



**SIX ARMY AIR CORPS** nurses, above, still manage to smile after being lost for two months in enemy occupied Albania. Their plane, enroute to Bari, was forced down in Albania and the girls were listed as missing for two months. Friendly inhabitants gave them the heavy hobnailed army shoes they display in the picture and aided them in their mountainous hike across Albania to the Adriatic Sea, where they were rescued by an Allied launch and taken to Italy. Members of an air evacuation unit, the nurses are, left to right, Lieutenants Lois Watson, Oakland, Ill.; Lillian J. Tacin, Detroit, Mich.; Pauline J. Kanable, Richmond Center, Wis.; Elna Schwant, Winner, S. D.; Ann E. Kopsco, Hammond La.; and Frances Nelson, Marotta, W. Va. As the picture indicates, the nurses didn't suffer from exposure or lack of food. They were well cared for by the natives who, the girls said, showed an eagerness to aid them in their escape from the country.

# Add War Adventures

## 2 Detroit Nurses in Albanian Epic

Taking its place among the great adventure stories of the war, details of the flight of two nurses from Detroit, in a party which included 13 nurses and 17 members of the Army Air Forces, across 850 mountainous miles of Nazi-held Albania to safety, became known today.

The Detroiters were Lieuts. Eugenia Rutkowski, 26 years old, 5961 Lucky Place, and Lieut. Lillian Tacina, 12014 Charest avenue. They were aboard a hospital evacuation plane which ran into a storm on a flight from North Africa to Bari, Italy, last November and was forced down behind the German lines in the Balkans.

### DODGE BULLETS

Days and nights of marching through rain and snow, playing hide-and-seek with the enemy, dodging bullets and living in the most primitive conditions followed the plane's forced landing until rescue came two months later, according to the stories told by the nurses to a writer for Collier's Weekly.

When Albanians who assembled hastily around the grounded plane found those on board were Americans "everybody got kissed," Lieut. Rutkowski said. The Albanians spoke no English, but used sign language to indicate that many Germans were just across the next mountain.

"They led us in the opposite direction across a mountain to a farmhouse, and there we stayed for two days and nights while arrangements were made with a Partisan official to get us some mules and a guide who could lead us to a British mission," she said.

"Sleeping wasn't so good. We took turns lying on the floor. Not everybody could lie down at once. When it was my turn I took off my shoes. That was a mistake, because I was awakened by a chicken pecking at my toes."

### JOURNEY ON FOOT

Mules were provided and the party set out across the mountains, but later the mules had to be given up, Lieut. Rutkowski related. Taking up the story, Lieut. Tacina told of the renewed journey on foot. They went on "with our shoes wearing out and our feet getting blistered and our stomachs never filled," she said.

In late November a blizzard caught the party on a high mountain and when some of the girls insisted on lying down in the snow "the rest of us slapped their faces and dragged them along," she related.

GI shoes, all in men's sizes were dropped for them by parachute after the travelers reached the British mission in December. German tanks overlooking a landing field prevented their being taken out by plane, and another 27-hour march was necessary before they reached the Adriatic, where passage was provided to Italy.



LIEUT. EUGENIA RUTKOWSKI



LIEUT. LILLIAN TACINA

## Lost Nurses Believed Safe

### Plane Is Reported Down in Allied Zone

Thirteen Army nurses, including two from the Detroit area, and 16 Army officers and men, who have been missing since Nov. 8 on a flight from North Africa to Italy, are believed safe in Allied territory, according to a United Press dispatch received today from Allied Headquarters at Algiers.

No further details of their landing were disclosed immediately.

The nurses were members of an air evacuation squadron that was being flown to Italy to accompany air ambulances back to North Africa. The plane, a C-47 transport, was last seen flying into a fog, after taking off for Bari, on the Italian southeast coast.

The two Michigan nurses on the plane were Lieut. Eugenie H. Rutkowski, of 5954 Lucky place, and Lieut. Lillian J. Tacina, 12014 Charest avenue, Hamtramck.

Other Michigan passengers on the plane were Lieut. Agnes A. Jensen, Army nurse, of Stanwood, and Technicians 3rd Grade Lawrence O. Abbott, of Newaygo, and Charles J. Adams, of Niles.

