

ELSIE OTT MANDOT

Elsie Ott Mandot, called St. James, Long Island, NY home back in 1943. Graduated from Smithtown High School in 1933. Graduated from Lenox Hill Hosp. NYC as a registered nurse. Enlisted in the ANC Sept. 1941 and was stationed at New Orleans. Feb. 1942 left for India where she was stationed with the 1st TCC. Was selected to make a 10,000 mi. evac trip from India to Walter Reed Hosp. at Washington, DC, traveling with five seriously ill men with only the aid of a male medic. This was her first plane ride. While on two weeks leave at home following the trip, she learned of the air evac program at Bowman Field, Ky., applied and was accepted. She was awarded the Air Medal for her spectacular feat, the first woman to receive this award. Following her course in air evac, she returned to Chabua, India with the 803rd MAES.



Receiving 1st Air Medal ever awarded a female — Bowman Fld., Ky. 1943



Friend

W Elsie OTT Mandot phoned - - -

I was at Bowman Field June 1943
when she received the 1st FI Nurse
to receive an Air Medal.

She ferried patients from India
to Walter Reed - in about 10 days.

She told me she had a movie
film of her trips. She sent me
the movie film. I couldn't see
in so I took it to Memorial Moments
in Leesburg. They put it on DVD.
I picked it up last week. Still have
not seen the film (No DVD player)

Tonight 12-15-06 7 PM her friend in
Calif. phoned to say Elsie died
Today.

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An amazing story of military skill evolves from the historical making events of World War II. During the early 1940's, Army Air Force nurses were demonstrating that their vitally needed skills were providing a life saving service to the nation. The contributions of one nurse, Second Lieutenant Elsie S. Ott unfolds in an amazing rendition of her role in the Air Evacuations of military casualties. Ott was born on November 5, 1913 and called St. James, Long Island, New York her home. She graduated from Smithtown High School in 1933. Following her high school graduation she fulfilled her desire for a career in professional nursing and entered Lenox Hill Hospital School of Nursing in New York. She graduated in 1936. Her first nursing position was at Kings Park Hospital, Long Island, New York. Following this experience she traveled to Florida where she obtained additional nursing experience at St. Francis Hospital, Miami Beach, Florida. Following these graduate nursing experiences, Ott decided on a military career. She applied for admission to the Army Air Force Nurse Corps and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant on September 13, 1941. At that time she gave her nearest relative as her mother, Mrs. Anna Ott. She was twenty-nine years old, weighed one hundred and twenty pounds and was five feet three inches tall.

Her first military assignment as an Army ward nurse took her to Barksdale Army Air Field Station Hospital in Louisiana. After a five month period she was reassigned to the 159th Station Hospital at Fort Storey, Virginia. Following these basic Army Nurse Corps experiences she was sent overseas and reassigned to the 159th Station Hospital located in the desert of Karachi, India.

As World War II progressed in the early 1940's on all fronts, evacuation of the

sick and wounded was of prime concern to medical officials. Recognizing the necessity of moving troops rapidly from the front to the Zone of Interior was considered expedient in order to save lives. As aerial flight became a feasible method of transportation, the War Department began to seriously consider moving patients rapidly by air. The Army Air Force was enthusiastic about organizing a battalion of so called "Air Ambulances". Patients could thus by-pass terrain obstacles, thus increasing speed and efficiency. Regional hospitals were established behind the lines of fire so as to evacuate casualties rapidly where time was a factor in saving lives. The need arose for fast transfer to these hospitals which were prepared for multiple trauma cases. Initially, the Aeromedical Evacuation proposal was not viewed as feasible or economical. There was minimal support for trained medical personnel or flight nurses. The Surgeon General of the Army generally opposed the concept of using female flight nurses while the Air Surgeon supported the use of flight nurses considering them the most highly trained medical personnel urgently needed to care for the seriously wounded military personnel. Although the Air Transport Command was far from ready to undertake any ambitious program of intercontinental air evacuation plans were surreptitiously being developed. Army medical authorities decided to test the intercontinental application of aeromedical evacuation and planned a 11,000 mile flight from Karachi, India to Washington, D.C.

