76 Nurses Complete Evacuation Course At Bowman Field

By Agnes Snyder

"You are setting an example to the whole nation, and, when the history of this war is written, the brightest pages will be those of the gallant women of the Air Evacuation Group," seventy-six graduating nurses of the Air Evacuation School at Bowman Field were told yesterday by Col. Wood S. Woolford, plans and operations officer of the Office of the Air Surgeon.

Martial music by the 67th Army Air Forces band provided background for the ceremonies held in Bowman Field's Post Chapel. Following an invocation by Lieut. Ernest E. Smith, assistant base chaplain, Lieut. Col. Ralph T. Stephenson, commanding officer of the school, introduced Colonel Woolford who sketched the history of military nursing throughout civilized warfare.

"Female nurses were first used in the United States during the American Revolution," Colonel Woolford said. "They were then authorized to serve on the basis of one to every ten patients, a ratio which still exists. Scrubbing floors was often as much a part of their duties as tending the sick."

War At Front Doors.

Discussing the use of nurses in the present conflict, Colonel Woolford pointed out that war has this time been brought to our very front doors, and that the civilian populace, under air bombardment, is now subject to the same perils as men on the fighting front.

"In Russia squads of women sharpshooters and guerrillas are used in actual combat," he said, emphasizing the role women are now playing in the war effort.

"The results of air evacuation thus far have been so outstanding that even the most skeptical are forced to admit its value in helping the wounded." A veteran of medical service in the recent clean-up of the Tunisian theater, Woolford witnessed evacuation from the front, in which wounded troops were brought to a troop carrier landing base and transported quickly and safely to a base hospital 500 miles to the rear.

"I heard more praise of air evacuation than of any other phase of overseas medical service," Colonel Woolford recalled. "And we now have a new hope for further progress in the perfection of the helicopter, which provides a flexible vehicle for swift transfer under conditions which restrict normal flying."

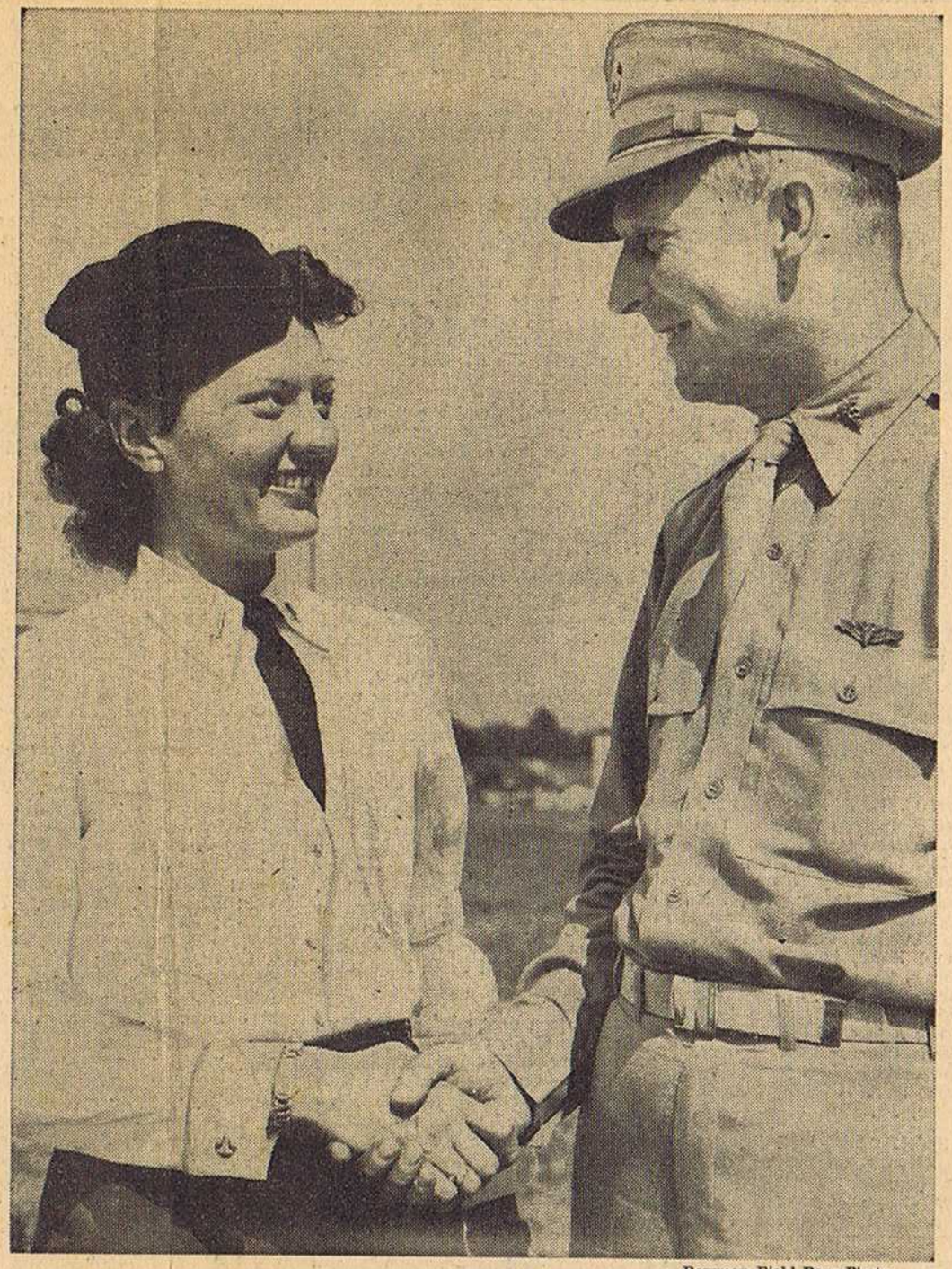
Diplomas Awarded.

