the wounded on a thirteen hour flight back to New York. Many of these wound patients had never been away from home before joining the Army, never been wounded in combat and never been on an airplane. All three created increased stress factors for the Flight Nurses on the long trip to the States. Over one million patients were evacuated by air during WW II, with 4, 707 wounded transported in one day. In WW I all the wounded returned to the US on troop ships and actual military hospital ships. In WW II one fifth of all patients returned to the States by Air Evacuation. Speed saves lives in combat. The Army Air Force had 500 Flight Nurses and formed 31 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadrons to meet the needs of the seriously wounded in WW II. They flew in all theaters of operations during WW II. After Germany surrendered the Evac Units in Europe were re-directed to the Pacific to transport the wounded during the impending invasion of the Japanese mainland. I met now retired Captain (Army equivalent Colonel) Merilys Brown of the US Public Health Commissioned Corps at the Labor Day weekend 2007 convention in Colorado Springs of the WW II Flight Nurses Association and the Society of Air Force Nurses. There where seven combat tested, WW II nursing aircrew members at the convention. They are always looking for their fellow WW II Flight Nurses. [Adnilem49@aol.com](mailto:Adnilem49@aol.com) or 248-623-7883 will put you in contact with this wonderful veteran's organization. These Nurses aimed high before the phrase was fashionable. They set the standard for today's Air Force medical evacuation flying missions. If you were wounded in combat during WW II or any conflict since and made it home, you most likely need to thank a Flight Nurse.

2 Sept 2007

Major Van Harl USAF Ret.

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## THE WW II VETERANS ARE LEAVING US

My mother was in the hospital so I decided to go back to the Chicago area to visit. At first I was going to fly. I live in Colorado Springs and it was a 1200 mile trip. I am from Iowa and if I drove I could stop by and visit some relatives. I have a couple of surviving uncles who are WW II combat veterans. They are both in very poor health and I just wanted to see them. I always call them on Veteran's and Memorial Day but I thought this trip would provide me a chance to see, perhaps for the last time, these family members who left Iowa to go to war as young men, not to return until the surrender of Japan. At one time there was a large group of uncles and great uncles in my family who had served in WW II but except for two men they are all gone now. Remember WW II ended 62 years ago. The WW II veterans you can still visit were the very youngest of the "boys" who fought. The senior military leadership of WW II was already middle-age when they lead the United States in



# GV woman was a flight nurse in Europe 50 years ago

By Dave Ricker  
Green Valley News

The evacuation of wounded soldiers from the front lines to the rear has always been of paramount importance.

During the last year and a half of World War II in Europe, a Green Valley woman was a vital part of that effort.

Merilys Brown, who at that time was known as Lt. Merilys Porter, was assigned to the 440th Troop Carrier Group.

Brown, 76, has lived in Green Valley with her husband, Daniel, for several years.

They moved here initially in 1979, but then moved away and lived in San Diego between 1984 and 1990 only to return to Green Valley.

The evacuation of wounded soldiers by air was a new concept during World War II.

"We flew in on C-47s and brought the wounded back," said Brown, during a recent interview.

For the D-Day invasion, Brown and her colleagues were based



(News photo by Mario Aguilar)  
**MERILYS BROWN**

near American airborne troops in England.

Later, they flew across the English Channel to evacuate some of those who had been wounded during the fighting.

"We were the first nurses to fly in and bring back the wounded from Omaha Beach," she said.



(Photo courtesy of Merilys Brown)  
**LT. MERILYS PORTER**

In fact, Brown's picture and one of her uniforms are on display at the Airborne Museum at Normandy.

Brown also participated in the Battle of the Bulge and the Rhine campaign as her crew was the first across the Rhine River to re-



(Photo courtesy of Merilys Brown)

**Lt. Merilys Porter and her crew celebrate V-E Day near Vienna.**

trieve casualties.

"The most difficult was the Battle of the Bulge because we would fly young men up and then fly the wounded back," she recalled. "Some of those young men had not been in the service long."

Brown also remembered that

her profession was exposed to danger as one of the C-47s was hit by German fire during the Battle of the Bulge.

Brown had been a public health nurse prior to the war and volunteered for air evacuation duty.

"I thought this would be the most rewarding," he said.

Brown recalled how they had flown out several loads of concentration camp survivors after the camps were liberated.

"You felt that you wanted to give them some food as they were so emaciated, but they couldn't tolerate it," Brown said.