When he announced that the plane was missing, Brig.-Gen. F. A. Blesse, U. S. surgeon general in the North African theater, said all the nurses were second lieutenants and the 12 enlisted men were technicians third grade. There was also a crew of four officers.

Lieut. Rutkowski is a graduate of Providence Hospital and a former airline hostess on the Transcontinental Western Airlines. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Constantine Rutkowski.

Lieut. Tacina is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Tacina. She is a graduate of Hamtramck High School and of Henry Ford Hospital. She has three brothers in military service.

THEIR PLANE GOT LOST IN FOG

# 2 Detroit Nurses Home from the Balkans

BY ROBERT COFFEY  
Free Press Staff Writer

Two Detroit Army nurses board a hospital plane forced down last November in the Nazi-held Balkans were home Monday but because of military secrecy were unable to reveal details of their escape along with 11 other Army nurses and 17 Army personnel.

Despite the rigid censorship, however, it was disclosed that the crash landing had trapped the party behind German lines in the Balkans. For weeks, they roamed through enemy territory before reaching Italy safely. In this time the Army had simply reported the plane "missing somewhere in the Mediterranean area."

In Pittsburgh another of the nurses who escaped, Lt. Gertrude Lawson declared: "Too much is at stake to reveal our benefactors or the terrible happenings of those terrible weeks."

The two Detroiters, whose escape was reported Dec. 2 by the War Department, are 2nd Lt. Eugenia Rutkowski, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rutkowski, of 5954 Lucky Place, and 2nd Lt. Lillian Tacina, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Tacina, of 12014 Charest, Hamtramck. They are on leave until March 13.

Another Michigan nurse, 2nd Lt. Agnes Jensen, of Stanwood, Mich., and two soldiers, technicians 3rd Grade Lawrence O. Abbott, of Newaygo, and Charles J. Adams, of Niles, also escaped from the Balkans.

Sgt. Adams also said he was bound by secrecy.

"It's a real story and I'd like to tell it," he added, "but I'm under government orders to keep quiet."

Lt. Rutkowski, a twenty-six-year-old graduate of Providence Hospital and a former Transcontinental Western Airlines hostess, said: "I can't talk about how we got out or any other details because the lives of other persons are involved. And that's the only story. I don't want any personal publicity. I'm no hero; just lucky."

She enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps last May after her fiancé, Charles Pressel, had been reported

missing on a ferry flight to England. She was a flight nurse.

Both Lt. Rutkowski and Lt. Tacina were members of a medical evacuation transport squadron and were reported missing when their plane was lost in the fog on a flight from Algiers to Bari, Italy. Almost four weeks elapsed before

the entire party was reported safe. One enlisted man suffered a knee injury.

Lt. Tacina is a graduate of Henry Ford Hospital and a former scholarship student at Wayne University. Three brothers of Lt. Tacina have entered the services. Twenty-three-years old, she en-

listed in the Nurse Corps in December, 1942.

## CRAFT VANISHES ON HOP TO ITALY

# 3 State Nurses Among 13 on Lost Hospital Plane

Three Michigan nurses, including two from the Detroit area, and two Michigan soldiers were reported missing in an American Army transport plane carrying 13 Army nurses and 16 Army men, it was announced Monday night at Allied Headquarters in Algiers.

The plane vanished in a fog on Nov. 8 in a flight from Algiers to Bari, Italy.

### THREE FROM MICHIGAN

Among the nurses were 2nd Lt. Eugenia H. Rutkowski, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rutkowski of 4954 Lucky Place; 2nd Lt. Lillian J. Tacina, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Tacina of 12014 Charest, Hamtramck, and 2nd Lt. Agnes A. Jensen, daughter of Lauritz E. Jensen of Stanwood, Mich.

The missing soldiers, technicians 3rd grade, are Lawrence O. Abbott, son of Caroline Abbott of Newaygo, and Charles J. Adams, husband of Winogene C. Adams of Niles.

The nurses were members of an air evacuation squadron which flies wounded troops to North African base hospitals. If the plane crashed it would be the first loss suffered by the medical corps in the African war zone.

