

GRACE CHICKEN

Grace Chicken completed her nurse training at the University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City Kansas. She was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Nurse



Corps. She served from July 1942 until September 1968 with two periods in the active reserve from 1946 to 1950 and 1952 to 1953. She entered the service at Camp Crowder Army Base, Joplin Missouri and then went to Topeka Army Air Base, Kansas. From there she went to Bowman Field, Louisville, Kentucky where she attended Air Evacuation School. She served in Newfoundland and then the Azores where she was promoted to 1st lieutenant. Next she had a very short tour in Scotland followed by her next assignment in Hawaii where she was based at Hickem Field. While at Hickem she flew missions throughout the Pacific area and also to San Francisco, California.

In 1946 after being discharged from her first tour on active duty she was promoted from 1st lieutenant to captain and her discharge orders corrected. In civilian life she attended Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois and became a member of the active reserves. In 1950 she returned to active duty to participate in the Korean Conflict. She was stationed in Japan at air bases in Itazuke, Ashiya, and Tachikawa and flew air evacuation missions to bring the wounded from Korea to Japan for medical treatment.

In December 1951 she was discharged and again joined the active reserve until 1953 when she returned to active duty. She went to Smokey Hill, Salina, Kansas and then to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska. At Elmendorf Grace was assigned to the 5040th USAF Hospital. From Alaska she went to Ardmore, Oklahoma and from there to Seward Air Force Base, Nashville, Tennessee. She was sent to Administrative School at Fort Sam Houston Texas for 12 months and then assigned to McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas where she was promoted to major on 1 Sept 1961. After her tour at McConnell she was transferred to Goose Bay, Labrador.

She returned to McConnell Air Force Base on 2 September 1965 and retired on 1 September 1968 as lieutenant colonel. Grace was awarded the Air Medal with 1 bronze star, Presidential Unit Citation, American Theater Medal, WW II Victory Metal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle East Campaign Medal, Republic of Korea Presidential Citation, United Nations Service Medal, Korean Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Air Force Longevity Medal w/3 bronze stars, and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal and Letter of Appreciation and Medical Air Evacuation Wings.

GRACE'S STORIES

I was in the service for 20 years and moved about 40 times, maybe more than that.

When I was in nurses training I was afraid we would never have another war so when World War II came along, naturally volunteered. I applied in 1942 and the only way they were taking nurses was through the American Red Cross so I had to join the Red Cross. They took me in and we went right to work in a hospital. We didn't go through any type of training, no boot camp, or anything like that. I vaguely remember it but I'm sure that I took an oath. I joined the army to see the world and was sent to Camp Crowder, Joplin, Missouri which was about 100 miles from my home town. That was the Army Signal Corps. After three months my friend, Irene, decided we should make a change. They were opening a new Army Air Base at Topeka Kansas. We applied and were accepted so we went to Topeka. The base was so new that around the houses they still had stubs of the corn stalks. The houses were just little shells and on the inside of them was a 2 X 4 that went around the inside of the building which made a nice little shelf to put our things on. It was a training base for B-17s and B-24s. I was there for a year and a half when Irene suggested we go to Air Evacuation School so we applied to Bowman Field, Louisville, Kentucky and again we were accepted. We moved down there on the 3rd of April and we were there for five months. It was longer than usual because D Day was the 6th of June and that kept everything at a standstill for a while. While I was there they had a case of mumps and everyone who had not had the mumps were sent off the base and we stayed in little pup tents, two girls to a pup tent. This was kind of close living and four of us became very friendly. We sort of followed each other around all over the world.

After five months we were assigned flights. Two of us went to Stephenville, Newfoundland, one to Hawaii, and one went to the China, Burma, India Theater of operations. At Newfoundland we had real short flights either into New York or if New York was closed we went to Presque, Main and that's the coldest place in the world.

One of my strongest memories of the air force was Memorial Day in Newfoundland. We marched with the troops down to a beach. Usually the medics didn't march but this time we did. We marched down to some benches that the engineers had set up on the beach. It was a beautiful location. Behind us were trees and in front the Atlantic which stretched forever. After a short little program, way in the distance, and I mean really way in the distance, the clear tones of Taps played. It just gives you shivers. I still think about that, Taps so clear and it was such a beautiful location.