Brown and her crew were based at Paris on V-E Day, but were on a mission to Austria when the war ended.

"We were sure it was going to happen," she said.

Brown continued flying out wounded for awhile after V-E Day, but eventually, the unit was ordered to prepare for redeployment to the Pacific for the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

"We were at Marseilles on V-J Day waiting to leave," she recalled.

Brown returned to public health nursing after the war with the U.S. Public Health Service until her retirement.



# WWII flight nurse recalls daring rescue work

By Ellen Sussman

Special to the Green Valley News

## Your Incredible Neighbors

Dec. 7, 1941 — the day Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan.

June 6, 1944 — D-Day, when American and British forces landed at Normandy in France to begin liberating western Europe from the Nazi grip.

Sept. 11, 2001 — when the war on terrorism is said to have begun.

These are all memorable dates that will forever be known in the annals of U.S. history.

During World War II, just six days after a mighty armada crossed a narrow strip of sea from England to Normandy, land-

ing on Omaha Beach on D-Day, former Army Air Force flight nurse Merilys Brown was one of the first to land in a C-47 to help with rescue efforts.

Now 90, and a resident at La Posada, Brown has a collection of books and memorabilia from that historic and memorable phase in her life.

Among one of the first classes of Army Flight Nurses, she completed training in November 1943 and spent the next three years as

an Air Corps nurse.

Recalling her arrival on Omaha Beach on June 12, 1944, she said, "The devastation on the beach was terrible."

Speaking about the rescue efforts, she confirmed that the C-47s, which flew in to rescue troops, did not have a Red Cross painted on them because they were combat planes. Therefore, they were not protected by the Geneva Convention and could be fired upon—even though their mission was rescue.

The landings on Omaha Beach were the first in the European Theater where C-47s had one flight nurse and one medical technician and were flown into a hot combat zone.

Research shows that over one million patients were evacuated by air during WW II

Brown remembers seeing Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower at Greenham Commons in England just days before D-Day; she pointed to a photo of him with American troops and said she was there.

"My most memorable experiences were D-Day, waiting for the C-47s to return to Greenham Commons after the Normandy invasion... then on June 12, making flights to Omaha Beach to evacuate the wounded, and also the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 flying young men, fresh from the U.S. to the front lines and evacuating



ELLEN SUSSMAN | SPECIAL TO THE GREEN VALLEY NEWS

**MERILYS BROWN** shows a latest medal given to her at a convention of WWII flight nurses in 2007 and a model of a C-47 transport plane.

SEE **NEIGHBORS**, PAGE A9

# NEIGHBORS: Nurse saved lives

CONTINUED FROM A1

the wounded. I remember the 'buzz bombs' falling all around as the wounded were loaded on the plane," she recalled.

Brown spoke of the memories very matter-of-factly; that was her calling and even with 'buzz bombs' falling all around her, she never considered herself in mortal danger.

Seemingly shy about acknowledging medals she has received, she said she was awarded the Air Medal, the Europe-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal.

Then in September 2007, more than 60 years after her service in World War II, she attended the World War II Flight Nurses Convention in Colorado Springs and received her latest medal.

The gleaming gold medal on a red, white and blue striped ribbon from the Non-Commissioned Officers Association reads: "WWII—in Honor of Remembrance. On the reverse side engraved are the words

"The Greatest Generation" Valor—Sacrifice—Fidelity.

