

~~Blodgett Memorial Hospital~~ ~~Grand Rapids Michigan~~

Memories of an Army Air Nurse

2007
It was recently brought to my attention that Charlotte Mallon, long time Parish and Choir member, was decorated by the Philippine government last year for her service during World War II. This year, Armed Forces Day is on May 17th and Charlotte has graciously consented to write a brief history of her military service for the Lantern. We know you will enjoy reading it. Belated congratulations, Charlotte! - The Editor

Several years ago, the Philippine government designed and issued a WWII commemorative medal for U.S. Veterans who had served in the Philippines. One of our sons who is active in the Iowa American Legion insisted that he obtain this medal for me. Mr. Victor Cumoa, President of the Philippines Lions Clubs in the United States presented it to me in Phoenix, just before the Veteran's Day parade on November 11th, 2002.

I graduated in 1938 from the School of Nursing at Blodgett Memorial Hospital in Grand Rapids, the oldest school of nursing in Michigan. It's interesting to note that in the early 1880's, four Grand Rapids socialites interviewed Florence Nightingale in England, and received instructions on organizing a School of Nursing. The first class of five students graduated in 1886. When I graduated, the Depression was sputtering to a close, but there were still 10 nurses applying for every job. By 1940, I had found steady work in a Detroit hospital managed by an Order of Protestant nuns from Switzerland.

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Late that same year, I read a notice on the

mess hall bulletin board, asking for volunteers for a pioneer program training Flight Nurses who would care for wounded removed from combat by air. I applied, and applied, and applied, but could not get past my Jefferson Barracks Chief Nurse. On an off day (without permission) I took the train to Kansas City, Kansas and obtained, from the Federal Aviation Administration, permission to take private flying instructions. I was ready to solo when my Chief Nurse finally gave up and cut orders for me.

Each class at the Army Air Force School of Air Evacuation located at Bowman Field, Louisville, Kentucky had 100 students. The course was ten weeks long, from 5am to 4pm six days a week, and rigorous with plenty of studying at night! We soon realized that the removal of wounded by air would be swift, systematic and well-organized.

I graduated in late November 1943. By March of the following year, another Flight Nurse (Yale University School of Nursing) and I were sent to the Army & Navy Command Staff School at Orlando, Florida. There we taught classes in the practices and procedures of Air Evacuation of wounded, to Flight Surgeons from the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and a few from France and Poland who wore berets.

In September 1944, I received my orders for the Air Transport Command, headquartered at Hickam Field, Honolulu, Hawaii. We were to be based in Saipan and assigned to the 4-engine C-54's, which carried 32 litter patients and 6 ambulatory. Flight Nurses in the South Pacific flew with Troop Carrier Command in the smaller C-47's. After a week's orientation and field exercises, we flew to Saipan and continued the evacuation of wounded from the tent hospitals on Saipan and Guam. After a short pause, we started air evacuations from the "island hopping" campaigns along New Guinea's northern coast, then on to Biak, Dutch East Indies where there ^{had been} ~~was~~ a large combat operation with tank warfare.

(Continued on page 10)



Our Warmest Birthday Wishes go out to ~ ~ ~

ANDREWS, MARK	5/05	FERRAZANO, EDITH	5/17
HALL, JULIA	5/06	SAFCIK, JOSHUA	5/19
MESECHER, DALTON	5/06	BJORGO, RICK	5/21
CAMPBELL, HULEN	5/07	THURSTON, ELAINE	5/22
AMICHETTI, FRANK	5/11	TENGBERG, CHARLENE	5/23
CHASE, WEBSTER	5/11	ARMSTRONG, MARGARET	5/24
CARDELLA, KAROLENA	5/12	GASSMAN, LARRY	5/25
MALLON, CHARLOTTE	5/14	HENRY, JEAN	5/26
DEMME, DORA	5/15	CARL, DOROTHY	5/29
POORBAUGH, KATHY	5/15	SQUIRES, JERRY	5/31
BRUTLAG, KIM	5/16		

Our very best wishes to each of you who celebrate a birthday this month. We hope you enjoy your special day. If your birthday was overlooked in this column, we apologize and extend these wishes for a happy birthday to you as well. Please let us know so that we can add your name to our files for next year.