Members of the group, fourth and largest to be graduated at Bowman Field, were awarded diplomas by Col. Walter S. Jensen, executive officer of the Office of the Air Surgeon. The benediction was pronounced by Lieut. William Zink, base chaplain.

Prominent among the pretty nurses, soon to be transferred to widely scattered war zones, was Lieut. Helen L. Summers, Brooklyn, N. Y., already a veteran of fighting in the South Pacific. Shipped out of Bataan at the zero hour, she was transferred to Corregidor, where she served at a hospital outpost. The night before its fall, Lieutenant Summers and thirteen other nurses were evacuated from the rocky promontory in a submarine and taken to Australia. They were the last people to leave before the fortress fell.

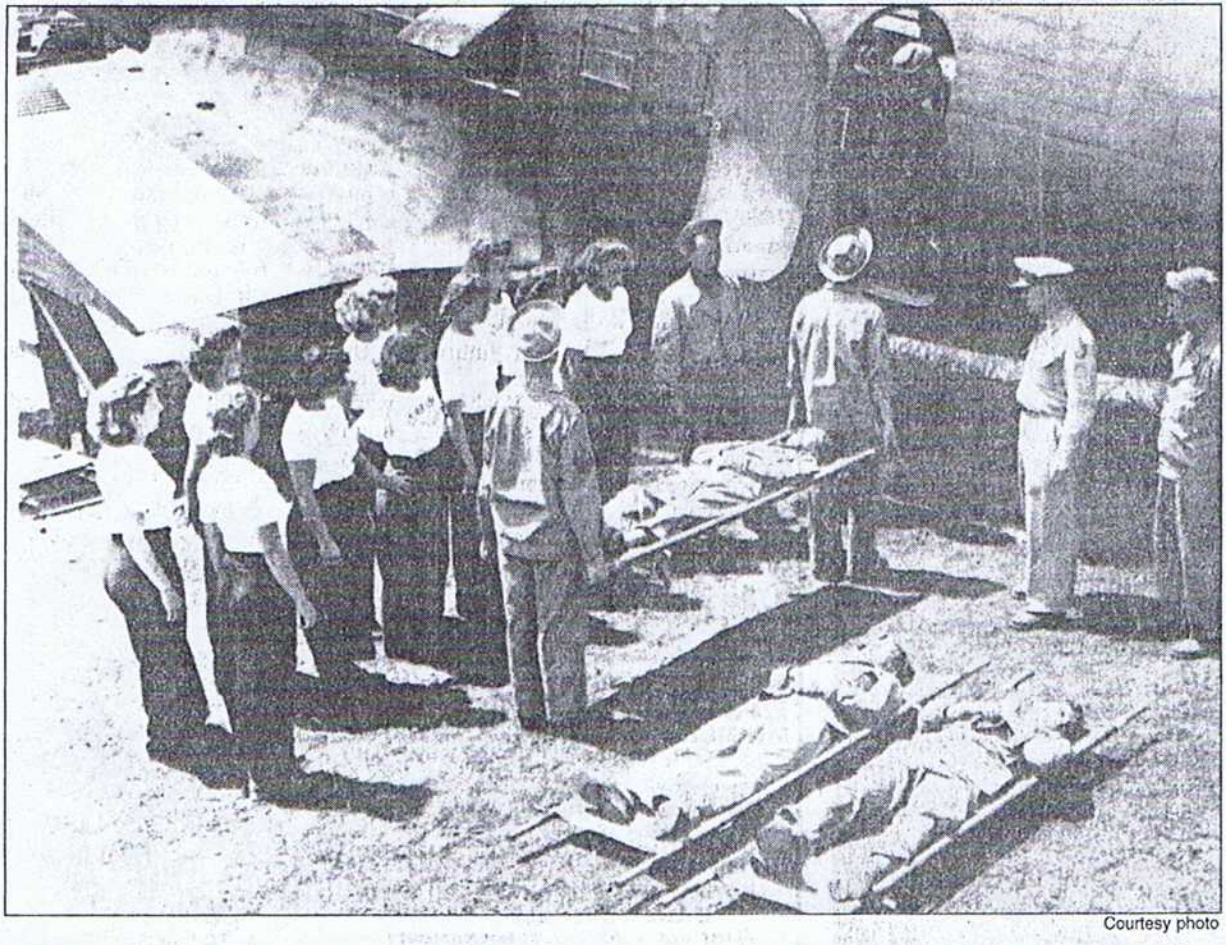
Surprise guest at the ceremonies was Brig. Gen. David N. S. Grant, chief air surgeon, who flew in from Washington, D. C.

A graduation dinner-dance was held at 8 o'clock last night at the Roof Garden of the Brown Hotel.



Bowman Field Base Photo.

Lieut. Helen L. Summers, veteran of Corregidor, got congratulatory handshake from Lieut. Col. Ralph T. Stevenson, commanding officer of Air Evacuation School at Bowman Field which yesterday graduated 76 combat nurses.



Courtesy photo

During their training at the School of Air Evacuation at Bowman Army Air Base, nurses were instructed in the proper manner in which to load casualties onto planes.