### HER FIANCE MISSING

Lt. Rutkowski entered the service last May after her fiancé, Charles Pressel, of New York, had been reported missing while ferrying a plane to England. She was stationed in Sicily with a medical evacuation transport squadron serving as a flight nurse.

Lt. Rutkowski, who was 26 years old, graduated from Providence Hospital in 1938 and before enlisting was a hostess with the Transcontinental Western Airlines. She also was a graduate of Cass Technical High School. She has a brother John and two sisters, Emily and Tilly.

### AN HONOR STUDENT

Lt. Tacina whose twenty-third birthday was on Nov. 18, graduated from the Henry Ford Hospital Nurses School in September, 1942. She was an honor student at Hamtramck High School where she graduated in 1936 when 16 years old. She won a two-year scholarship in chemistry at Wayne University. She enlisted in the Army

on Dec. 15, 1942 and received her Army training at George Field, Lawrenceville, Ill., and Bowman Field, Ky. She went overseas in August.

She has three brothers who have joined the armed forces. Charles G. Tasina, 29, is at the Santa Rosa (Calif.) Army College; Pvt. Harry, 20, with the Marines at San Diego and John, 25, was discharged from the Navy two months ago.

## First Casualty

### Detroit Nurse Missing in North Africa Area

Lieut. Eugenia H. Rutkowski became the first known woman casualty in the Detroit area today when her parents, Mr. and Mrs. K. Rutkowski, were notified by the War Department that she was missing in the North African area.

Lieut. Rutkowski, an Army nurse, has been missing since Nov. 8. When last reported she was stationed in Sicily with a medical air evacuation transport squadron, acting as flight nurse.

She entered the service last May 15 when her fiancé, Charles Bowman, was reported missing while ferrying a bomber to England.

Lieut. Rutkowski was graduated from Providence Hospital in 1938. She then worked as instructor of operating technic. Before enlisting, she was an air line hostess with the Transcontinental Western Airlines.

Before being sent to the North African area, she received her flight training at Bowman Field, Kentucky.

Her parents, with whom she lived at 5954 Lucky place, believe that her plane was shot down and that she might be a prisoner of the Germans. They have not given up hope of her return.

As an A student at Cass Technical High School, she received a year's scholarship at Wayne University. She has a brother, John, and two sisters, Emily and Tilly.

JULY 10 1990

MRS. ERRAIR,

I ONLY JUST RETURNED A FEW DAYS AGO FROM A 3 WEEK VACATION TO FIND YOUR LETTER TO MY MOTHER POSTMARKED JUNE 12. I WOULD HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU MUCH SOONER HAD I BEEN AWARE YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MY MOTHER, LILLIAN.

I'M VERY SORRY TO TELL YOU THAT SHE DIED ON APRIL 5, 1990 OF COMPLICATIONS FROM LEUKEMIA CHEMOTHERAPY. BUT I'M HAPPY TO TELL YOU THAT THROUGHOUT HER ILLNESS (SHE ALSO HAD OVARIAN CANCER, DIAGNOSED IN MARCH, 1989), SHE KEPT A POSITIVE ATTITUDE, AND FOUGHT FOR LIFE

ALL THE WAY UNTIL THE END. SHE WAS TRULY A REMARKABLE WOMAN, NOT TO MENTION A GREAT MOM. THE BEST.

I KNOW SHE WAS YOUR FRIEND FROM THE 80TH (AND THAT YOU EXCHANGE CHRISTMAS CARDS EACH YEAR). I MUST ADMIT I DON'T KNOW A LOT ABOUT MY MOTHER'S PAST. SHE DIDN'T DISCUSS IT MUCH. UPON MY MOTHER'S DEATH, I CALLED ELNA KRUTIM. LATER, I RECEIVED CARDS OR NOTES FROM AGNES JENSEN MANBERICH AND JEAN RUTKOWSKI WILKINSON. I'M SURE YOU ARE ALL WONDERFUL PEOPLE WHO HAVE SHARED A LOT TOGETHER, AND I WISH I COULD MEET EVERY ONE OF YOU AND COULD HEAR THE STORIES YOU COULD TELL.