(Continued from page 9)

Next, around D-Day+2, and as soon as the engineers could lay down the steel landing mats, we went into Leyte, southern Philippines. This was followed by Manila where fighting was house to house and room by room. We were billeted in a large residence where every room had bullet holes in the walls. As soon as a Manila airport was cleared, we began Air Evac, lasting about a month. Okinawa was the final Pacific operation with a lot of casualties. We were almost overwhelmed by wounded. Because of the "kamikaze" threat, we often had P-51 or P-47 fighter escort in and out.

Even after V-J Day we continued air evacuations with full plane loads. Air transport command evacuated 100,000 wounded in the Pacific with only two deaths on board. — Forget who told me that — someone in office at Hickam.

I returned home in September of 1945, and was separated from the service on February 2nd, 1946. I am the proud possessor of two decorations, a Presidential Unit Citation and the Air Medal, along with five campaign ribbons and four combat area stars.



Charlotte and the crew of "Miss Ohio", April 1944

10 Remember and support the St. Christopher's Building Fund!

P.S. & The School of Air Evac still in ^{✓ memo} existence ??
3-28-11

12415 No 103rd Ave, Apt C-55, Sun City, Az.
(Sun Valley Lodge) 85351

Dear Melinda:

First, let me express how much
your continuing interest in W.W.II
Flight Nurses has meant to me,

and, I'm sure, to all of us !

It's really just astonishing! It was
such a pioneering effort and was
the forerunner of such Emergency
patient care as Helicopters lifting
injured from highway wrecks, (ie)!

And, certainly the Guiding Spirit
of our dear School of Air Evacuation
at Bowman Field (then Brooks Air Base)
was Capt. Mary Leontine (Sleeper) R.N., of
Massachusetts - Chief Nurse of A.A.F. S.A.E
1942-1946

I've written to the Massachusetts Board of Registration for Nurses in Boston, Mass.

I asked if they could retrieve any information about the "Guiding Light" of our School.

Captain (then Major) Mary Leontine
(Sleeper)

I graduated in 43 "B" (about Thanksgiving, with I think your mother!)

But I didn't go to the Pacific Theatre until a year later - I was assigned first to the Florida Demonstration Unit & our plane "The Miss Ohio".

What I remember of Capt. Leontine was that she was a College grad. @ Women's College possibly Mt. Holyoke - then Mass. General School of Nursing. More than that I can't express. Charlotte L. Mallory R.N. Ret.

Flight nurses transported, comforted the wounded

Charlotte Mallon of Sun City proudly displays photos taken when she was a flight nurse during WWII. She served from 1942 to '46 and had tours of duty in the South Pacific.



Dave Cruz/The Arizona Republic

A memorial to women who have served in the military will be dedicated in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 16. In honor of that, Community will feature throughout October the stories of women who contributed to the war effort both at home and abroad. In this story, Sun City resident Charlotte Mallon shares her experiences as an Army Air Force flight nurse.

By Charlotte McFall Mallon

The afternoon of Dec. 7, 1941, I went on duty in a Detroit hospital as an evening-shift head nurse. On my way, I stopped off to check on a patient who had just had cataract surgery. He was lying flat on his back in a darkened room with both

Memories ★ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

eyes covered and sandbags beside his head.

I realized he was listening to his bedside radio. Upon questioning, he told me he was listening to a news report that the Japanese were bombing Pearl Harbor.

"Pearl Harbor," I said. "Where's that?" He told me. Then I asked, "What does it mean?" He said, "Miss, it means war." "War?"

I left his room, and in the nurses'

— Please see **FLIGHT**, Page 4

Flight nurses helped transport, comfort WWII wounded

— FLIGHT, from Page 1

station I picked up the phone and spoke to the nursing supervisor on duty. I told her I wanted to resign and go into a military nurse corps.

"Not so fast, Miss McFall," she said. "I have to have a written resignation and two weeks' notice."

So, early on Feb. 2, 1942, I was sworn in by a judge in the at Kent County, Mich., courthouse. By that evening I had reported for duty in the Army Nurse Corps at Camp Grant, Ill. I was the second civilian nurse to do so.

From then until September 1943 I had several assignments. One of the most challenging was with five other nurses and a chief nurse to stock and organize from scratch the base hospital at Eagle Pass Army Air Base in Texas on the Mexican border.