NURSES

Continued from C1

do whatever they could to ensure freedom for the United States and its allies. Both Errair and Haynes knew they could use their nursing training to serve.

In 1941, Haynes worked in a psychiatric hospital in Roseburg, Ore., where some of the Pearl Harbor soldiers were taken. She was moved by the young men, many of whom never recovered from their traumatic experience.

"After I saw all of those boys I decided to go into the air evacuation nurse training," Haynes said.

Errair felt the calling as well. She became a member of the first official class of 25 flight nurses shortly after completing nursing school and completed two months of training at Bowman Field, Ky., in July 1943.

"They had no idea what we were going to be facing, or if the patients were even going to be able to withstand the high altitudes," Errair said. "At that time, the planes had no pressurized cabins."

It was August of 1943 when Errair was sent to North Africa and Italy with the 807th Squadron. Haynes soon followed and spent three years in India, China and Burma with the 821st.

Their job was to evacuate the wounded and treat them in-flight as they flew to either the station hospitals or the general hospitals. Their unmarked C-47 and C-46 cargo planes also delivered gasoline, food and replacement troops.

"We had no radio contact when flying over the Himalayas," Haynes said. "Those pilots were flying by the seat of their pants. But we always had our minds on the patients."

A number of planes crashed and within three months of Errair's two-year term, many in her squadron were missing in action. Three nurses who had been sent as replacements were killed.

Courtesy photo

During bivouac, or temporary encampment, the Army Air Corps nurses lived without luxuries. They could expect to crawl through the most inaccessible places and tried to blend in with their surroundings.

but I ended up with a sprained ankle on that one."

Haynes received the Distinguished Flying Cross medal, one of the highest honors one can earn, for her role in the close call.

They say the memories of the positive experiences far overshadow the negatives, but one of the things Errair has had a hard time letting go of was when another nurse took her place on a flight. Unfortunately, the plane never made it to its destination, and her friend was killed.

"I always felt terrible about that," Errair said. "I still think about her all the time, especially at this time of year. It was such a tragedy."

Since their homecoming so many years ago, each of the two women raised six children, and each continued her career in nursing. But they will never forget the days when survival had a far different meaning.

"You do what you have to do in life," Errair reflected modestly. "At that time we didn't do anything special. It was our job."

"It was devastating. These were young girls in their 20s who had their whole lives ahead of them," Errair said. "I want my buddies remembered."

Both Errair and Haynes humbly say they were overseas doing what had to be done — it was their duty.

But their duty involved being shot at, on the ground or in the air.

While on the ground, finding a place to sleep or go to the bathroom took resourcefulness. While in the air the patients needs were always the main concern.

At one point, a cave in China was found to be a temporary home of choice for Haynes and her squadron.

"It was cool and turned out to be a safe place," Haynes said. "You'd be surprised how comfortable a cave can be."

Both Errair and Haynes had times they barely escaped from death.

Two flights almost turned deadly for Haynes. Once a flight fully loaded with wounded was shot at by a "Zero," a Japanese fighter plane. Haynes said they narrowly escaped.

"A bullet ripped off the buckle of my shoe and grazed my ankle," Haynes said. "I received a Purple Heart for that, but didn't really like telling people about that one."

Another shooting incident involved a loaded plane just taking off out of Burma. The Japanese were firing, and the pilot knew they would be hit if they continued to ascend.

"We crash landed because the landing gear wasn't going to be able to go back down, since it was in the middle of retracting," Haynes said. "The plane caught fire, but all we could think about was getting the wounded off the plane. We succeeded,

Return to Bowman Field Reunion

June 17 - 21, 1992

Louisville, Kentucky

World War II Flight Nurses Association, Inc.

This is to certify that the bearer owns a piece of the World War II Bowman Field Air Base. A chip off the old chapel. The Bowman Field Chapel 1942 - 1989.

Bowman Field Chapel 1942 - 1948
Bowman Field, Kentucky

St. Matthews Methodist Church 1948 - 1989
St. Matthews, Kentucky

Charles W. Arrington

082

Bowman Field

Troop carrier units organized and combat glider pilots trained at Bowman Field. Only School of Air Evacuation in the Air Force here, 1942-44. It taught surgeons, flight nurses, and medical technicians the procedures for the care of patients in the air. Some gave their lives caring for sick and wounded soldiers worldwide.