SINCERELY, Dan Rotaj



Booze Dawson



Dorothy White Enrain  
Wilma Lytle



Welds White Sheldorf  
Smith



White Smith  
Welds Sheldorf



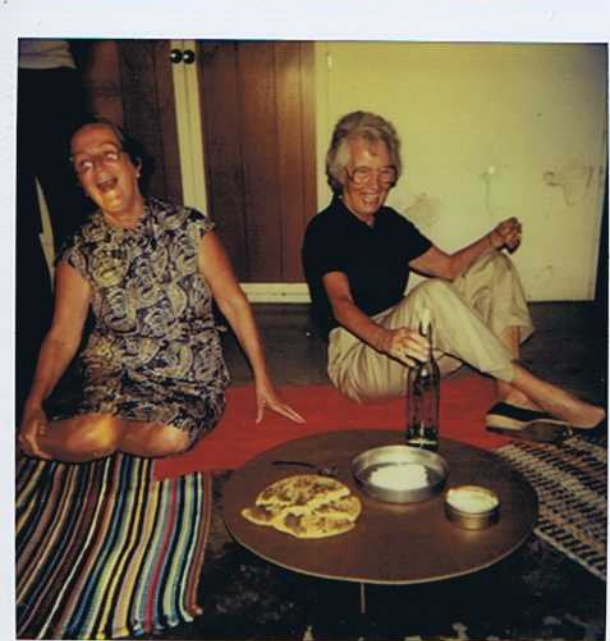
Welds Sheldorf  
Smith Tacina



Tacina & Husband



Lillian Tacina Protaj





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# DDA Magazine



tijdschrift voor historische luchtvaart



Zij vlogen in C-47's in de Zuid-Pacific, Noord-Afrika en Europa; zij werden beschoten door Japanse Zero's; zij brachten uren door in schuttersputten op Guadalcanal; zij toonden inzet, moed en gaven de gewonden aan boord aandacht en hun glimlach werd niet vergeten:

## Engelen aan boord



*First Lt Dorothy White een Army Nurse uit Detroit neemt even pauze tijdens een evacuatievlucht met 17 soldaten die minder dan 24 uur voordat deze foto werd genomen gewond zijn geraakt. (foto: Sgt Paul Hunter van Mats in het voorjaar van 1944).*

Op Bowman Field, Kentucky werd begin 1942 een school opgericht voor opleiding tot Flight Nurses of Flight Technicians. Veel stewardessen van de Amerikaanse burgerluchtvaartmaatschappijen meldden zich aan. Na hun studie werden de Nurses en Medical Technicians ingedeeld in Medical Air Evacuation Squadrons (MAES). Hun taak was het begeleiden en verzorgen van gewonden, die per vliegtuig geëvacueerd zouden worden. Behalve een uit-

Nurse en één Technician maakten samen een team uit voor een C-47, zij moesten toezien op het in- en uitladen van de patiënten en de medische verzorging onderweg. Er werden 31 MAES opgeleid.

Vanuit de haven van New York vertrokken schepen naar Engeland of Afrika. Aan boord van één van de schepen - onderweg naar Engeland - bevond zich een groot aantal verpleegsters. Op de naburige schepen klonk gefluit en geschreeuw! Zonder problemen kwam het konvooi in Schotland aan en ging de reis per trein verder naar hun bestemming in Zuid-Oost Engeland. Hun huisvesting bestond meestal uit een Quonset- of nissenhut, welke samen met andere Nurses gedeeld werd.

### Kerstmis 1943 in Albanië

Op 8 november 1943 bevonden zich 13 Flight Nurses and 13 Medical Technicians aan boord van een C-53D (42-68809) van de 314th Troop Carrier Group. Het toestel steeg op in Catania en was - samen met twee andere C-47's - onderweg voor een vlucht van twee uur naar Bari. Kort nadat het toestel was opgestegen, kwam zij in een zware sneeuwstorm terecht. De radio operator van de 809 kreeg geen contact met Bari en uiteindelijk kwam de vijf-koppige bemanning tot de conclusie dat men verdwaald was. De twee andere kisten waren nergens te ontdekken. Na vier uur vliegen, verbeterde het weer. De piloot ontdekte een vliegveld en maakte zich op voor de landing. Opeens werd het toestel beschoten en moest de piloot een noodlanding (wheels up) maken