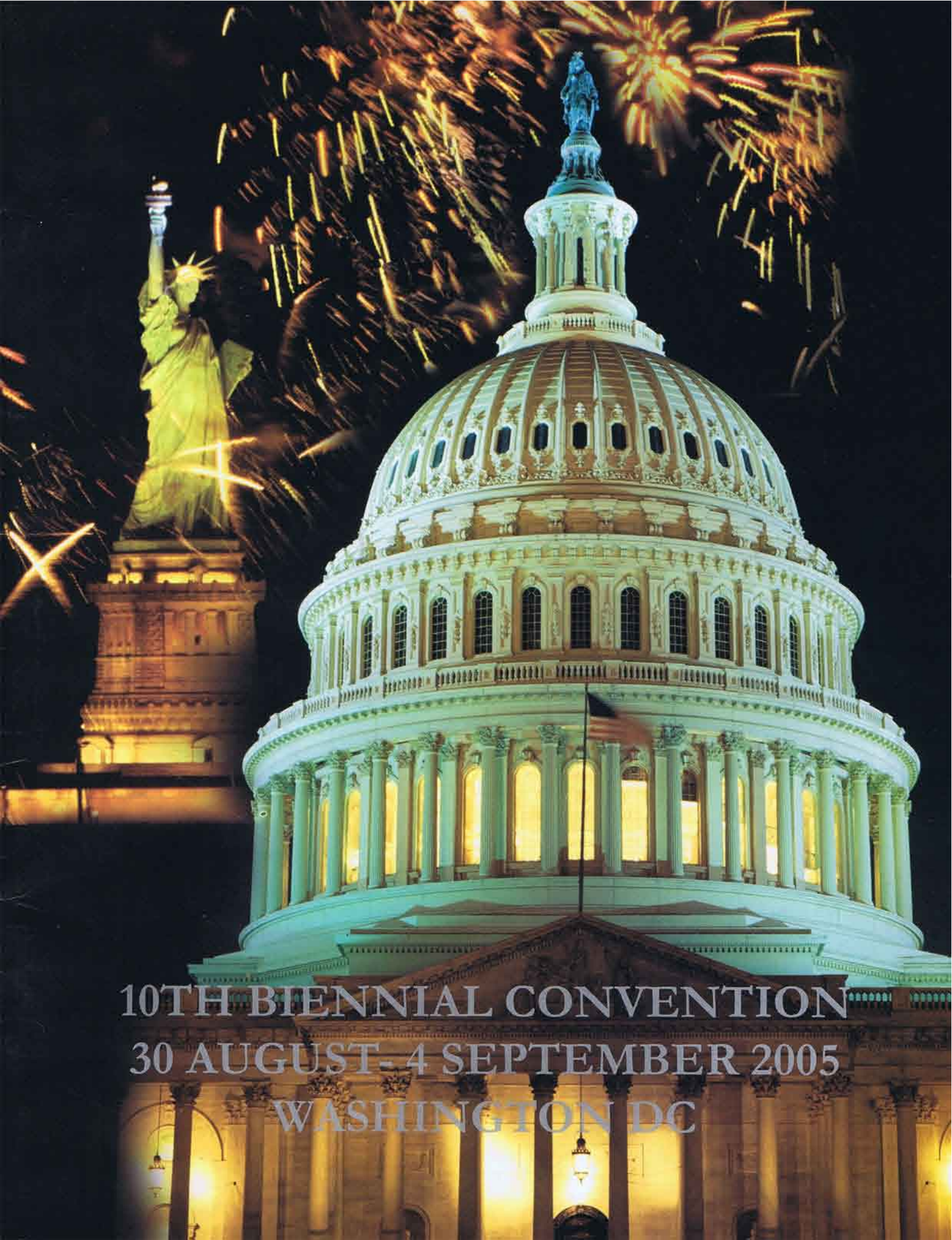
Asked if she ever considered herself adventurous, Brown said, "I wouldn't have thought so, but I guess so."

From 1954 through 1960, continuing her work as a nurse with the U.S. Public Health Service she spent six years in Alaska, when it was still a territory, and made her rounds on dog sled. Brown talks about it as if it was nothing unusual.

Major Van Harl, USAF Retired, has written about WWII flight nurses and said, "These nurses aimed high before the phrase was fashionable. They set the standard for today's Air Force medical evacuation flying missions. If you were wounded in combat during WWII or any conflict since and made it home, you most likely need to thank a flight nurse."

**Ellen Sussman** is a freelance writer in Green Valley. Contact her at [ellen2414@cox.net](mailto:ellen2414@cox.net). Comment on this story online at [www.gvnews.com](http://www.gvnews.com).





10TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
30 AUGUST - 4 SEPTEMBER 2005  
WASHINGTON DC









**Agnes Mangerich**





**Dorothy Errair delivers a great speech!**

















**WWII Flight Nurses**



## WWII FLIGHT NURSES COLLAGE

Saturday, 3 Sep 05  
Members of the WWII FNA  
gave oral & video interviews  
about their service before,  
during, and after WW II.



Agnes Mangerich  
w/ Ruth Anderson, interviewer



Harriet Papp & Merilys Brown



Rose Miller



Dorothy Errair  
President, WW II Flight Nurse Association



Agnes Flaherty



Frances Thorp



Gene Eisenhower

By Ruth Anderson