HISTORICAL MARKER

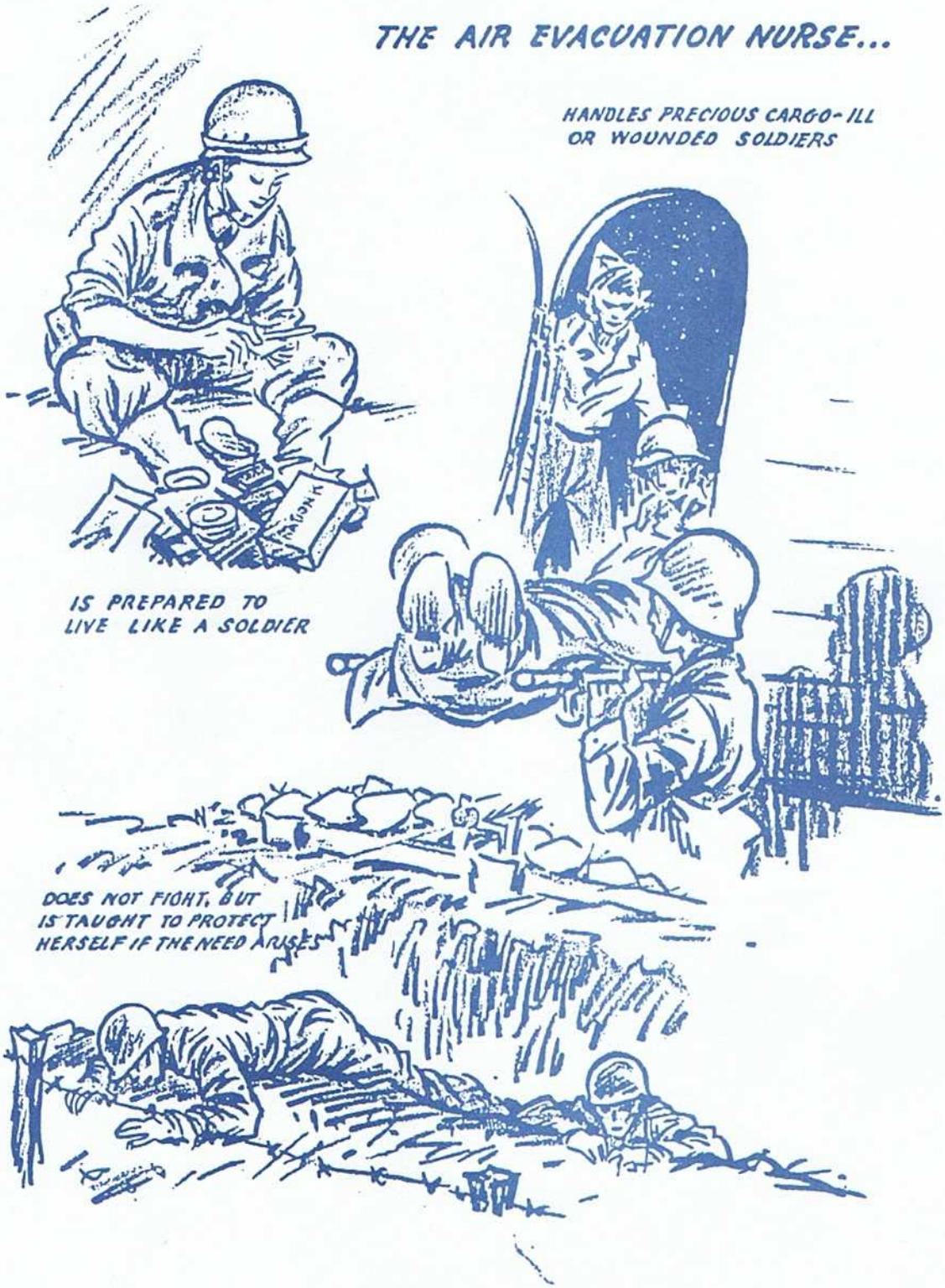
Bowman Field

The east side of Bowman Field airport was expanded in 1940 to become the Bowman Field Air Base. It was a training facility with 124 buildings used by the U. S. Army Air Force throughout World War II. One hangar survives. Bowman Field was first used to train bomber crews and later was assigned to the First Troop Carrier Command.

Comic strip artist Milton Caniff was best known for his two creations, "Terry and the Pirates" and "Steve Canyon." He was born on February 28, 1907 in Hillsboro, Ohio and died in New York on April 3, 1988. "Terry and the Pirates" ran from 1934 until 1973 while "Steve Canyon" enjoyed a shorter run. During World War II, he would often personalize one of his characters for Army Air Force Bases throughout the world as he did with Burma for Bowman Field in 1943.

Some information taken from Courier-Journal obituary, April 4, 1988.

AIR EVACUATION NURSE



BOWMAN FIELD TIMELINE

BOWMAN FIELD TIMELINE

1910 ..... First flight into Jefferson County, Ky.
1926 ..... First freight service in Jefferson County, Ky.
1926 ..... Passenger service began at Bowman Field.
1928 ..... First airmail service in Jefferson County, Ky.
1929 ..... Bowman Field Administration Building completed.
1929 ..... First radar used in Jefferson County, Ky.
1938 ..... Concrete runways replace grass at Bowman.

WWII AIR BASE

1940 ..... Construction begins on Bowman Field Air Base.
1941 ..... Bomber training begins.
1942 ..... First Troop Carrier Command assigned to base. Bomber training ends.
1942 ..... Air Evacuation training begins.
1943 ..... School of Air Evacuation officially designated by Army Air Force.
1943 ..... Glider pilot training begins.
1943 ..... Bowman Field expanded.
1944 ..... Glider pilot training ends.
1944 ..... School of Air Evacuation reassigned to Texas.
1944 ..... First Troop Carrier Command leaves.
1944 ..... Base becomes convalescent hospital.

1947 ..... Commercial airlines move from Bowman to Standiford Field.
1947 ..... Bowman Field begins mission as general aviation airport.

BOWMAN FIELD AIR BASE

WORLD WAR II BOWMAN FIELD AIR BASE

Construction on the east side of Bowman Field Air Base began in 1940 and, eventually, 124 buildings were completed including one large hangar. The base was originally developed to train bomber aircraft crews and 1941 saw a number of these outfits, including the 16th Bombardment Wing, at the field. In 1942, it was decided to assign the Bowman Field Air Base to the First Troop Carrier Command for troop carrier training using transport aircraft. This continued until the end of 1944. Among troop carrier units using Bowman were the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing and the 1st and 4th Combat Cargo Groups.

