

8-17-09 \$50.00

WWII FNA NEWSLETTER

WAR II FLIGHT NURSE ASSOCIATION

Newsletter of August, 2009

RESPONSE SHEET—PLEASE FILL IN AND RETURN

EVERYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY OR COMMENT ON....

ANYTHING AT ALL....I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

To date 8/17/09 Your Squad # 804th

First, middle, maiden, last name Helen Louise Geisler Charleston

HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED FROM LAST NEWSLETTER yes no

New address here: _____

Telephone number changed yes NO

New telephone number is _____

BIRTHDAY LIST.....birth dates: YOURS IS 7/21/17 or you already sent it.

Please write back..... I WOULD LIKE TO SAY.....

I was in the army from Oct 1941 to Oct 1945, the full time of WW2. I'm writing a book for my time of an army nurse. It is about finished. I appreciated Teddy Anderson's comments on the beginning of the 804th as my time in the 804th started in June 1944 and ended Oct 7, 1945. I will send you a copy when I get it in print.

Helen H. Charleston

I received the flag scarf - Thanks a lot. I'm enclosing a check for \$50.00 to help with expenses as I enjoy use back also your letters.



MAIL TO:
DOROTHY ERRAIR
C/O Melinda Errair
4020 Rich Drive
Waterford, MI 48329





REMEMBERING THE
WINGED ANGELS OF WAR

By

Helen Charlestone, R.N.

CHAPTER ONE

I resigned my position at Maple Knoll on September 15, 1941, and enlisted in the Army on October 7, 1941, at Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky. I was on orientation there until October 16th when I was sent to Daniel Field, Augusta, Georgia, as O.R. Supervisor because of my surgical background in the delivery room at Maple Knoll.

I had 4-6 male surgical technicians at all times. I was the only nurse, so I was on call every night, except for an occasional weekend off. I could go anywhere on the base (theater or an occasional dance) by leaving my phone number so I could be reached if needed.

Daniel Field Air Base was a bomber training field. All Air Force was under the Army until it was established as AF in 1947. Here the pilots of the United States Air Corps were trained in the technique and operations of our latest bombers. The school was new and fast growing, turning out pilots in increasing large numbers.

Camp Gordon, also at Augusta, was a training center for United States Tank Divisions.

I was on call nearly every night since I was the only nurse in the O.R. there.

Our one outlet for exercise and entertainment was riding stables not far from the bases. We encountered Camp Gordon officers and enlisted men there.

I had 5-6 O.R. technicians (all male), some pre-med students before joining the Army. We did all kinds of surgical procedures, even an occasional brain procedure. We got a civilian surgeon from Augusta for those procedures not covered by military doctors.

On about October 15, 1942, Ray (S/Sgt) Charleston came to my O.R. for surgery on a deviated septum. He had a broken nose from a previous fight. I never did find out what he was fighting about.

I had a gown and mask on as I supervised my technicians—all Ray could see were my brown eyes. He said that's what he fell in love with.

After the surgical procure, he was being sent to the surgical convalescent ward for recuperation. I sent my boys to lunch and said I would take him to the ward and then go on to lunch also. When I asked him to get in the wheelchair, he said I should get in and he would push me. I had to pull rank to get him in the wheelchair.

All the way to the convalescent ward, he kept asking me to come see him. I, of course, said I would if I had the time, which I never did.

About the first of November, I discovered I needed some gauze bandages folded, some 2x2's, 4x4's and 4x8's. We had to cut and fold our own bandages then. So, I called the convalescent ward and asked the nurse there if she had three or four patients who were able to fold bandages. Ray said he was the first in line. They folded bandages for about four days. I talked to Ray several times while he was there. On Thursday, he asked me to meet him outside the gate and have dinner with him. That wasn't a problem for me, so I said yes.

I met him after work (had to get someone to take call for me), and we went to downtown Augusta to the Bon Aire Hotel to have dinner. We had just ordered steaks and a nice meal when Ray looked at me and asked me to marry him. In our talks, I had learned that he was a newspaper man who joined the Army in December 1941 right after Pearl Harbor. He was a great talker and had told me about his life up to meeting me. Then out of the blue, he asked me to marry him. It knocked me off my feet. He convinced me that I was the only girl for him and that he would do anything to get me to say yes.