*Dezelfde Dorothy C. White in 1944 op 24 jarige leeftijd*

gebrede medische opleiding, werden brancards in- en uitgeladen; zij gingen op bivak en kregen tekst en uitleg over kaart- en kompas lezen. Er werd ook aandacht geschonken aan eventuele landingen op water. De Flight Nurse controleerde de gewondenlijst en keek toe of alle gewonden veilig vastgesnoerd zaten. Een MAES bestond uit 25 Nurses, 5 doktoren, een administrateur en 70 Technicians. Eén Flight





'Staatsieportret' van het 807th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron voor een C-47 op Bowman Field Kentucky in juli 1943.

Op de eerste rij: Gertrude Dawson, Elna Schuwant, Lois Watson, Ann Maskowitz, Lucia Slopen, Lillian Tacina, Mary Smith, Ann Kopeso, Edith Belden, Chamion Villa. Op de 2e rij: Hoofdverpleegster Grace Stakeman, Wilma Lytle, Pauleen Kanable, Agnes Jenzen, Doris Kirkpatrick, Elizabeth Ruminski, Frances Sale, Ava Maness, Helen Corten, Anna Sheldorf, Linnie Saumer, Helen Welch, Frances Nelson, Dorothy White en Eugina Rutkowski,

in een modderig veld. Hij waarschuwde de passagiers voor een ruwe landing. Het toestel werd vervolgens omringd door een aantal gewapende Partizanen en al gauw bleek dat men zich in Albanië bevond. Gelukkig waren deze Partizanen pro-Amerikaans. Er was haast geboden en men ging op weg om een veilige schuilplaats te vinden. De tocht was ruw en koud, het sneeuwde, het vroom en de Nurses waren hier totaal niet op gekleed. Voedsel was schaars. Men trok over moeilijke paden om de Ballista (pro-Duits) te ontwijken. Men trok van dorp tot dorp en samen met de Partizanen vierden zij kerstmis. Op 27 december 1943 trok men verder. Al gauw kwamen de Duitsers hen op het spoor en de groep werd beschoten. Gelukkig kon men op tijd weggelopen, doch de groep raakte wel gesplitst. Drie verpleegsters raakten achter. In de tussentijd was er door de Partizanen contact opgenomen met de Geallieerden en werden Britse commando's in hun nabijheid gedropt. De gehele groep trok naar de kust, waar zij door de Britse marine geëvacueerd werden. Op 9 januari 1944 kwamen zij in Italië aan, de drie achtergebleven verpleegsters werden door de Partizanen naar Italië gesmokkeld waar zij in maart aankwamen. De eerste evacuatievlucht in Normandië vond plaats op D+4. 's Ochtends werden de vliegers op de hoogte gesteld dat er later op de dag een evacuatievlucht gevlogen zou worden. Eerst werden een Flight Nurse en een Technician opgepikt, vervolgens werd de C-47 volgeladen met munitie, voorraden of de bekende jerrycans met benzine om vervolgens door te vliegen naar een pas veroverde landingsstrip nabij de frontlinies. Veelal zaten de Nurses en Technicians boven op de lading. Vaak vlogen er meerdere toestellen op zo'n vlucht. De toestellen

waren niet voorzien van Rode Kruizen en werden door de Duitsers beschoten. Nadat het toestel geland was, werd de oorlogsvracht uitgeladen. De ambulances met de gewonden stonden al te wachten. In de tussentijd werd het toestel voor het vervoer van gewonden in orde gemaakt. De Nurse had de regie. Lopende patiënten namen plaats op de zittingen aan de zijkant van de cabine en/of gingen op de bodem van het toestel zitten. Voor de zwaarder gewonde patiënten en die per brancard vervoerd moesten worden, werd een 'stellage' aangebracht en werden de brancards boven elkaar 'geladen'. Meestal werden er 21 brancards geladen. Zodra de patiënten aan boord waren gebracht, was het team voor het wel en wee van

Een geallieerde soldaat die minder dan 24 uur van te voren werd gewond wordt vanuit een ambulance in een C-47 gedragen. Op de voorgrond copilot First Lt S.P. Taliaferro



de patiënten verantwoordelijk. Soms waren er 28 brancards aan boord (4 boven elkaar). De bemanning had grote bewondering voor de Nurses. Nadat het toestel opgestegen was, onderzochten de Nurses de patiënten. Zij hielden een praatje, verschoonden het verband of gaven de patiënten te drinken. Soms vlogen er twee Nurses mee.