Training for combat glider pilots was added to the base in 1943. In time, large WACO CG-4A gliders—used to swiftly deliver troops and cargo into battle, became a familiar sight over Louisville. One glider instructor pilot assigned to Bowman from time to time, Major Mike Murphy, later landed the first combat glider at Normandy in June 1944 during the D-Day invasion of Europe. Murphy was a noted barnstormer and stunt pilot before the war. Of interest, actor Jackie Coogan took glider pilot training at Bowman and later served on active duty in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

Most unique to the Bowman Field Air Base was the assignment of the School of Air Evacuation in 1942. This was the only such school in the entire Air Force until its move to another location in October 1944. The school graduated an air evacuation squadron every six to eight weeks and taught necessary skills for the air evacuation of sick and wounded troops from the front lines. Bowman-trained flight surgeons, flight nurses, and medical technicians served in every major combat zone during the war. Some gave their lives in the line of duty and, today, Gardiner General Hospital in Chicago is named for the first Bowman-trained flight nurse, Lt. Ruth M. Gardiner, killed in action.

In late 1944, the Bowman Field Air Base was converted into a convalescence facility for troops returning home from combat. It continued this role for a number of years after the war.

AIR EVACUATION SCHOOL

SCHOOL OF AIR EVACUATION

From combat experience in 1942, the U.S. Army Air Force decided to establish a training facility to teach needed skills to air evacuate sick and wounded soldiers from the front lines. Bowman Field was selected as the location and the 38th Air Ambulance Battalion was established at the field in September 1942.

Expansion came the next month with a new designation, 349th Air Evacuation Group. With a dedicated staff, the 349th was tasked to train flight surgeons, flight nurses, and medical technicians for air evacuation duty. Because of the desperate need for qualified personnel in the combat zones, training was often cut short and graduation ceremonies eliminated.

The first formal graduation finally came in February 1943. At this time, the staff was increased in number and the curriculum improved. Classes lasted from six to eight weeks and, upon completion of training, were organized into Medical Air Evacuation Squadrons for duty worldwide.

On June 25, 1943, the name School of Air Evacuation was officially recognized by the Army Air Force. The school continued at Bowman Field until October 1944 when it was transferred to Randolph Field, San Antonio, Texas. School of Air Evacuation graduates were trained to treat patients in the front lines of combat and to care for them while being evacuated by air to hospitals in safe areas. The European Theater of Operation set a record of 4707 patients being air evacuated in one day.

OF SPECIAL NOTE, the Bowman Field School of Air Evacuation was the only such school in the entire U.S. Army Air Force during the period 1942-1944.

IN APPRECIATION

A special thanks to:

World War II Flight Nurses Association
803rd Medical Air Evacuation Squadron
806th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron
821st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron
67th/567th AAF Bowman Field Band
436th Troop Carrier Group
79th Troop Carrier Squadron

for underwriting the cost
of the historical marker at Bowman Field.

PROGRAM

Dedication of Historical Marker
Commemorating the World War II Bowman Field Air Base

Friday, June 19, 1992
11:00 a.m.

Music	Les Brown's Spotlight Orchestra On Tape
Welcome	Robert S. Michael General Manager Regional Airport Authority
Presentation of Colors & National Anthem	
Introduction of Guest Speaker	Charles Arrington
Guest Speaker	Col. Jack R. Walker, USAF Chair, Dept. of Nursing USAF School of Aerospace Medicine Brooks AFB, Texas
Unveiling	Reunion Leaders & Special Guests
Adjourn	Glenn Miller Orchestra on Tape

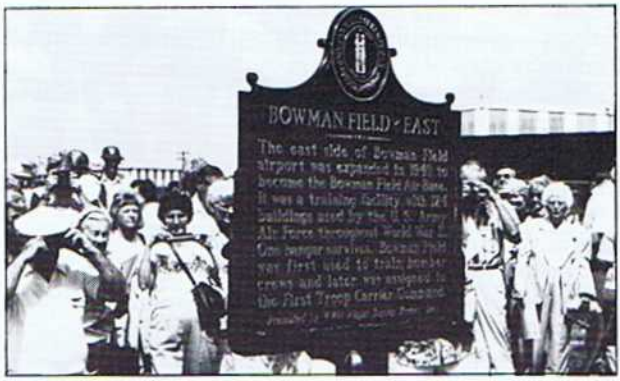
Historical Marker at Bowman Field

Nearly 300 people gathered at the corner of Cannons Lane and Sidney Park Drive to witness the Regional Airport Authority dedicate a Kentucky State Highway Marker at Bowman Field June 19. The historical marker commemorates the School of Air Evacuation at Bowman Field Air Base during World War II.

Construction on Bowman Field Air Base began in 1940 and the base was training bomber crews in 1941. In 1942, troop carrier training began using transport aircraft. Training for combat glider pilots was added in 1943. In late 1944, the Bowman Field Air Base was converted into a convalescence facility which it remained for several years after the war.

The historical marker dedication was in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Bowman Field School of Air Evacuation. This was the only such school in the Air Force from 1942-44. Bowman-trained flight surgeons, flight nurses, and medical technicians served in every major combat zone during the war.

Attending the ceremony were 300 World War II veterans who trained at Bowman Field. The veterans visited Louisville for the "Return to Bowman Field" Reunion and were responsible for the funding for the historical marker. Those members included the World War II Flight Nurses Association, 803rd Medical Air Evacuation Squadron, 806th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron, 821st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron, 67th/567th Army Air Force Band, 436th Troop Carrier Group, and the 79th Troop Carrier Squadron.