I was attracted to him from the start—more so than anyone I had ever met. I tried to tell him that he knew nothing about me and that he would be making a big mistake. I told him I would consider his proposal which he

took for a "yes." I thought he meant an engagement ring and waiting some time before marriage. I underestimated what he meant; and before I knew what was happening, he had gotten a Judge (North Augusta, SC) to give him a license. On the afternoon on Sunday, November 8th at 1:00 p.m., we were married. So, I was married at the Judge's house before I knew what was happening. It was like a fairy tale.

He wanted me to keep it a secret, but I said I wanted everyone to know we were married. On Monday, November 9th, when he told his supervisor, they told him he would be shipped out to overseas. He got a three-day leave of absence and went to St. Augustine to tell his mother. He also had a roll of film taken at the wedding that he wanted the Times Union in Jacksonville to develop for him. I didn't know about the film until years later.

When he came back from his three-day leave on Thursday (saw me Thursday night), he was sent to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on Friday the 14th.

It took longer to find a replacement for me. They found one by the 24th, so I was shipped to Jackson, Mississippi, on that date.

On December 8th, I asked for seven days' leave of absence, and I caught a bus for Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Ray got some time off, and we had five days together at a motel there. I guess one would call it a honeymoon.

I was given my first full dress uniform at Jackson, Mississippi, and we had daily drills. I met Margaret Piscenti there, and we got along great. Sometime in February or March, Margaret and I had a weekend off, so we caught a bus to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to spend some time with my brother, Ray, who was in the infantry there.

We ate in the enlisted men's mess hall and stayed the night in the nurses' quarters. We were treated royally by the enlisted men there.

I was stationed at Jackson, Mississippi, until May 1943.

An opening for an O.R. Supervisor came from Malden, Missouri, so I was transferred to Malden, Missouri.

On June 7, 1943, I was on leave for eleven days. My mother had married my father's younger brother on February 8, 1943, and my \$50 a month to my mother ended at that time. When I returned to Malden, Missouri, I had a tumor on my left breast removed. It was about the size of a golf ball. The analysis came back benign.

About June 5, I received word from home that my stepfather, Bill, had died of viral pneumonia at my mother's house, so I caught a bus for home. Bill was at the funeral home, and the house had been cleaned.

When I returned to Malden after a five-day leave, I came down with viral pneumonia on July 10th. They treated it with sulfa back then. After two days of treatment, I broke out with huge hives from my head to my feet. They put me in an ambulance alone and sent me to Kennedy General in Memphis, Tennessee, on July 22, 1943.

I don't remember much of my 2-3 weeks' stay there, but I gradually got better. My mother and sister, Edith, came to see me, but I don't remember much of their visit.

I returned to Malden, Missouri, and my job of O.R. Supervisor the last of July 1943.

Sometime in October, a bulletin came out for R.N.'s to train for Flight Nurses at Bowman Field in Louisville, Kentucky. So, I applied and was accepted for a class starting the last of January.

On November 8, 1943, Ray wrote a beautiful letter for our first wedding anniversary. He didn't know at that time that I had applied for Flight Nurse training at Bowman Field, Kentucky. He did learn that my

name had been changed from Helen Geisler to Helen Geisler Charleston on October 25, 1943.

I had a fourteen-day leave on November 4, 1943, to November 18, 1943. Then I returned to Malden, Missouri, until January 22, 1944, when I reported to Bowman Field for Air Evac. School.

On December 13, 1943, Ray got the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). I didn't know it until I received a letter in January 1944, which read as follows:

We, the fellows of the 454th Aerial Engineers, wish to compliment you on the great achievement of your husband in winning the DFC. We are very proud of him for bringing honor to our outfit. Here's hoping for more and better deeds. Ray is a wonderful lad, and we thank you for the use of your hubby,

Sincerely yours,

Signed Aerial Engineers, Barracks 21, Somewhere in England

CHAPTER TWO

I reported January 22nd to Bowman Field for four weeks of rigorous training. We were outfitted for flying togs to wear as flying nurses. We still wore white uniforms in the hospitals.

We were instructed on bivouac in the fields where we sometimes would be staying overnight. Each flight nurse had one surgical technician to fly with her. I was fortunate to have a good sergeant named Temme on all of my flights. We got along great as we usually had 6-8 litter patients and 15-18 ambulatory on each flight. Half of the ambulatory were medical returning to the hospitals and then on to the states. We had some chaplains, doctors, etc., in that group. The fighting in the Pacific was producing many medical to be returned to the states.

The first graduates of Bowman were on February 18, 1943, of which the 804th was one with complete training. Several of the others were returned to Bowman for more instructions. A class graduated in eight weeks.