### Gevangen genomen

Luitenant Reba Z. Whittle van de 813th MAES werd op 27 september 1944 door de Duitsers gevangen genomen. Zij was aan boord van een C-47 van de 436th Troop Carrier Group. Het toestel werd beschoten en maakte een noodlanding achter de vijandelijke linies. Lt Whittle had tijdens de ruwe landing verwondingen opgelopen. Desondanks hielp zij mee om gewonde bemanningsleden uit het toestel te krijgen. Opeens verschenen er Duitse militairen en werden zij gevangen genomen. De Duitsers keken toch wel naar op dat één van de gevangenen een vrouw was. De gewonden ontvingen eerste hulp en werden vervolgens naar een gevangenkamp (Stalag 9-C) getransporteerd, waar zij afzonderlijk werd ondergebracht. In het kamp waren geen faciliteiten voor vrouwelijke gevangenen. Reba verzorgde geallieerde gewonden. Zij bracht vier maanden in gevangenschap door en vierde kerstmis 1944 in Duitsland. Door tussenkomst van het Rode Kruis werd zij – samen met andere gevangenen – uitgewisseld. Luitenant Whittle was de enige Amerikaanse vrouw, die door de Duitsers gevangen was genomen.



*Captain Willie Hammon en zijn crew van het 96th Sqdn TCGp. De Flight Nurse is 1st Lt Betty Cronquist van 816th MAES.*

### Kerstmis 1944

De Flight Nurses van de 817th MAES vierden kerstmis 1944 samen met een aantal Franse weeskinderen. Er werd een kerstboom neergezet en uiteraard was er ook een kerstman. Na een uitgebreid diner ontvingen de kinderen cadeaus. Eén van de Nurses was 1Lt Christine A. Gasvoda. Zij kwam op 13 april 1945 om het leven, toen haar C-47 bij Paderborn neerstortte. Zij werd – samen met de bemanning – begraven op de tijdelijke Amerikaanse begraafplaats Margraten in plot/rij/grafnummer GG-5-107. Na de oorlog werd zij op Margraten herbegraven en ligt nu begraven in F-19-4.

Eveneens op Margraten ligt begraven 1Lt Wilma 'Dolly' Vinsant (806th MAES). Wilma was op 20 februari 1917 geboren. Haar vader was arts, haar moeder verpleegster. Wilma volgde haar opleiding tot verpleegster aan het John Sealy Hospital in Galveston. Haar aandacht voor de luchtvaart werd getrokken door Amelia Earhart. Kort daarna solliciteerde zij bij de MAES. Wilma was aan boord van een C-47 van de 436th Troop Carrier Group, die op 14 april

1945 nabij Eisenach neerstortte. Wilma ligt thans begraven op Margraten in B-17-4. Beide graven werden door Nederlanders geadopteerd en tijdens Memorial Day voorzien van een boeket bloemen. Het plaatselijk ziekenhuis in San Benito (Texas) draagt de naam Dolly Vinsant Memorial Hospital. De Dolly Vinsant Trophee wordt jaarlijks aan de meest verdienstelijke Flight Nurse van Amerika uitgereikt.



*Het graf van Christine A. Gasvoda op de begraafplaats Margraten in Zuid-Limburg. (foto's: archief Jan Bos)*

Louise Anthony (816th MAES) merkte dat één van de zwaargewonde militairen aan boord van haar toestel er erg slecht aan toe was. Zodra de C-47 opgestegen was, ontdekte zij dat de militair overleden was. De andere gewonden hebben hier niets van gemerkt. Tijdens de vlucht gaf Louise de gewonden alle aandacht, ook aan de overledene. Zij schudde zijn hoofdkussen op en praatte tegen hem. Zo voorkwam zij onder de anderen paniek en verwarring. Toen de C-47 in Engeland landde, werd de overledene als laatste uit het vliegtuig gehaald.