I was assigned to the dispensary at the hospital for morning sick call. The afternoons were spent with a medical officer at a clinic for military dependents in downtown Eagle Pass, seeing and treating pregnant wives on different days, postpartum care, well-baby clinic, as well as upper-respiratory infections and other illnesses. On Fridays, it was the venereal disease clinic.

In September 1943, I was finally accepted into the Army Air Force School of Air Evacuation at Bowman Field, Ky., about 30 miles northeast of Louisville.

The 10 weeks of training that followed were rigorous beyond belief. The school graduated, in all, 1,347 flight nurses as well as flight technicians. My first assignment in December 1943 was overseas to North Africa with my unit to replace two flights and chief nurses (13 in all) plus crews, who had crash-landed in Albania and who were escaping at night over the mountains with the aid of Communist partisans and airdropped British intelligence agents.

Unfortunately, before we got to leave for Africa I contracted a severe cold, and due to prolonged coughing I suffered a partially collapsed lung. I was hospitalized at the Miami Port and my unit went overseas without me.

After the recuperation period, I was returned to the school, where I was temporarily assigned as barracks housekeeper, checking on the civilian maids and supplies and keeping watch on the heat. It was a severely cold winter that year in Kentucky. The boilers were coal-fired, not too dependable, and had to be watched. I also taught first aid and bandaging to new student flight nurses.

By March 1944, my lung had healed and another flight nurse and I were sent to the Air Evacuation Demonstration and Teaching Unit of the Army and Navy Command and Staff School in Orlando.

Two mornings a week we taught principles and practices of air evacuation in the field. And in the afternoons we

demonstrated, in the air, our equipment and methods using our C-47, "The Miss Ohio."

The flight surgeons in our class came from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. We also had a few Free French and Poles.

Looking back, I realize we were being instructed in the pioneer use of cargo aircraft, to be reconfigured after unloading with litters. These planes would then rapidly remove the wounded after the D-Day invasion in Normandy and the island invasions in the Pacific. How primitive everything was in those early days in air evacuation, and 55 years later, how different.

The first woman to land at Normandy was a flight nurse, and, from what I have read, British Royal Air Force nurses landed in Normandy with the troops.

In September 1944, I finally received my orders to go to the Central Pacific: Kwajalein, Saipan and Guam. We gradually extended to the western Dutch Indies, the Philippines and the Northern Pacific. I was assigned to the Air Transport Command, using the four-engine C-54s. The Air Transport Command evacuated more than 100,000 in the Pacific Theater.

Flight nurses in the South Pacific assigned to the Troop Carrier Command flew in the C-47s. The weather in the South Pacific being so unpredictable, they transported their patients to us at Manus, Tarawa, Biak and later Leyte in a relay system.

Many of the patients were young Marines who, at 16 and with their parents' written permission, had joined the Marines and completed basic training and extra-weapon training. Many of them had gone to the South Pacific, fought in combat, were wounded and on their way home before their 18th birthday.

While deadheading back to Saipan, I and two other flight nurses survived the crash of our cargo-laden airplane at Eniwetok in the early spring of 1945.

The engineers had just completed bulldozing the airstrip and lengthening it, leaving a large pile of coral at the western end. We apparently came in a little too low. The nose wheel broke off, flipped us over to the right, the wing tore off behind us and the plane burst into flames.

One other nurse and I jumped out of the porthole behind us, through the flames. I escaped being burned probably because I was wearing my leather flight jacket and winter-issue trousers. The other flight nurse, the crew and some of the passengers were severely injured, suffering burns and fractures. But everyone got out.

I often think with admiration of our wonderful, helpful flight crews, particularly the crew chiefs. Occasionally, though, we would have civilian airline pilots who were not as sympathetic and knowledgeable as our usual personnel.

In one case, I had picked up

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CHARLOTTE MALLON
WWII ARMY FLIGHT NURSE

some injured, including five amputees. Depending on the location of the amputation, we had to place that limb next to the fuselage. It couldn't be allowed to dangle over the edge of the narrow litter into the aisle where it might be bumped. Using pillows and rolled-up blankets, we positioned the limbs as best we could.