My class, the 818th, went to England, which consisted of 25 nurses—one chief nurse. We graduated on March 11, 1944.

My mother, who had never traveled anywhere by herself, got on a bus from Hamilton, Ohio, to Louisville, Kentucky. I met her at the bus station, and she stayed with me one night to attend the graduation. I had a single room with double bunk beds, and she slept on the lower bunk. I did not have a roommate.

Eleanor Roosevelt was our speaker at graduation, and she was great!

I left Bowman on March 14th for San Francisco Port of Embarkation, with ten days' delay en route. I arrived at San Francisco Port of Embarkation on April 1st.

On April 22nd, I went to Station Hospital at Fort Mason, California, Camp Stoneman.

On April 27th, I was relieved for unknown destinations. Four of the 818th were put aboard a troop carrier along with about fifteen Red Cross workers. I was one of the 818th since my husband was stationed in England. We were the only women on the 33-day trip to the staging area # in New Guinea. We arrived there May 20, 1944.

CHAPTER THREE

On June 23rd, we (4 flight nurses) were sent to APO 713, unit 1, Nadzab, New Guinea, to join the 804th. My flying orders were dated April 17, 1944.

My first flight out of Nadzab was on June 26th with Sgt. Temme. He was my only attendant on all of my flights. We got along great. It was an 8-hour flight with 2 landings.

On July 25th, we had a 5-hour flight to Biak. On the way there, the weather closed in on us, and we had to land at Hollandia. It was only about 5-10 miles to the front fighting lines. We stayed overnight. I was the only woman in the front camp and ate with the top brass.

I was put on a cot in a pup tent with an M.P. patrolling it. The M.P. knew that I had a 32 in a shoulder holster, so he would call to me from the opening, and I would have to answer him.

We would fly a 3- or 4-day stretch and then have 4 or 5 days off. We frequently stayed overnight and then picked up a load of patients on our way back to our quarters.

I had a 12-day leave to Sydney, Australia, on August 17th. Two of us would go together. We did a lot of sightseeing, attended some operas, some horse racing, and had permanents at a beauty parlor. I had my first male operator to work on my hair.

Recently, I learned the saga of the original 804th Squadron. They left New York in June 1943 and arrived in Brisbane, Australia, 30 days later. They joined a nurse corps outfit there and worked in the Station Hospital for three months.

They went to Port Moresby, New Guinea, in September 1943 and joined a station hospital there. When the first request to fly the wounded to Brisbane, Australia, was received, a flight nurse and her medical male attendant made the trip. At the second request, the Lt. Col. of the Nurse Corps sent one of her station hospital nurses to make the trip. She was airsick all the way there and back and couldn't take care of the patients. The flight nurses were given all the other trips, and they were made with no problems, so the flight nurses were allowed to wear their flying togs and wings and had no more trouble from the station hospital nurses.

The 803rd and 804th were the first squadrons to complete the training at Bowman Field. The 801st and 802nd were already overseas with very little training and were returned to the states to complete their training.

The barracks at Nadzab and Biak were constructed by the Army engineers. We had indoor plumbing and a nice day room. All the other places we occupied were outdoor showers and toilets. When we stayed overnight on many of our trips, we took what we could get.

The air-evac units (25 flight nurses) were attached to the 375th Troop Carrier Group. We would ride on cargo going to the front lines and then pick up patients on our way back to our base. The cargo planes flew at much higher altitudes than when we carried patients. We usually carried 7-8 litter patients and about 15-16 ambulatory patients, some surgical and many of them medical returning back to the states. We flight nurses carried a 32 in a shoulder holster to keep order on the trips and also for our protection when we stayed overnight in forward stops before picking up patients for return trips.

The 57th Carrier Squadron took part in the airborne paratroops' invasion on Nadzab, New Guinea, on September 5, 1943. After they secured the base and constructed a runway, they built nursing quarters and

moved the air-evac teams in. They had the best pilots, and we felt secure on all our take-offs and landings. On one occasion, I and my surgical technician made 18 take-offs and landings with patients from the front lines in an 8-hour, 20 min. day. On October 5th, the 804th moved to Biak. Biak is 45 miles long and 23 miles wide. Biak was seized by the Japanese in April 1942 and was retaken on May 27 – July 22, 1944.

On December 5th, I went on leave to Sydney, Australia, for ten days. It was very hot in Sydney.

On December 24th, I flew to Peleliu Island and stayed overnight there and then picked up a load of patients the next day and took them to Leyte. That was Christmas Day 1944.