Ann M. Krueger (817th MAES) haalde met gevaar voor eigen leven, 27 patiënten uit een brandende C-47. Jeanette Gleason kreeg van de piloot te horen dat de C-47 in moeilijkheden verkeerde. Zij gespte haar parachute om en sprong uit de C-47. Toen zij neerkwam, ontdekte zij dat zij alleen was. Zij sliep in haar parachute en werd de volgende dag door een Chinese familie ontdekt. Na een ontbijt van rijst, werd zij naar de geallieerde linies gebracht.

In totaal sneuvelden er elf Flight Nurses en zes Technicians in Europa. Ondanks alle ellende was er ook nog tijd voor afspraakjes en romantiek. Vaak vlogen de Nurses met dezelfde bemanningen en ontstonden er romances, die resulteerden in huwelijken.

Jan Bos

<b>Subj:</b> English translation of story Flight Nurses <b>Date:</b> 3/15/2003 11:48:45 AM Eastern Standard Time <b>From:</b> circle82@wishmail.net (Jan Bos) <b>To:</b> Dorothyce1920@aol.com
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Dear Dorothy,  
 well finally, here is the English version of the story about the Flight Nurses which I wrote on behalf of the Dutch Dakota Assn. You have the magazine, only with the Dutch text, hope you like it. Space was limited, I could have written much more

all the best

Jan Bos

*Angels*

Angels on board.

They flew in C-47s in the south Pacific, North Africa and Europe; they were fired upon by Japanese Zeros; they sheltered in foxholes for hours in Guadalcanal; they were brave and gave attention to the wounded on board the planes; their smiles will never be forgotten.

Early 1942 a school for Flight Nurses and Flight Technicians was founded at Bowman Field, Kentucky. Many stewardesses from American airliners reported for duty. After training they were divided among the Medical Air Evacuation Squadrons (MAES). It was their task to take care of the wounded, who were evacuated by airplane. They had a medical training and education. Stretcher were loaded and unloaded; they went on bivouac and they were instructed in map and compass reading. Attention was paid to ditching on water. The Flight Nurse checked the list of the wounded and noticed that all wounded were securely buckled up. A MAES had 25 Nurses, 5 doctors, one clerk and 70 Technicians. One Flight Nurse and one Technician were one team for a C-47; they had watch loading and unloading of the patients and had to take of the welfare of the patients on board the planes. 31 MAES were activated.

From the harbor of New York the ships left for England or Africa. On board of one of the boats bound for England were many nurses. On the adjacent ships the men whistled and yelled to the women. Without difficulty the convoy reached Scotland and the voyage to Southeastern England was by train. The women were housed in Quonset- or Nissen huts.

Christmas 1943 in Albania.

On 8 November 1943 13 Flight Nurses and 13 Medical Technicians were on board of a C-53 D (42-68809) of the 314th Troop Carrier Group. The plane left Catania together with two other planes and head for Bari, a flight of 2 hours. Shortly after he planes had left Catania, it came into snowstorms. The radio operator on board of this C-53 could not get radio contact with the control tower at Bari. The crew decided that they were lost. No trace of the other two planes. After some four hours flying, the weather cleared. The pilot discovered an airfield and prepared for a landing. Suddenly the plane was fired upon and the pilot had to make a forced landing (wheels up) in a muddy field. The pilot warned the passengers for a rough landing. When the plane came to a halt, armed men surrounded it. These men were partisans and it turned out that the plane had landed in Albania. Luckily the Partisans were pro-American. The men were in a hurry and took the Americans to a safe place. It was cold and over rough terrain, it snowed, it was freezing and the Nurses Nurses were not wearing the proper clothes for this trip. There was hardly any food. They did their best to avoid the Balista, who were pro-German. They traveled from village to village and together with the Partisans Christmas was celebrated. They all moved on 27 December 1943. Soon the Germans were after the group and the group was fired upon. The group could get away, but they were separated. Three nurses

stayed behind. In the meantime the Partisans had contacted the Allies and British commandos were dropped near the group to assist them. The entire group moved in the direction of the coast, where a boat of the Royal Navy waited for the group. The group arrived in Italy on 9 January 1944. The three nurses, who were separated from the group, were smuggled to Italy by the partisans and arrived in Italy in March 1944.