After two months we were sent to Logans Air Force Base in the Azores. "Behind him lay the great Azores, Behind the Gates of Hercules, Sail on and on and on..." Portugal was neutral, the British were guest of the Portuguese and the U S troops were guest of the British. Besides the British and Americans there were Germans over there, we had all kinds of people and everyone did their own thing. Logans was sort of a filling station and dispersion point for the wounded. They were brought from Africa, Europe, and the CBI and we would take them to the United States. We flew either to New York or Miami,

depending on the weather. Both were long flights and we had to refuel in Newfoundland if we were going to New York and Bermuda if we were going to Miami. It took 13 hours to Bermuda and we carried 13 hours of gas. When I first started flying they carried gas in big tanks on the inside of the airplane which sort of shut down a lot of the area that was usable. Finally they decided to put the gas in the wings which gave us a lots more room. It was still kind of scary, you would fly and fly and fly and fly and then when we would look down and see these tiny little islands we were glad that we had a good navigator. We always carried a parka and packed a bathing suit because we never knew when we were called to take a flight out if we were going to Newfoundland or Bermuda. In the Azores we learned to drink Champaign because we couldn't drink the water and of course in Bermuda we could get scotch real easy.

We were in the Azores for about six months and I don't know exactly why but we were sent to Scotland. We went there on 1 May and VE Day was May the 8th so we were there a very short time. After VE Day all the planes were busy transferring the troops from Europe to the Pacific so we did not do a lot of flying at that time. We helped in the Scottish hospitals and we took a lot of trips. One of the trips we took was to Loch Lomond. We didn't plan this too well. We took a train and when we got to the little town it was dark, they did not have many lights, and there was not a soul around as we stood there wondering what we were going to do a policeman came along and he took us to what we would have called a YMCA where we stayed for the night. The next morning he took us to the resort where we had reservations.

We received orders to go to the Pacific and the planes were all busy moving troops and equipment to the Pacific so they flew us to Paris where it would be easier for us to catch a plane. Out of Paris we sort of hitched a ride back to the States. We put our foot lockers in the nose of the plane if there was room then we got on the plane but sometimes our footlocker went before we did. One of the girls landed in New York and her footlocker landed in Washington, DC but she finally caught up with it. All of the luggage we had was a small hand bag and a footlocker that we lived out of.

We landed in Hawaii in July of 1945 and I was stationed at Hickem Air Force Base. That was where one of my friends went when I went to Newfoundland so now three of us were together. We lived in base dependent homes which were very deluxe. We ate lots of fresh pineapple. For entertainment our dates could check out jeeps and they could also check out a "Duck." A "Duck" is a boat with wheels that can travel on land and water. We would go out into Pearl Harbor and cruise around all of the sunken ships as the harbor was full of ships that had been sunk on December 7th, 1941. Out of Hawaii we flew either east or west. If we flew west we probably flew to Manila and of course it was a long flight but it wasn't as bad as the Pacific flights because there were islands in between. If we had problems we could stop at Johnston, Guam, or Kwajalein where we could get gas, have an engine repaired, and spend the night. While I was there the war ended and we celebrated VJ Day. That was another day and night to remember. The landing strip search lights "danced" all over the sky.

I was on the second Air Evac plane into Japan after VJ Day. This is the only time I ate out of a mess kit and used a helmet to wash in, this was front line living. We were there overnight. The other nurse from the first plane and I went out and picked up a couple of soldiers and they took us into Tokyo. The base was just outside of Tokyo and they had an open jeep and they both wore pistols on their belts. We went into Tokyo but there was not much to see because everything was boarded up. We went into the big hotel in Tokyo that the Americans had taken over for their headquarters. We went in the bar and had some sake and we insisted on having ice. The Japanese thought it was funny that we had ice in our sake. Afterwards we got back in our little jeep and started home. Well Tokyo was the second largest city in the world and we got lost. Here it is, two days after VJ Day, we were lost in this big city. We were hoping the Japanese knew the war was over. Finally we came to an intersection where there was a policeman in the middle of the intersection directing traffic. He took the driver into his little shed on one of the corners where he had this big map up on the wall. He showed the driver where we were and then showed him where we wanted to go. That's the way we got home.