Peleliu Island was the heart of Japanese in Palau during WWII. There are over 500 natural and manmade caves there during the Battle of Peleliu. Peleliu is eight miles long and about three miles wide. During the Battle, over 12,000 Americans and Japanese perished in a period of three months.

December 24, 1944, was my first flight there where I stayed overnight in a fox hole and then took a load of patients to Leyte on Christmas Day. I stayed in a foxhole Christmas night also and took patients to Leyte. More

than 2,200 tons of ammunitions resulted in one of the fiercest campaigns of the entire Pacific War.

By November 27, 1944, the Battle of Peleliu was over, and the last strong holds of the "Pocket" and "Bloody Nose Ridge" were secured.

Temme and I made many trips to Peleliu to pick up patients. They were taken to hospital tents in secure areas and then by air to the states or hospital ships for treatment.

While I was at Nadzab, Bob Hope and his entourage visited there. The women stayed in our quarters. I remember Judith Anderson had my bunk, and I moved in with another nurse.

Our move to Biak on October 5, 1944, was into quarters as good or a little better than Nadzab. We were on a ledge about 30-40 feet above a little inlet of the Pacific Ocean where we went swimming.

CHAPTER FOUR

We were at Biak from October 5, 1944, until February 2, 1945. Before the invasion was to get underway, General Douglas MacArthur needed a base of operation closer to the northern island than Leyte. Mindoro became a logical choice--just south of Luzon, and about half the size of the state of New Jersey. The island is covered by mountains, with a few narrow plains along its coast. Almost daily rains along its plains and along its coast, carried by clouds moving up from the south trapped by the high peaks, made it a breeding ground for malaria and other tropical diseases. Furthermore, Japanese defenses on the island were minimal.

The unsatisfactory conditions of airfields recently constructed at Leyte were deemed unreliable, so the potential of more airfield landing sites at Mindoro to support the Luzon operation appealed more to MacArthur. The town of San Jose was the spot chosen. On December 15th, the invasion of Mindoro began. Except for mopping up, the island was secure within 48 hours.

The 804th was moved there February 2, 1945. We were in Quonset huts with outdoor toilets and showers. We used mosquito netting on our bunk cots and had a constructed wooden day room.

I was mopping the floor of the day room one day when a scorpion hidden in the mop bit me on my left hand. My arm swelled up to twice its size. They packed my arm in ice for two days, and I had a sore arm for a few days.

The next week, three of us were chosen on the flight line for take-offs when the third nurse asked me if she could take off first because she had a date that night. I told her to go ahead as I didn't care as I was the only married nurse, and I didn't date. She and a load of patients, the crew and plane all flew into a mountain, and all were killed. That was the only casualty in the 804th. I was very lucky indeed!!!

The Chief Nurse always put me in charge if a group of our nurses went to a dance or other outing. We were the only women as we moved up with the carrier group we were attached to.

We left Mindoro on March 23rd for Clark Field.

CHAPTER FIVE

About five weeks after moving to Clark Field, I received a two-page letter from an older enlisted man in Ray's squadron telling me what a wonderful man my husband was, always for the little guy. He continued to say that Ray had a bad deal at Kessler Field where he had two operations on his knee--for which he got a purple heart in May 1944. He continued flying until October 1944 when he was sent back to the states with many of his squadron. He didn't like it when I was not in the states.

His left knee gave him a lot of pain when he was home on leave, and he was miserable.

He was sent to Kessler Field to have surgery on his knee the early part of 1945. After the second operation and he was recuperating, he was at the post exchange having some beer with some of the guys and telling everyone about his brown-eyed wife. An officer opened his mouth about Ray's wife running around like all the other women overseas when Ray Charleston hit him and knocked him down. They had to pull him off the officer. An enlisted man hitting an officer was a no-no. So, Ray Charleston was court marshaled. When the military board heard all the details--that we were separated 30 months, Ray was a returning veteran with 75 missions, had a

purple heart and just finished two operations on his left knee, they let him go and transferred him to Panama City.

The Board put in for my return to the states on June 14th from Clark Field, and I arrived in Jacksonville, Florida, on July 3rd, and I was given a 30-day leave for R&R.

Ray had been discharged the last of May and went back to the Times Union and was placed on the Sports Desk. I had written Ray to get reestablished at the TU and find us a place to live.

The letter I had received from Ray's older buddy from the 454th never gave me his name or what the bad deal at Kessler Field that Ray was involved in. I learned all that after I got back to the states.

Ray got us a 3-room apartment from one of his friends about July 6th. Soon after that I became pregnant with my first of four children.