Above: Veterans photograph and admire the historical marker just after its unveiling. Top right: Col. Jack R. Walker, USAF Chairman Department of Nursing, addresses the crowd of nearly 300. Bottom right: The marker inscription honors Bowman Field.

Bowman Field served as Louisville's commercial airport until 1947 when it began its mission as a general aviation airport. It remains as one of the busiest airports in the region with 160,000 operations annually.

In Feb-'43 when we graduated from air crew. There were no wings & N's I called my sister in Chicago (after obtaining permission) to have her buy every metal N from every jeweler possible. She sent them to me & we took them to jewelers to have them attached. This is why the variety + colors of N's

Phyllis Wiesner Chaura
1st grad. class Feb-'43

DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER--LT. PHYLLIS M. WIESNER
349 SQUADRON A.E.G., BOWMAN FIELD, LOUISVILLE, KY.
At her Commencement and to all members of the
FLYING NURSES

With reverence, we honor you,
The flying nurses corps
As you soar on wings to the magic realm
Of sacrifice in war.
With interest keen and bated breath
We watch this venture new
Allotted to you--qualified--of whom
There are but few.
Who leave your base of quiet
Far removed from battle front
To fly thru hell and carnage
Your casualties to hunt.
From the shadow of the reaper
To retrieve the wounded cases,
Tuck them in the plane--to nurse them
And fly to saftey bases.
Midst sweat and blood and cannon's roar
And war's terrific din,
With nerves of steel and hearts of gold
Is where you enter in.
To stem the dread infections--transfuse
If needs must be,
To calm the nerves and rest the soul
And save the casualty.
Your mission may be deserts
Or tropic jungles we are told,
Or may be in the Artic to brave
The bitter cold.
In any clime, tho dark the day,
As your planes land one by one
To the wounded men who need your care
You will each be rays of sun.
A hundred years have passed since eighteen
Hundred twenty-one.
Nursing instituted then--has greater
Valor won.
"Angel of Mercy" she was named--
Miss Florence Nightingale.
Her dream came true--her proteges
Have wings in all detail.
As your allegiance oath is carried out
In the duties you perform,
In song and story, may they sing your glory
With respect to your uniform.
Each night as old Sol goes to rest
With his head on a pillow of fleece,
As we pray for the boys and girls at war,
Let us fervently pray for peace.

J. F. WIESNER
February, 1943.

TO PHYLLIS WIESNER FROM
HER DAD FEB. '43

Dear Phyllis,

Congratulations on the event of obtaining Wings. May they fly you through showers of happiness, followed by long years of sunny skies and fair weather.

You are the first one in our family to become a "Cinderella" in the eyes of your admirers.

First the first whimper in the maternity ward to our final epitaph, all of us live two lives. One is our life of "reality" and the other is our life of dreams. We do one thing and dream of things we would like to do. You seem to be made of the kind of stuff that can "Take it" with the ability to accomplish some of your dreams and convert them into reality.

Since you have chosen the air I have read most every thing that I could read, relative to the subject, and the consensus of opinion of the writers seem to say that your new vocation surely is an escape of boredom, routine and monotony and should give you a perpetual parade of fine moments, and endless pageant of events and a panorama of picturesque scenery.

Clouds, lakes, rivers, oceans, hills, mountains, forest, outlines of cities with landmarks and an ever changing "Alice in Wonderland" effect in the strange magics of altitude and poetic mysteries of flight.

Flying is a very special type of living and the aesthetics of the field is limitless. It creates a world apart, replete with its own beauties, charisma, excitements and enthusiasms. The most fascinating, intoxicating, satisfactory occupation, "out of doors".

You soar and glide and skim and swoop, like the most graceful and agile bird, and silently you laugh with the sense of freedom, power and safety of it all.

Bless you for the advancement in your desires and may you enjoy some of the picture I have tried to paint with words.

Be a good stewardess,

Love,
Dad.

p.s.
Will expect you to keep a diary and write some day a "Saga of the Skies"?

"a letter for your scrap book"

VENUS-OF-THE-AIR--AMERICAN AIRLINE STEWARDESS

Joseph F. Wiesner
Father of Phyllis Wiesner 1941

Hail to you-- Stewardess sweet and fair
Exclusively chosen by American Air
Trained nurse is she and naturally
Radiates pleasing personality.

Staunch and true--so full of zest
With knowledge of womanhood in her breast
Enables her with mercy mild
To care for the aged or for child.

Hail to those who held interview
Who from the hundreds chose the few
Young--mobile and untouched by strife
Not set nor hardened in the oven of life.

Hail to your instructors last
Including both present and the past
Who took you as clay in the potter's hand
Molding useful vessels to sail o'er land.