After plans were approved for this long distance flight, Ott was selected to make this historic experimental flight. With little more than eight months military experience and no preparation in the transport of patients by air plus no flying experience, Ott was given twenty-four hours to prepare for the trip. An officer informed Ott that she would

leave the next morning immediately after breakfast. She was told she would be responsible for five casualties, only one of whom she had cared for before. Ott immediately set about to gather medical supplies for the trip. She collected a few sodium amytal capsules, aspirin tablets, PAC capsules, one bedpan and one urinal. The Station Hospital contributed blankets, sheets, pillow cases, two mattresses and two Army cots. It is interesting to note that during preparation for take-off no flight surgeon was consulted as to the selection of the patients, type of medical supplies or instruction regarding medical care while in flight. Ott, however, was aware that this was a preliminary test to evaluate the feasibility of Air Evacuation from India to the United States.

On the morning of 17 January 1943 Ott and her five patients boarded a DC-3 type transport which departed Karachi, India at 7:00 in the morning. As the aircraft headed south, the flight plan included stops at Salala and Aden, Saudi Arabia; Khartoum and El Fasher, Egyptian Sudan; Ascension Islands; Natal and Belem, Brazil; Borinquen, Puerto Rico and Morrison Army Air Field, Florida. The date of arrival at Bolling Army Air Field, Washington, D.C. was planned for 23 January 1943,

Once in the air Ott found herself faced with a complexity of medical and nursing challenges, of her five patients, two were seriously ill litter patients. One had a diagnosis of chronic poliomyelitis with paralysis of the lower extremities as well as the left arm. Another had multiple fractures of the vertebrae, ribs and scapula with lower extremity paralysis and multiple deeply ulcerated bedsores. Army cots were strapped to the floor of the aircraft to accommodate these two paralyzed patients. The other three ambulatory patients had respective diagnosis of early active tuberculosis, glaucoma and manic-

depressive psychosis considered non-violent for the trip, A Staff Sergeant who had been a recent patient with chronic arthritis was assigned as a medical attendant. This young relatively inexperienced Army nurse provided continuous nursing care for her patients. This included baths, feeding the litter patients, changing dressings and administration of medications. She was also responsible for maintaining security of luggage between overnite stops. Ott arranged for all her patients needs and secured overnite accommodations for them from enroute medical facilities, none of which had been alerted to care for these transient patients.

The first overnite stop was made in Aden, Saudi Arabia. The patients were removed from the aircraft and taken to a British Hospital. Ott stayed with the two litter patients in the same room overnite to provide the necessary nursing care. The Staff Sergeant stayed with the other three patients. Generally, facilities were poor and the food was not particularly appetizing. Overnite meals cost \$2.00 per person. When the patients were charged for their meals at stopovers, Ott paid from her own funds for those who had no money of their own.

On arrival at El Fasher, the Egyptian Sudan, the patients were removed to the Sudanese Hospital. The medical personnel were unusually accommodating and assisted her in changing dressings, bathing the patients, irrigating wounds and replacing indwelling urinary catheters. Lunch at this stop consisted of dry sandwiches and oranges. Flying continued day and all night and finally they arrived at Ascension Island. Breakfast consisted of greasy french toast and bacon. The flight from Ascension Island to Natal, Brazil was made at an altitude of approximately 10,000 feet. Ott who was not accustomed

to flying became terribly airsick and had to cope with her own personal health concerns. Flying for days at high altitudes took its toll on this young Army nurse. On the stopover at Natal, Brazil she appeared to be so exhausted that a flight surgeon volunteered to care for the patients overnight. Ott insisted she be allowed to continue the trip. Finally the flight surgeon stated that flying fatigue had taken over and demanded that she rest overnight.

Departure from Natal, Brazil was at 7:00 P.M. on January 22, 1943. The aircraft landed at Belem, Brazil where the hospital facilities were poor as was the food. It was impossible to take a stretcher through the doors of the hospital without tilting the stretcher as the doors to the hospital rooms were too narrow, therefore the patients were bathed and cared for in the hallway of the hospital. They left Belem, Brazil at 2:35 A.M. January 23rd and arrived at Borinquen, Puerto Rico at 8:00 A.M. It was cool so the flight surgeon who met the plane suggested they leave the patients in the plane. The first hot breakfast since leaving Karachi, India was served on board and consisted of eggs, ham, toast and coffee. Warm water was provided for bathing the patients face and hands. At various stops it was necessary for Ott to unload the mattresses, pillows, sheets etc. from the aircraft as no assistance was available. Personnel not expecting them were not supportive and were not concerned with the welfare of the patients. There was little interest in the fact that these patients were casualties who were attempting to return to the Zone of Interior after months on the front. Final arrival was at Bolling Army Air Field, Washington, D.C, at 8:00 in the evening on January 23, 1943. Medical attendants met the aircraft and transferred the patients by ambulance to Walter Reed Army Hospital.