When the war ended in August, 1945, they left me on leave until October 7, 1945, when I went to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and was placed on inactive duty. I was three months' pregnant at that time. They gave me the extra sixty-two days' leave at that time. That ended my military service from October 7, 1941, to October 7, 1945.

Oh, I want you to know that I got my engagement ring on our 14th wedding anniversary. Better late than never.

The Winged Angels

U.S. Army Air Force Flight nurses in WWII

It is now my privilege to lift this lamp of hope and faith and courage in my profession to heights now known by hers in her time (Florence Nightingale).

Together with the help of flight surgeons and surgical technicians, I can set the very skies ablaze with life and promise for the sick, injured and wounded who are my sacred charges— This I will do—I will not falter in war or in peace.

(From the Flight Nurses' Creed)

Memorial in the Power Gallery At the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

Dedicated 3 March 2010

(We had to wait a long time for this.)



Shirley, Charleston, Cottingham,
Lloyd Raymond, Bill Meister



JACKSONVILLE GUNNER FLIES WITH HEARST — W. Ray Charleston, former Times-Union State editor, was a member of the crew of a Marauder bomber which recently carried William Randolph Hearst Jr. over France on a bombing mission. The crew members include First Lieut. Thomas Shirley, Louisville, Ala., bombardier-navigator; First Lieut. Paul F. Cottingham, Greenville, S. C., pilot; S-Sgt. Lloyd A. Raymond, Salem, Mass., tail-gunner; S-Sgt. Charleston, fourth from left; Hearst, and S-Sgt. W. A. Meister, Fort Wayne, Indiana, radio-gunner.

Charleston Serves On Medium Bomber Aiding in Invasion

A former Jacksonville newspaperman who is now a Marauder engine-gunner recently had the privilege of flying over the heads of Allied troops in France with the son of the most prominent publishers in this country—William Randolph Hearst Jr.—now a war correspondent.

Staff Sgt. W. R. Charleston, who left The Times-Union's State desk to join Uncle Sam's Air Forces more than two years ago, said of Hearst, who was making his first mission in a B-26—"Bill looked a little worried just before we took off, but when we got into the air, he said everything was fine."

The mission was directed just behind enemy lines. The targets assigned to the Ninth Air Force twin-engined bombers included a road intersection and a road bridge, and both were successfully hit by the bombs.

Sergeant Charleston has more than 50 missions to his credit, most of them over enemy-held France in pre-invasion days, when the Marauders paved the way for the Allied landings. Since D-Day, he and other fliers in the group led by Col. Wilson R. Wood of Chico, Tex., have often flown twice a day hitting targets calculated to disrupt the enemy's communication and supply lines.