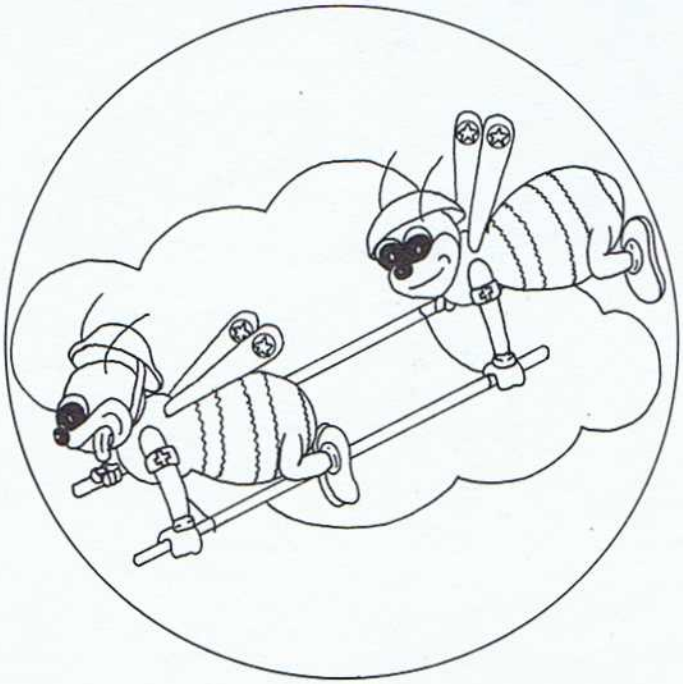
Valuable to all our human kind
By gentle skill of the teacher's mind
With care and kindness and love and art
As employed while shaping you for your part.

Skimming air and clouds o'er land and sea
You girls have chosen your destiny
Gentle and kind to your charges be
And hardened to all catastrophe.

Queen of the Flagship--Angel on high
Wholesome, comely and lithe, that why,
Blessed both with youth and beauty rare
They call you "The Venus of the Air".

WORLD WAR II FLIGHT NURSES
ASSOCIATION, INC.

RETURN TO BOWMAN FIELD



LOUISVILLE KENTUCKY
JUNE 1992


COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
UNITED WE STAND
DIVIDED WE FALL
BOWMAN FIELD - EAST
The east side of Bowman Field airport was expanded in 1940 to become the Bowman Field Air Base. It was a training facility with 124 buildings used by the U. S. Army Air Force throughout World War II. One hangar survives. Bowman Field was first used to train bomber crews and later was assigned to the First Troop Carrier Command.
Presented by WWII Flight Nurses Assoc., Inc.
1992
KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

THE AIR SURGEON'S LETTER

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY AIR FORCES
WASHINGTON

1 February 1945

Dear Fellow Officers:

From the beginning of mass air evacuation of casualties in the 1942 counteroffensives in the South and Southwest Pacific areas to the end of 1944, an estimated total of more than 700,000 sick and wounded patients of the American and Allied forces were transported by the Army Air Forces. Reflecting the growing acceptance of air evacuation as the method of choice for the movement of casualties, more than 525,000, or 75 per cent, were transported in 1944. The trend during the 2 years ending in September, 1944, may be seen from the chart on page 47. Of the 426,000 patients evacuated by air in that period, 43 per cent were transported in the last 4 months, reflecting the invasion of France and the campaign in the Central Pacific.

The vast majority of the half-million patients were evacuated from forward to rear areas in theaters of operations where Troop Carrier aircraft were often the only practical means for the safe and rapid evacuation of casualties on a mass scale. The number of patients evacuated by Air Transport aircraft from theaters of operations into the United States has grown about 1,000 per cent from 1943 to 1944, and the same is true of air evacuation from Ports of Debarkation to Army hospitals in the interior. Although the ATC brought fewer than 500 casualties home from overseas in January, 1944, the monthly total grew to more than 5,000 by September. Evacuation within the United States has grown proportionately.

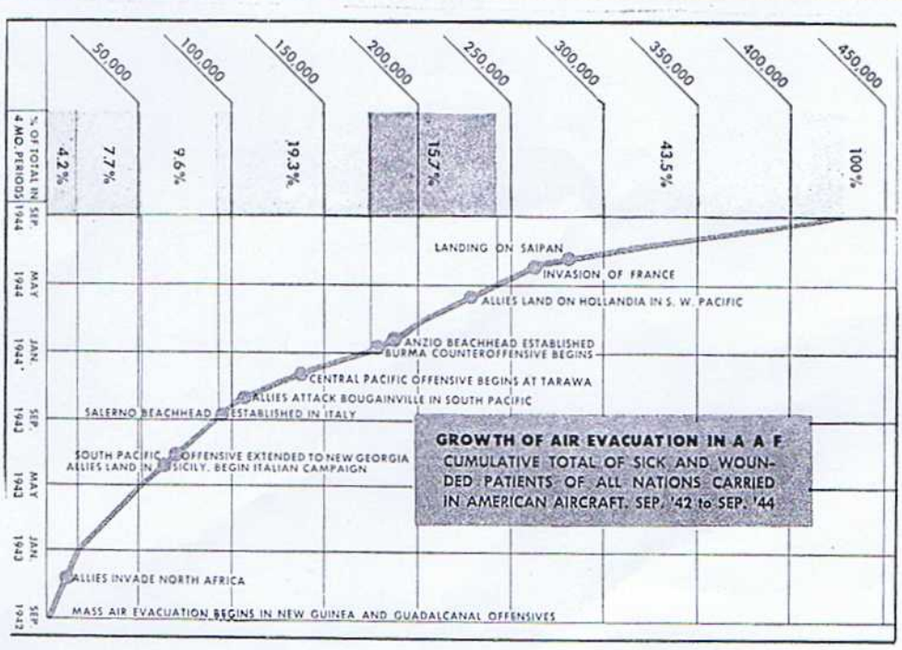
Although the efforts of the AAF Medical Service, in keeping with our team concept, are directed mainly to the service of the AAF, the mission of air evacuation is an outstanding exception. We evacuate all AAF personnel who require it, but the ground forces of the United States and of Great Britain are the principal beneficiaries. A 6 months' study in 1944 showed that 53 per cent of air evacuees were from the United States AGF, 30 per cent were from Britain and other Allied countries, 9 per cent from the AAF, and 6 per cent from the Navy and Marines.