I brought back a load of soldiers who had been on the Corrigador Death March and they said, "We knew you would pick us up." We were there at Hickam for about five months; the war was over, things got kind of quiet. It was just one beautiful day after another because it really is pretty there in Hawaii. We decided to get out of the service. The three of us applied for discharge, we went back to the states on a ship as we decided we had done enough flying. We ended up in Chicago getting our discharge papers and while we were standing at the counter waiting for someone to take care of us our fourth friend, who had been in the CBI, walked up. The four of us who had started in the Air Evacuation Training were discharged on the same day.

I was discharged the first time February 4th 1946 and went to school on the GI Bill. The government pays your tuition and they buy your books so I looked at all the colleges and saw which college charged the most for tuition because I wanted to get my money's worth. I chose Northwestern in Chicago and I was there for about a year. While I was there I joined a reserve unit and that unit was one of two in the United States that was recalled when Korea came along. They have never drafted nurses but because I had just graduated and had nothing else to do I went back into the service.

I was sent to Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter, South Carolina and was only there for about two months when they looked at my records and saw that I was an air evacuation nurse so they sent me to Japan. The Korean War was not actually a declared war so they called it a police action. The Air Force "powers to be" decided that they would be the ones to get the patients out of the battlefield area. Air evacuation was the method of choice for the prompt removal of the wounded from battle zones as it provides casualties with the best possible care in the shortest possible time. In Korea inadequate roads, rails, and port facilities made air evacuation the best method to get military casualties back to the hospitals where they could be taken care of. The Air Force wanted to prove that they were the best so we were sent over there with very little equipment and no uniforms. We went over there fast. When I got to Japan I went out into the dump and picked up an ammunition box and that was my medical kit. I went to the pharmacy and picked out any

medications I wanted. You could get morphine, codeine, and everything that you thought you would need for your medical kit. My uniform was whatever you happened to have. I found a jump suit, I called it my rompers, and I wore it most of the time. We were issued air force parkas because it gets cold in Korea. The air force parka was fine except the back of my lap got cold. I found an army parka which was longer and that was better. But one time when I was up in North Korea and someone up there was colder than I was, I knew I could go back to Japan and get warm so I gave my parka away.

As I mentioned we went over there pretty fast and my footlocker didn't come. We lived out of our footlockers; we were allowed a footlocker and a suitcase. I was living out of my suitcase and the footlocker didn't come. One day when I was down in the orderly room where they kept our records and I was looking around when I saw my footlocker, standing up, with a board on top of it, and they were using it for a table. How long it had been there I don't know but finally I got my footlocker.

In Korea they had holding stations where the men were brought from the battlefield to a first aid tent. It was a little bit like MASH. We flew in C-47s which were cargo planes. The cargo planes would carry in supplies and we would fly with them. The supplies were anything from hand grenades, BX supplies, food, medical supplies, and tanks of gasoline. The gasoline was in great big barrels and the way they offloaded them was to put a tire on the ground and just roll the drums of gasoline out. They would just bounce and we wondered why they didn't explode. On one flight we carried blood and that was a very cold flight as they had to keep the temperature down for the blood. When the supplies were unloaded then we would pick up patients. Korea was an international operation and we had all kinds of people. We had Turkish soldiers, we had Americans, we had Koreans, and we even had North Koreans. One time I almost had a fight on my hands because this big sergeant on the plane, who was a walking wounded casualty, saw this Korean come on board and said, "Is that a North Korean?" because a few hours ago he was fighting them. I said, "No, no, that's a South Korean." That was a good time for a lie because he was a North Korean.

When the supplies were offloaded and the plane was empty they would drop down straps from the ceiling that had loops on them. On the walls of the plane they had fittings so when they brought litters with wounded on board they would fit one side of the litter in the fitting and the other side would fit into the loops on the straps. We carried four tiers on each side of the plane and about four rows so we could carry about 32 patients. Sometimes when we were real busy I would put some on the floor. We were only supposed to carry so many but during the war rules were bent.

One time I was the last plane out of Kimpo Air Base. In the Korean conflict we would keep bases for a while and as we had to pull back we would have to give up the base. This plane was really loaded and just as I was getting ready to leave they came roaring up from the battlefield with a soldier who had a big hole in his chest. I was completely loaded but we found room for him because they said if we didn't take him out he would never make it back to the hospital.