At the first stop in Kwajalein, the contact pilot, for some unknown reason, jammed his brakes on hard as we landed, throwing some amputees against the fuselage, hurting them. I repositioned the stumps and said little. However, at Johnson Island the same thing happened.

Once we had come to a stop and with some patients in pain, I hotfooted it up to the cockpit and proceeded to give the pilot a piece of my mind.

After lunch, we flew on to Honolulu. About half an hour out, the crew chief came back to tell me that the pilot had radioed to Hickam Air Field and reported the incident.

Sure enough, as we were taxiing I could see my reception committee: our commanding officer, chief flight surgeon, chief nurse, flight nurse supervisors and various other bodies. Nothing was said to me as I supervised our unloading. When I finished, I was just told to get in the staff car.

Describing the incident to the assembled VIPs later in the office, I had started to cry. But in spite of my tears, I felt I had stood up for my wounded patients and that I had honored the Florence Nightingale Pledge I had taken when I graduated from nurses training — to think first of my patients.

The result was that I was put on house arrest for a week, and an MP and jeep had to escort me back and forth to meals at the Hickam Officers Club. Believe me, that caused a stir. But I didn't give a rip. I was unrepentant.

Several weeks after the rapid liberation of prisoners at Santo Tomas in Manila, a bunch of us were in Saipan evacuating wounded when our chief nurse called a meeting and asked us to scrounge around and get all the donations of food we could from other units. We were to help put on a "buffet" in several days for VIPs at the hangar on the flight line. A buffet in Saipan? Unbelievable.

We gathered everything up, took it down to the hangar in

the early evening, then stood around waiting for two planes to arrive. Pretty soon they landed and taxied up to the hangar. Not the usual air- evac cargo planes either, but the upholstered "plush" jobs.

The doors opened, the stairs were wheeled up and the Corregidor nurses, who had been interred at Santo Tomas, started down the steps. Thin as rails, their uniforms hung on them and their caps were down over their noses.

The band struck up *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and I didn't see a dry eye anywhere. We ushered them into the hangar, tables laden with food. The centerpiece was a huge sheet cake decorated in red, white and blue that said, "Welcome home to the good old USA."

A month or so after VJ Day, I landed at Johnson Island at noon and gave my patients their box lunches and coffee. When I got down from the plane, two

GIs approached me, one on crutches, carrying their records and asked if we could give them a ride to Hickam. A bird colonel and his aide heading east in a big hurry had "bumped" them.

Reading the cover letters on the front, I realized to my horror that they were both ex-prisoners of war who had survived Bataan and Corregidor. Appalled at this callous treatment, I ran after the pilot, caught up with him, described the situation and asked if we could give them a ride.

The pilot said, "Sure, Lieutenant, if we are not overloaded. Let me do the numbers first." The upshot was that we were able to take them.

After putting them in two seats in the tail section, I again gave my preflight instructions, explained the equipment and assured my patients that they would receive any medications ordered.

Then I said in a very steady

voice, "Boys, we are especially honored today. He have added two ex-prisoners of war who survived Bataan and Corregidor. They are seated in the tail of the plane." Then cheers erupted — whistles and applause. It was a very moving moment.

In October 1945, I returned to the states and in February 1946, I was separated from the service. My mother was shocked when she saw me. I had entered the Army Nurses Corps at 112 pounds and now weighed 99. That September my boyfriend returned. Putting aside all of those hair-raising adventures, we married and I became, in short order, a professional mother.