Although personally exhausted upon arriving at Bolling Army Air Field, Ott was

highly enthusiastic about the possibilities of organized air evacuation of patients. By using initiative, common sense, compassion and astute nursing judgment, Ott prevailed against all obstacles. Little did Ott realize that the success or failure of her trip would influence the future of air evacuation. This intercontinental movement of seriously ill military personnel confirmed the practicability of air evacuation and enhanced the ability to pursue long range evacuation. It also highlighted the value of flight nurses on aircraft. Although the flight had been poorly planned, its success was highly noted. Commands were ordered to provide the best care available and a high priority was allocated to all patients being evacuated.

In recognition of her meritorious achievement, Lt. Ott received the first AIR MEDAL ever awarded to a woman in the history of the United States Army. The AIR MEDAL ordered by President Roosevelt in 1942 was specifically for heroism and meritorious service in the air. The award ceremony for Lt. Ott took place at Bowman Army Air Field, Kentucky on 26 March 1943. At the ceremony attended by members of the Troop Carrier Command, military commanders and supporters, Brigadier General Fred W. Borum pinned the Medal on Lt. Orr's uniform. Numerous congratulations were heard as the military command were jubilant regarding the success of this historic trip. Lt. Ott was granted a two week furlough following the trip.

In the early 1940's opposition continued in regard to placing nurses on "Air Ambulances." however, General Davis N. Grant took a personal interest in promoting the status of nurses. On 7 October 1943, the first official organization whose mission was the training of flight nurses was activated at Bowman Army Air Field, Kentucky.

The program included a four week course in flight nursing. Ott learned of the course while on leave, applied for admission to the Flight Nurse Course and was accepted. She asked for flight training so she could continue to fly near combat areas and care for evacuees. The course was most strenuous and included didactic instruction in air evacuation nursing, mental hygiene in relation to flying, aeromedical physiology, military indoctrination, ditching procedures and a one day bivouac. The objective of this course was to prepare nurses for risky assignments, later justified by reduced deaths seen among the military sick and wounded. On 18 February 1943, the first group of flight nurses had the distinction of graduating from the first School of Air Evacuation in the world. Ott as a graduate of the program was now a fully prepared Air Evacuation Nurse.

Although the Army Air Force Medical Service had well trained air evacuation personnel, the need for appropriate Air Ambulances remained. Those aircraft utilized to transport patients were slightly modified to provide safety for patients as well as flight personnel. Problems arose however, relative to the changing barometric pressure, oxygen supply problems, decreased humidity, excessive noise level, turbulence and vibration from the aircraft engines. Research efforts brought about a new aircraft designed specifically for aeromedical evacuation missions. The "Nightingale" was the name chosen for this new aircraft. The C-9 as it was known was named for Florence Nightingale whose kindness and compassion during the Crimean War influenced the advancement of military nursing. Twenty-five years after her famous trip, Ott now Mrs. Elsie Mandot was selected to christen the aircraft. In August of 1965 the first C-9 arrived at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. At the christening ceremony, Mrs. Mandot poured water from the

Sea of Galilee on the nose of the first "Nightingale." The water was used to accentuate the historical significance of humanitarian and compassionate care.

Air Evacuation was a successful endeavor due to the pioneer flight of Second Lieutenant Elsie S. Ott and the skill of many competent flight nurses that followed. Many gave their lives in the performance of their military duty.

Lt. Ott served as a flight nurse for years after her graduation from flight school. She returned to India in October 1944 as a member of the 803rd Military Air Evacuation Squadron. Later she was promoted to Captain and flew out of Stockton, California to various overseas bases. Her date of discharge from the Army Air Force was May 1946. In later years she married Larry Mandot and settled down in her new role as an American housewife. She and her husband settled in Wheaton, Illinois.

We remember Elsie Ott as a remarkable and courageous trailblazer. Her acts of bravery, compassion and unflagging devotion to duty provides future generations with a unique and outstanding role model.