The first evacuation flight out of Normandy took place on D+4. In the morning the pilots were instructed for the mission later that day. First a Flight Nurse and Technician were picked up, then the C-47 was loaded with supplies, ammunition or the well known jerrycans. Then the plane flew on to the airstrips near the frontlines. The Nurses and Technicians sat on top of these supplies. The planes did not have Red Cross markings and often were fired upon by the Germans. After the plane had landed, the supplies were unloaded. The ambulances with the wounded were already waiting. The interiors of the planes were fixed for the transportation of the wounded. Walking wounded took their seats on both sides of the cabin or sat on the floor. For the more severe wounded, who had to be transported by stretcher, special equipment was installed. The stretchers were loaded one above the other and a total of 21 stretchers could be loaded. Sometimes 28 stretchers were loaded. As soon as the wounded were on board, the Nurse and Technician took care of them. The pilots admired the nurses. As soon as the plane took off, the nurses and technicians checked the conditions of the wounded, they talked to the men, cleaned the bandages or gave the men something to drink. Sometimes there were two Nurses on board.

#### Prisoner-of-war.

Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle of the 813th MAES was taken prisoner by the Germans on 27 September 1944. She was on board of one of the planes of the 436th Troop Carrier Group. The plane was fired upon by the Germans and was hit. The plane made an emergency landing behind enemy lines. Lt Whittle was injured during the landing. In spite of her injuries she helped the other wounded crewmembers. Suddenly the Germans appeared and all were taken prisoner. The Germans were astonished to see a female among the crewmembers. First aid was given to the wounded and all were taken to Stalag 9-C (prisoncamp). Lt Whittle was separated from the men. There were no facilities for women in the camp. Reba took care of the wounded Allies. She was a prisoner for four months and celebrated Christmas 1944 in Germany. Thanks to the red Cross, she was exchanged. Lt Whittle was the only American woman, who was a POW.

#### Christmas 1944.

The Flight Nurses of the 817th MAES celebrated Christmas 1944 with French orphans. There was a Christmas tree and there was a Santa Claus. The dinner was extensive and there were presents for the children. One of the Nurses was 1Lt Christine A. Gasvoda. She was killed on 13 April 1945, when the C-47 she was in, crashed near Paderborn. Together with the crewmembers she was buried in the temporary American Military Cemetery at Margraten [Holland] in plot/row/grave number GG-5-107. After the war she was reburied in the permanent American Cemetery at Margraten in F-19-4.

Also buried at Margraten is 1Lt Wilma "Dolly" Vinsant (806th MAES). Wilma was born on 20 February 1917. Her father was a doctor, her mother a nurse. Wilma became a nurse at the John Sealy Hospital at Galveston. Amelia Earhart became her inspiring example for flying airplanes. Wilma joined the MAES. She was on board of a C-47 of the 436th Troop Carrier Group, that crashed near Eisenach on 14 April 1945. Wilma is now buried at Margraten in B-17-4. Dutchmen adopted both graves and during Memorial Day both graves receive flowers. The local hospital at San Benito (Texas) has the name Dolly Vinsant Memorial Hospital. The Dolly Vinsant Trophy will be given yearly to the Flight Nurse, who had done her utmost best.

Louise Anthony (816th MAES) noticed that one of the severely wounded in her plane, was dying. After the plane was in the air, the soldier had died. The other wounded men on board never knew this. Louise gave her

attention to the dead soldier during the flight. She talked to the man and by doing so, she prevented panic among the other men. When the plane landed in England, he was the last man to leave the plane.

Ann M. Krueger (817th MAES) evacuated 27 wounded patients from a burning C-47. She endangered her own life. Jeanette Gleason heard from the pilot that the plane was in trouble and he ordered all to bail out from the plane. She attached her parachute to the harness she was wearing and jumped from the plane. After touch down, she noticed she was all by herself. She slept in her parachute and the following morning she walked to a Chinese family, who gave her a breakfast. She was taken to allied lines.

Eleven Nurses and six Technicians lost their lives during the war in Europe. Besides all sad things, there was also some time for romance. Often the same Nurses flew with the same crews and after duty, they dated and some of the Nurses married their pilots.

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----- Headers -----

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