

First significant war memorial for women

LOCAL AMERICAN HEROINE HONORED IN WASHINGTON

by Ed Phillips

SIMSBURY - Constance Rudolph of Simsbury re-joined her World War II comrades at the dedication of their new memorial building in Washington, D.C.

The impressive Women in Military Service for America Memorial is at the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, an honored burial ground for America's heroes. The ceremonies, including a candle light parade, extended from October 16th through 19th.

Rudolph joined an expected 30,000 plus former and current servicewomen.

She herself served all across the Pacific Theater of

War. She pointed out that nearly two million women have served with America's fighting men starting way back in the Revolutionary War.

Rudolph graduated from Vassar Brothers Hospital School of Nursing, Poughkeepsie, New York at the beginning of the war and joined the army a year or so later. She met her husband Otto when he was a patient at the Army Air Force Hospital in Oklahoma

City.

He went to the Pacific to a B-29 heavy bomber group; she went to an Air Force flight nurse school.

there to take care of them and evacuate the seriously wounded."

She said that there were no hospitals and they had to

"They said I wasn't a veteran."

The more than twenty million dollar memorial was funded by private contributions from businesses and individuals from many states. More than \$15,000 came from Connecticut.

The memorial contains artifacts, records of women's activities, and memorabilia. A computer in the memorial contains records, pictures, and stories that have been provided by women who have already registered.

Women who want to be included in the memorial's computerized registry can call (800) 222-2294.



Constance Rudolph, Simsbury, was "everywhere" in the Pacific War.

They met again on the island of Saipan.

Her Air Medal citation says in part that First Lieutenant Constance W. Oestrike, her maiden name, participated in more than 700 hours of overwater flights, half (of them) while attending battle casualties and severe mental cases ... under trying conditions and subject to possible enemy interception and anti-aircraft fire.

Her Meritorious Service Unit plaque says that her unit rendered medical aid to more than 56,000 sick and wounded in 13 months. She also has four battle stars on her Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal.

"The World War II flight nurses were the first to evacuate men from combat zones," she said. "Wherever they were fighting we were

get the wounded to the United States as fast as possible. Once on the west coast they would be taken to appropriate hospitals around the country. "We had no civilization out there." She added, "I was everywhere in the Pacific War."

After the war Rudolph worked as a civilian nurse at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospitals in Norfolk, Virginia and Staten Island, New York. She and Otto were married in 1948 and have two daughters, Peggy and Barbara.

Rudolph said that this memorial is the first significant recognition of women who served. She said that when she came home she was refused admission to a national veterans organization because she was a woman.



Mr. Otto W. Rudolph
22 Branch Brook Dr.
Simsbury, CT 06070

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**RUDOLPH, Constance
"Connie" W., (Oestrike)**

Constance "Connie" W. (Oestrike) Rudolph, 85, of Branch Brook Drive, Simsbury, beloved wife of Otto W. Rudolph, died Saturday,

(December 30, 2006) at John Dempsey Hospital. She was born April 10, 1921 in Fairport, NY, daughter of the late Richard and Anna (Wilson) Oestrike and had lived throughout the Northeast prior to moving to Simsbury 35 years ago. Constance was a graduate of Poughkeepsie High School and Vassar Brothers School of Nursing, Class of 1942, where she received her Registered Nursing degree. After graduating she volunteered as a nurse in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was assigned to Patterson and Tinker Air Force Bases. In March of 1944, Constance was accepted for Flight Nurses Training at Bowman Field, Louisville, KY, graduating class 44D, May 24, 1944. In December of 1944 she was assigned to duty in the Pacific Theater at Biak, in the Dutch East Indies with 830 MAES. Constance flew evacuation trips to Tarawa, Guadalcanal, Los Negros, New Caledonia, Leyte and Honolulu and evacuated casualties from Guam, Saipan, Leyte, Manila, Kwajalein, Okinawa and Bataan with stop off bases at Johnston Island, Honolulu and Hamilton Field, CA. She was honorably discharged in January of 1946 being awarded the American Campaign Medal, Air Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four battle stars, Meritorious Service Unit Plaque, the World War II Victory medal and in November of 2006 was awarded the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal. From 1946 to 1948, Mrs. Rudolph was a Staff Nurse with the U.S. Public Health Service Hospitals in Norfolk, VA and Staten Island, NY. She organized and was Charge Nurse of the Emergency Room-Out Patient Department in