My first base in Japan was Itazuke which is on the southern Island of Kyushu. I was there for a couple of months and then we were sent to Ashiya. In Ashiya I used my spare time to put a garden out in the front yard. To keep people from walking on it I put a little fence around it with parachute tape. The pilots said that was the best landmark they had. They always knew when they were getting into Ashiya. One time I was sent way up north to pick up some wounded. On landing we blew a tire. I had two flat tires during my flying career, this one and one on take-off. This was a remote base with no plane maintenance and no women. We had to wait there until another tire was flown in. The problem was what to do with me! I was loaned a two-man tent with bedrolls as the owner was up front fighting. When I went to the "bathroom" (a seven holer) someone had to stand guard. After two days our tire was flown in. I don't know who was happier, them or me.

Next I was stationed at Tachakowai which was a few miles from Tokyo so when we weren't fighting too much we could take runs into Tokyo. We would take the train. The trains in Japan are really efficient, when they say they are coming in at 10:52 they come in at 10:52. We would take a train into the station and then take another train or street car into town. One time we got on the wrong train. and we finally decided we were not getting into town. We "talked" to the conductor, we didn't speak Japanese and he didn't speak English, but I did know the name and could pronounce the name of the station where we changed trains. When we stopped the conductor took us off and put us on a streetcar back to the station.

One thing that happened in Korea that made the newspapers was "Operation Kiddy Kar" when 1000 Orphans were taken from North Korea to South Korea. A Chaplain had made arrangements to have the orphans moved down because it was so cold where they were. The Air Force was contracted to haul them and I can still see the 10 C-54s which were four engine planes something like a 747, lined up in the snow. It was in December just about Christmas time. The orphans were brought down in open trucks and two little boys shared a single coat. One would wear it for a while and then the other boy would wear it. When the trucks came up they had some reporters there. The reporters were trying to get them to say something. They finally decided they would sing a little song and the kids sang "Jesus Loves Me." You didn't know the words but you could understand the tune. I had 100 orphans on my plane. In the back there were several babies and two blankets so I put one blanket on the floor, put the babies on the blanket, and then covered them with the other blanket. We had a sandwich of babies. We carried them down to an abandoned navy base in South Korea. We had two adult "Mama sans" who were taking care of the babies and we just sort of dumped them out with boxes of care packages so they did have some food. These poor little kids had been picked up early in the morning and it was night when we got them down there. They hadn't had anything to eat all day. One plane was having engine trouble and it went back to Japan. All of the kids were taken into the terminal which was just a big barren building. We did have a Christmas tree up and the mess hall sent over hot chocolate and sandwiches. We brought all the kids in and we thought, "We wonder what the kids will think when they see the Christmas tree." They never saw the Christmas tree as all they saw was the food. Bless

their little hearts, when the older ones got their sandwiches they bowed their heads and said a little prayer.

In December 1951 when my two year tour was up and everybody was getting out I also got out and went back to Kansas City where I worked for a year. Then I decided that after 10 years in the service I couldn't make the salary on the outside as I did in the Air Force so I went back into the service. I was sent to Smokey Hill, Selina, Kansas where nothing much happened. I lived in a house and we had a cat. One day the cat went up a tree and wouldn't come down so I called the fire department. They came, climbed up the tree and got the cat down, drove off, and the cat went back up the tree. We just left it up there.

In June 1955 I went to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska. This was before Alaska was a state. While I was there they moved the hospital from a group of old wooden buildings into a beautiful four or five story modern hospital. If you think moving from one place to another is bad you should try moving 1000 patients. We got rid of as many patients as we could and we didn't schedule any surgery but people still had babies. We had a baby on the day we were moving but in Alaska because of the long dark nights, we had a lot of babies.

We did a lot of fishing up there, sometimes we would fish all night. We fished for salmon and we used heavy treble hooks that we would just throw in and snag them. When the salmon were running they were so thick you could almost catch one every time you would cast. One night we were fishing and a bear came walking down the mountain. We watched him but he didn't pay any attention to us. He just walked in, got his fish, walked out, and went back up the mountain. We packed up and went home. We camped out a lot. I had an old Nash, the kind the front seat backs would lay back and make a bed, and the other three people I was camping with had one man mountain tents. On long weekends we would go out camping. On one trip we drove up from Anchorage to Fairbanks on the 21st of June and before the red of the sun went down on one side it came up on the other side. Sometimes in Fairbanks the sun doesn't go all the way down. Because there were no roads we put the car on a train to Mount McKinley Park. At McKinley Park they had 90 miles of roads and we drove all around the park which they do not allow people to do now as they use sightseeing busses. We stayed there about a week. We had beautiful views of McKinley in the daytime and by moonlight at night. It's something we could never do again.