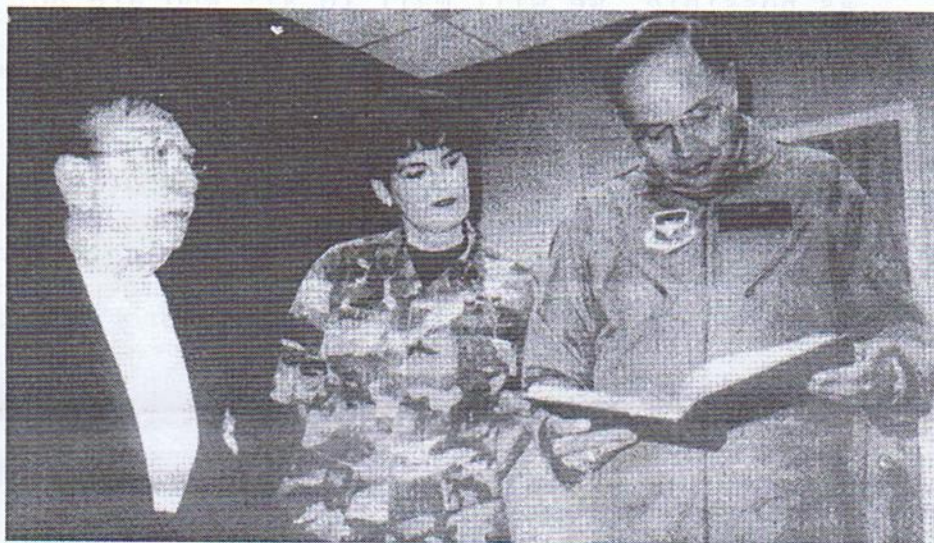
Mallon asked to dedicate her story to the Army Air Force flight nurses who died trying to save the wounded. Stories like Mallon's will be published in a new book, *No Time for Fear*, written by Phoenix resident Diane Fessler and published through Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, Mich.



FAREWELL Delores Gusinda Devine 831st
Grace R. Hawkes 806th
Ruth Banfield Lowderback 830th
Florence Eleanor Rockwell 809th
Dorothy Canten Smith 820th
Dymphna Van Gorp U.S. Navy

"But every house where Love abides
And Friendship is a guest,
Is surely home, and home, sweet, home;
For there the heart can rest." Henry Van Dyke-"Home Song"

WWIIFNA member Charlotte McFall Mallon presented The Story of Air Evacuation to the Luke Field Army Air Force Hospital - a perpetuation of our history. Sydelle Lipman assisted Charlotte.



Marybelle Spalding, Chief Nurse of the 813th wrote on October 13th that the nurse featured on the cover of our September Newsletter was Jean Tolen who died about 10 years ago, one of the 813th nurses, "a great gal". Marybelle was recovering from a stroke when she wrote.

Memories and Recollections

Those of you who have sent your remembrances before, during and after World War II, thank you. One day, we will have those stories printed to be added to the Archives (maybe even published!). Here are a few to remind us of those days:



Charlotte (McFall) Mallon

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HISTORY OF WWII, FNA

Charlotte McFall Fallon and Mary Oldehoff Stehle began bringing Flight nurses together in 1948.

For several years, Mary and Charlotte persevered in getting the Flight Nurses to reunite. During some years, the meetings were held every 2 to 3 months. Occasionally, flight surgeons and technicians joined the group.



Charlotte McFall Fallon



Mary Oldehoff Stehle

In 1963, a 20th Anniversary meeting was held at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. For many of us, it was an introduction to the "new" air evacuation plane - oh, so much more space, and the new technology on board was a delight to behold.

Mary Oldehoff Stehle coordinated the meeting; Mildred Osmun Beeman was elected President and Mary O. Stehle, Treasurer. The dues was \$5.00.

In 1966, Kay Shafer Mayhue compiled the first roster she was elected President. Kay served as President, 1966-1973.

In 1968, Leora Stroup, Kay Shafer Mayhue and Mary Oldehoff Stehle presented the Story of Early Air Evacuation to the flight nurses at the School of Air Evacuation at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. A movie was made of the program and placed in a time capsule. In 1986, Mary O. Stehle, Denzil Nagle and Ethel C. Cerasale planned and carried out a meeting at Cocoa Beach/Patrick Air Force Base, Florida. Ethel was appointed as temporary chair, Denzil as vice-chair and Mary as Secretary.



Denzil Nagle



Ethel C. Cerasale

1988 the first "national" meeting was held in San Antonio, Texas. About 200 nurses plus husbands and guests attended. Co-Chairs Margaret Raffa and Claire Murphy and the committee did a super job for this historic meeting. It was voted to incorporate in Florida as a non-profit, veteran organization. Ethel Carlson Cerasale was designated President and Denzil Nagle and Mary Stehle agreed to continue in their respective roles.

Note: A more complete summary of the history of WWII FNA can be found on page 5 of THE STORY OF AIR EVACUATION, 1942-1989.