Norfolk, VA. She was a Staff Nurse in Pittsfield, MA during the polio epidemic in 1949 and was a part time Staff Nurse at Yale New Haven Hospital and McLean. Constance was a part time student at William and Mary College, VA, New York University and Connecticut State Colleges. Mrs. Rudolph was a Girl Scout Leader for five years, was active in school and church programs, taking medical histories at Red Cross blood banks and was a consultant for the Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program. Connie visited Washington, D.C. under the guidance of Representative Nancy Johnson and at a later date attended the dedication of the Woman's War Memorial. She appeared frequently at History Classes at Simsbury High School describing her World War II experiences. Constance was recognized as an active trustee of the VFW Metacommet Post #1926 in Simsbury prior to her illness. Connie was a member of the World War II Flight Nurse Association in Tavares, FL where she attended their bi-annual National Conventions. She was an active participant of activities at the Simsbury Senior Center and a member of the McLean Aquatic Groups. Besides her husband of 58 years, she is survived by two daughters, Barbara and Peggy Rudolph, both of Simsbury; one brother and sister-in-law, Richard and Alice Oestrike of Poughkeepsie, NY; two sisters and a brother-in-law, Dorothy and Tom McCormack of Owego, NY and Margaret Traver of Pleasant Valley, NY and many nieces and nephews and their children. Friends may call at the Vincent Funeral Home, 880 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, Wednesday, January 3, 4-6 p.m. Funeral service will be Thursday, January 4, 11 a.m. at Simsbury United Methodist Church, 799 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, with the Reverend Mel Kawakami officiating. Burial with military honors will be in Simsbury Cemetery. In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be made to Simsbury United Methodist Church, 799 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 06070.

Unfortunately the above bear the news!

Otto W. Rudolph

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Airborne evacuation of casualties has roots in World War II

■ Tom Condon mentioned in his Nov. 11 column that a Vietnam nurse points to today's civilian hospital trauma centers with air evacuation ambulances as an offshoot of the treatment and air evacuation of military casualties of the Vietnam War ["Nurse earned today's honor"].

Actually, it was the World War II medical evacuation units of the Army Air Force that were the precursor of today's

air evacuation ambulances at civilian hospital trauma centers.

During World War II, medical teams consisting of a flight nurse and medical technician flew into combat areas, loaded severely wounded stretcher casualties into an airplane, and flew them back to a general hospital. Each casualty had initial treatment by a flight surgeon before takeoff. The medical teams were assigned to every theater of war.

Between January 1943 and May 1945, more than 1.17 million sick and wounded casualties were evacuated by airplane from combat zones. Many of these flights were subject to possible enemy interception and anti-aircraft fire.

Helicopters were in the experimental stage during World War II. They were used for evacuating battlefield casualties during the Korean War.

During World War II, battle casualties

that were air evacuated to general hospitals recovered much faster. This pioneering method of treating battle casualties was adopted in each succeeding war. Eventually, this method was adopted by civilian medical centers.

Connie Rudolph
Simsbury

Editor's note: The writer was a flight nurse during World War II.

22 Branch Brook Drive
Simsbury, CT 06070
March 23, 1988

Letter to the Editor, The Courant
285 Broad St.
Hartford, Conn. 06115

To the Editor:

In the March 21, 1988 Hartford Courant, a letter to the editor from Linda Schwartz needs a correction when she states "For the first time in our nation's history, women were assigned to active combat zones." Women nurses in World War II were very much active in combat zones. A nurse friend of mine has a permanently damaged leg as a result of enemy shelling during the Anzio Beach landing in Italy. Army Air Force Flight Nurses flew into combat zones daily in the European, China-Burma-India, and the Pacific Theaters.

As an Army Air Force Flight Nurse assigned to the 830th Medical Air Evacuation Unit stationed in the Pacific Theater, I distinctly remember flying into many combat zones to evacuate the casualties from the islands as the invasion forces recaptured each of these islands. A Meritorious Service Unit Plaque and four battle stars speaks for itself. Also, my Air Medal Citation states that I "spent many hours flying over and within combat zones, was subject to enemy interception and anti-aircraft fire while attending to battle casualties and severe mental cases, under trying conditions, with steadfast devotion to duty." Evacuation planes were neither armed nor marked with the Red Cross insignia because they were classified as cargo planes.

Being in a combat zone left me with an indelible memory. Even after forty-three years, it is hard to forget the terror of being in the exact location where bombs are being dropped, or sensing the moment when you realize that a sniper had you as his target when a bullet whizzed by.

I'm sure there are many other nurses who can also testify about their experiences in combat zones during World War II.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Connie Rudolph

Connie Rudolph, R. N.
Simsbury, CT.
Telephone 658-9909



**WORLD WAR II FLIGHT NURSES
ASSOCIATION, INC.**



A WONDERFUL LEGACY, "Thank God they sent a nurse along."

Connie Oestrike Rudolph (830th) sent me a copy of an article written by Morris Markey in the October 28, 1944 issue of Liberty Magazine. The article begins by describing the relief of a Flight Surgeon when meeting a plane at Saipan when he saw Irene Craig Stone (812th) get off the plane, thank God, they sent a nurse along."