The snow in Alaska was unbelievable. In the wintertime they would go down and clean out the roads and you would usually have three or four feet of snow on each side so there was no problem of sliding off the road. There was a problem with seeing because everything was light. The snow was light and the horizon was light so they would paint a line on the snow banks so you could see where the edge of the road was and wouldn't drive into the snow bank.

After a year and a half I came back from Alaska and went to Ardmore, Oklahoma. While I was at Ardmore they phased out the base and they kept reducing the staff until I was the

next to the last nurse to leave. From there I went to Seward Air Force Base, which was close to Nashville, Tennessee. While I was there I put in another garden. When my tomato plants got big enough I wanted to stake them. I found some 2 X 2s about four feet high but you can't drive a 2 X 2 into the ground very easily and I needed to sharpen them but I didn't have an axe. I thought, "Now where can I find an axe? I know, I saw one on the fire truck." So I called up the fire company and asked them if I could borrow their axe. They were not very busy so they came over and sharpened my stakes and I think they even drove them into the ground for me.

After five months at Ardmore I went to San Antonio, Texas to Fort Sam Houston where I attended Administrative School. After six months of schooling I went to McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas. At McConnell I had another garden. Behind the BOQ where I stayed was a big expanse of ground that was a parade ground but they never used it. It was a co-ed BOQ and some of the fellows came out and helped me dig up the ground. It was hard because it had never been cultivated before but we dug up this little spot. Then I decided we had better get permission because after all it was a parade ground. When I asked they said no, I couldn't do it. Well, after all that work we said we were going to have a garden so we planted some tomatoes and some flowers and we called it our illegitimate garden. The fellows said they were the best tomatoes they had ever eaten.

My next station was in Goose Bay, Labrador. Labrador was another cold tour. It was interesting but it was not as much fun as Alaska. We picked blueberries there because you have the permafrost which means the ground is always frozen except in the summertime when about six inches thaws. It's a perfect place for blueberries and they were so thick that when you were picking them you would be stepping on them. I was there for a year and I took a trip almost every month. I went to Iceland and Greenland. In Thule, Greenland the winter is 24 hours of darkness and in the summertime its 24 hours of light. While we were at Thule we got to walk out on the frozen Artic Ocean. It was like walking on a drum, "clunk, clunk, clunk." I also made a couple trips to Canada and got to go to the Ice Carnival

In 1965 I returned to McConnell and retired in 1968. I came to Florida in 1974 and was a doctor's assistant for a while and then I retired again.



Loading a patient



Take off

By AL HEMINGWAY

Staff Correspondent

PUNTA GORDA

— During World War II, when U.S. Army nurse Grace Chicken hopped on board a C-54 Skymaster plane to transport wounded soldiers, she didn't know whether she should bring a bathing suit or a parka.

Chicken said there were northern and southern routes flown as many as four times a week.

"We either went from the Azores to Newfoundland to New York, or from the Azores to Bermuda to Miami," she said. "We carried 13 hours of fuel on the C-54. Sometimes we just made it and coasted in."

Chicken, 99, was one of the women honored at the Military Heritage Museum on Wednesday in a reception honoring women who served in the military or those who performed jobs Stateside taking the place of men who went off to war, referred to as "Rosie the Riveters."

Chicken said she was the second plane to land in Japan immediately after it surrendered in August 1945. One of her flights brought survivors of the Bataan Death March back to the U.S.

"I remember them saying, 'I knew you would get us; we never lost faith in America,'" she said.



Lt. Col. Grace Chicken, USAF, logged more than 2,000 hours on C-54, C-46 and C-47 transport aircraft, while attending to the wounded from World War II and the Korean conflict.

When World War II ended, Chicken left the service and attended college on the G.I. Bill. After graduation, she joined the U.S. Air Force. She retired after 20 years with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

"During the Korean War, we flew from Japan into Korea to pick up casualties," she said.

"I also served a year in Labrador and 10 months in Alaska. They still call me 'Amazing Grace.'"