Much of the credit for the success of air evacuation must go to the Flight Nurse and to the Technician Third Grade who assists her in the medical attendance of patients during flight. The Flight Nurse's professional training is, in a considerable measure, responsible for the extremely low death rate of 7 per 100,000 patient trips in flight, despite the large number of critically wounded cases evacuated from Normandy, Burma, Italy, and the Central Pacific. Many seriously wounded soldiers, while still under surgical anesthesia, were evacuated by air from the Anzio beachhead in Italy, but, thanks to expert nursing care, there were no deaths or ill effects in flight. Of the first 50,000 patients evacuated from Normandy, where critical cases were given priority, the death rate during flight was only 6 per 100,000. Only 4 per 1,000 died after arrival at a general hospital. I have reason to doubt that any other method of casualty evacuation can equal this splendid record.

Sincerely,

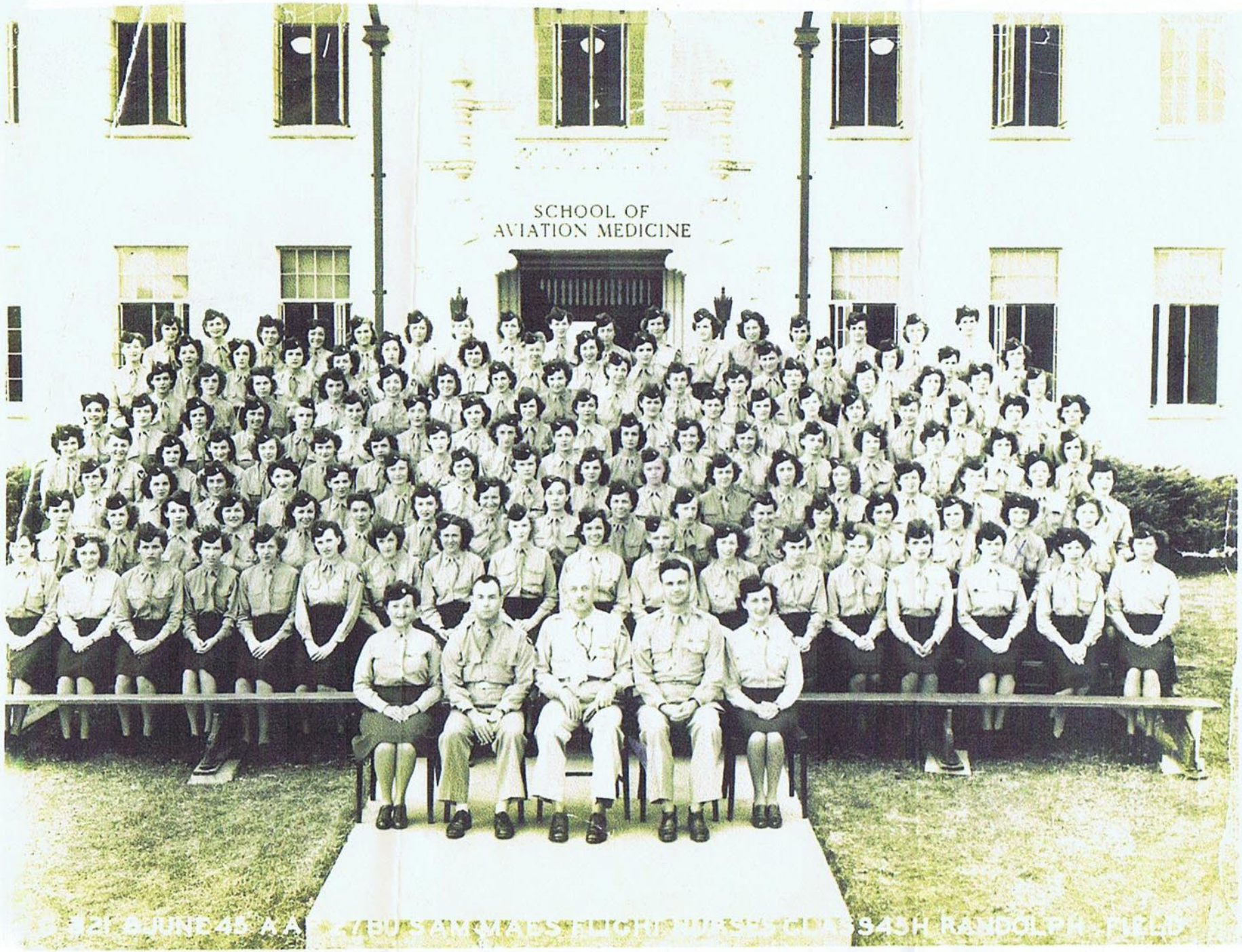
David N. W. Grant

DAVID N. W. GRANT
Major General, USA
The Air Surgeon



GROWTH OF AIR EVACUATION IN A A F
CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF SICK AND WOUNDED PATIENTS OF ALL NATIONS CARRIED IN AMERICAN AIRCRAFT. SEP. '42 to SEP. '44


A.A.F. SCHOOL
Air Evacuation


SCHOOL OF
AVIATION MEDICINE