The plane to transport the severely wounded patients to Hawaii, a 15 hour flight, carried only K-rations. Lieutenant Stone found a chaplain and together they began to forage. "It was night and mess halls were closed. Burglary of the officers' mess yielded only a few cans of soup. But at a Seabees galley the two found a newly baked cake, which they appropriated (the chaplain pausing to bless the cake). A Navy kitchen with a flimsy lock gave up some cans of fruit and turkey meat. That night, 10,000 feet over the Pacific, the men in their litters ate delicacies which had dwelt for months in tantalizing dreams."

A young marine in the first invasion wave at Saipan found himself in a knife fight with a Japanese officer as soon as he was ashore. When the officer was dead, the marine made a routine search of his body and found his own brother's identification tags. His mind exploded with rage. Aboard the evacuation plane, the marine was morose and threatening. He made the other wounded restless as the plane droned endlessly above the water. The Flight nurse aboard was lieutenant Sara Ann Jones (812th). He met her first approaches with sneers and brutal words. But presently, she persuaded him to smoke a cigarette with her. Then she played the role of mother or big sister and got him to talking. She asked enough questions to lead him over his harrowing experience two or three times. And so he talked out his rage and was calm again. He still wanted to kill-but only Japanese, and not even those with his bare hands.

On one of her flights out of the battle zone, Nurse Betty Chase (809th) had among her patients a Navy photographer whose leg had been nearly blown off at Kwajalein. He knew he was being flown out for an amputation and he had little will to live. Lieutenant Chase sat down on the litter beside him. She found out that before the war he had been a photographer specializing in style pictures. She began to wonder how his injury could really handicap him in that sort of work. At first she sympathized with him, but then she began to work out with him the way he would live in the future. She checked off the things he still could do. Then she tried to make a list of things he couldn't do. Run? Play tennis? Dance? Perhaps not. How much running and tennis and dancing had he done before, anyway? Not much. Very well, then. Where's the rub? You don't take pictures with your legs do you? By the time the plane landed at Hickam Field, he was eager to have the amputation over so he could get going with his new life. The article ended with these observations, "Nobody instructs the nurses to do these things. No doctor or flight surgeon, no general or admiral would risk orders governing feminine instincts, feminine warmth and generosity and cheerfulness. And it is not the flight surgeons alone who say, "Thank God they sent a nurse along!"

NEWS FROM THE AUTHORS

Diane Fessler "... my manuscript is finished and I hope to be able to announce the publication date of the book soon. The Newsletter did generate some news from your members and I am keeping track of anything that comes in so I can include it future projects." 5738 North Central Ave. Phoenix AZ 85012

Jenenne P. Nelson ... is fine tuning A Research Study of WWII Flight Nurses. Dr. Nelson can be contacted at Beth-El College of Nursing, 2790 Academy Blvd. (719) 475-5170 Colorado Springs, CO 80917-5338



In retrospect, some memories are laughable (maybe awesome)..

Connie Oestricke Rudolph has written letters/articles to the Hartford Courant, New York Times, The Chronicle and others. Connie describes so well the Flight Nurse Training and experiences with some wonderful and sometimes sad memories.

"Jumping off a 30 foot high platform into a swimming pool while fully clothed ... was part of the training. For me, a non-swimmer with an irrational fear of being submerged, this was creating terrifying emotions. I stood in line that fateful day waiting my turn to jump. Climbing up the ladder was relatively easy. Walking across the diving board was not easy. And standing at the end of the diving board for ten minutes was hell.

This was also hell for the instructor ..who had already given many commands for me to jump. In desperation, he ordered me to turn around and climb back down. Classmates were already chanting "Chicken, .." For me, it was all over.

But then from somewhere deep inside, I knew I had to go through with this ordeal, even though it would mean my untimely demise. They say one's whole past flashes through the mind just before a tragic ending. My whole future flashed through. Or rather my lack of one. I would never be a flight nurse, a wife, a mother, a grandmother.

With trembling resignation, I forced myself to jump. But instead of feeling a deathly thud on hitting the water, I became aware that the instructor was furiously swearing and struggling to unlock my arms from the death grip that I had around his neck. His only coherent words were something about being damned if he was going to go off that board with each nurse and furthermore, he hadn't joined this damn service to take care of a bunch of damn women.

After a rebuke like that, I realized that jumping off the board was the lesser of the terrifying experiences of the day.

So in the second attempt, all went without a hitch and without an obituary!"

Thanks Connie for sharing this experience, many of us will remember those moments before the leap into the dark waters.

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Jean Stratton of Sedona, Arizona has sent a number of pictures and articles that will be helpful to the Archives Committee and also if/when we update THE STORY OF AIR EVACUATION.

Jean graduated from the USAF University in September 1953.

The photo shows Jean with a C-131 at Travis Air Force Base, CA.