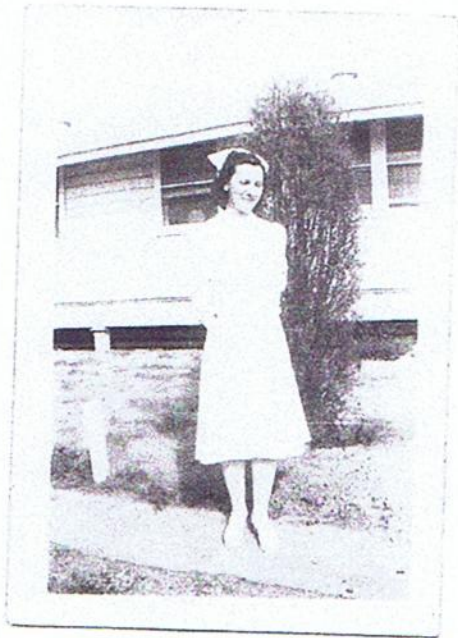
July, 1944



Leyte



Leyte - Charleston
+ Sgt. Jimmie



Charleston - D. R. Supervisor
Daniel Field



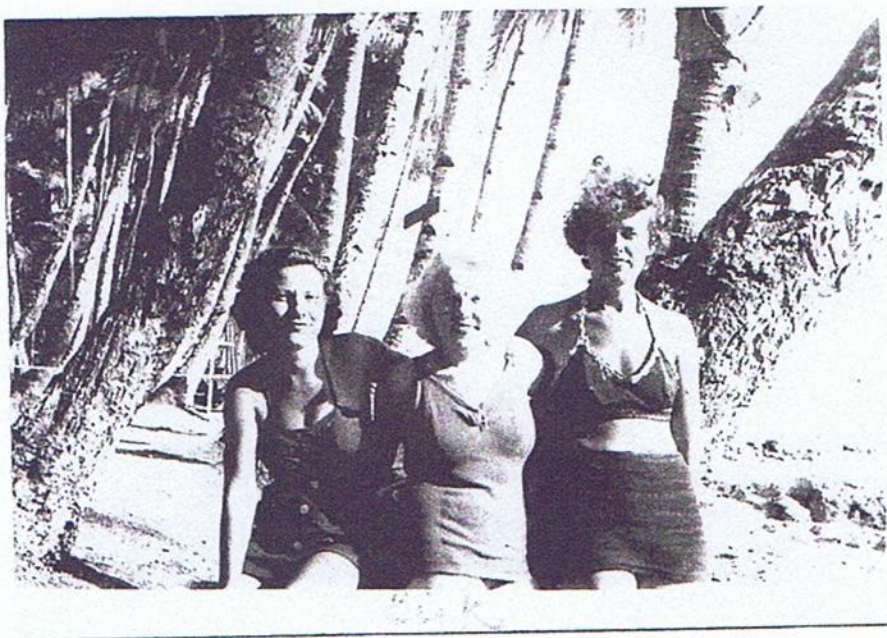
Biak - Charleston 3rd from left



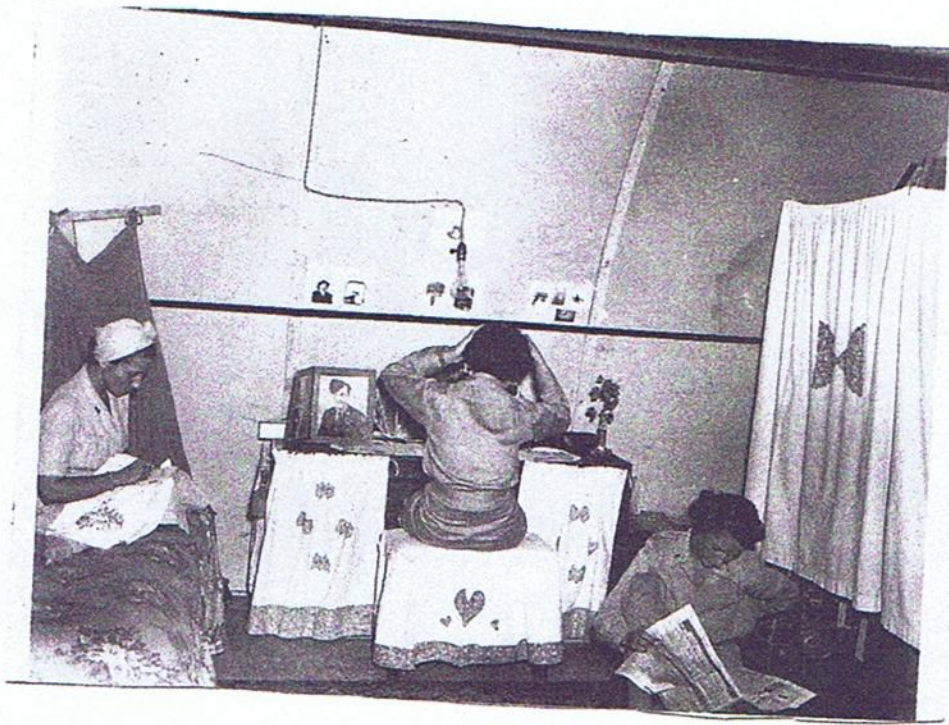
Winders - Charleston 1st from left



Biak - our swimming
hole.



Our swimming hole
Charleston - 15¹ on left.



Clark Field
Charleston - left bunk - book sitting on my bunk
Picture of Ray Charleston on table.



*"It is now my privilege to lift this
lamp of hope and faith and courage
in my profession to heights
not known by her in her time.
Together with the help of flight
surgeons and surgical technicians,
I can set the very skies ablaze
with life and promise for the sick,
injured and wounded who are my
sacred charges ... This I will do.
I will not falter in war or in peace."*

from the Flight Nurse's Creed

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE OPENING OF

*The Winged Angels:
U.S. Army Air Forces Flight Nurses in World War II*

IN THE AIR POWER GALLERY
AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, OHIO

WEDNESDAY, 3 MARCH 2010
CEREMONY AT 4 P.M.
RECEPTION TO FOLLOW



RSVP BY WEDNESDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2010 TO DAWN LAZZARINE
AT (937) 255-1743 OR DAWN.LAZZARINE@WPAFB.AF.MIL
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