

801 MEDICAL AIR EVACUATION SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

801 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron

STATIONS

Tachikawa AB, Japan, September 14, 1950

Ashiya AB, Japan, December 1, 1950

Tachikawa AB, Japan, February 6, 1951 June 18, 1953

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

UN Defensive

UN Offensive

CCF Intervention

First UN Counteroffensive

CCF Spring Offensive

UN Summer-Fall Offensive

Second Korean Winter

Korea, Summer-Fall 1952

Third Korean Winter

Korea, Summer 1953

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation
Sep 21-30 and Dec 1-10, 1950

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation
July 1, 1951-June 18 1953

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Three months before the North Koreans invaded South Korea, the 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron had moved from Japan to Clark AB in the Philippines, leaving only a flight in Japan. When the conflict began, this flight air-evacuated wounded personnel from Korea, while the rest of the squadron returned to Japan. As American casualties mounted, the 801st, flying on C47 aircraft, evacuated the wounded from forward airstrips to hospitals in the rear. Following the waterborne invasion by ground forces at Inchon in September 1950 and during the subsequent battle for Seoul, the 801st, under heavy fire from enemy troops, evacuated nearly 1,450 battle casualties from the Suwon and Kimpo airstrips near Seoul. In December, at the Chosin Reservoir in northeast Korea, the squadron evacuated almost 4,700 battle casualties from the Koto-ri and Hagaru-ri airstrips. During these actions, it operated from inadequate airstrips located in an area entirely surrounded by enemy troops, who subjected the aircraft to hostile fire on the ground as well as in the air. For actions during these two periods, the 801st earned a Distinguished Unit Citation. As the conflict dragged on, the 801st, utilizing C-46, C-47, C-54, and C 124 aircraft, flew on intra-Korea, intra-Japan, and Korea-to-Japan medical evacuation missions. For more than a year after the USAF authorized a group-level organization, the service could not obtain the necessary trained personnel to man the unit. Finally on June 18, 1953, the 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group, a Table of Distribution unit, replaced the 801st, assuming its mission through the end of the war.

1952-53. This was the anniversary year of the 801st. It was during this period that a decade of continuous service drew to a close. It was dark February 1943 that the little handful of people comprising the 801st began their mission in New Guinea. The following years saw a constant turnover in personnel and finally the mission of moving the sick and wounded from Korea.

During the early months of 1952, action throughout the theatre was more or less static in nature and the majority of flights were routine. Personnel were spread out in various locales with Headquarters located at Tachikawa. On the southern most island, which was sometimes referred to as the paradise of Japan, was the "Leper Colony." Here a handful of Flight Nurses and Technicians served their temporary duty assignments before moving on to Korea. Later in the year this operating location was moved to Brady where they now make the best of winter's cold and summer's heat.

In October 1952 a milestone in Air Evacuation was reached when the 250,000th patient was evacuated. This memorable event was highlighted by a special flight which was piloted by Brigadier General Chester E. McCarty, and which was met at Tachikawa by General O. P. Weyland, Commanding General Far East Air Forces plus a host of other prominent personages. Nothing was left to be desired in the carrying out of this mission to make it one that will long be remembered by all participants.

While the normal flights were within Korea, Korea to Japan and within Japan, occasionally the situation reversed itself and emergency flights were made originating in Japan with destination Korea. This occurred on two occasions when the patients involved required artificial Kidney available in Korea.

In August of 1952 Lt Col J. K. Grace assumed command of the unit replacing Major Norman A Twigger

In the latter part of November, one of the youngest patients ever evacuated was flown from southern Japan to Tokyo for immediate treatment. At take off time, the little fellow was less than 20 hours old. Under the care of the Flight nurse and the Technician the young one completed the flight with out difficulty.

December was a month broken by sorrow. For, after many months of flying without incident, the unit was suddenly struck by the loss of two Flight Nurses and one Medical Technician. On 22 December, while on an evacuation flight in southern Korea, Lts Margaret Perry and Virginia McClure together with Staff Sergeant Francis Marstiller were fatally injured in an aircraft accident.

During this period there was an even bigger event in the shadows of the future. The reorganization of the 801st were being made. Proposed TOE were submitted, narratives on the potential workings were prepared and the long wait for USAF approval. Gradually proposal went through the long chain of command and then the decision was reached. The 801st would be inactivated and an Aero-Medical Group would be born. This Group was to be organized under a TDA and as a result would be renumbered. Reluctant to let the number 801 pass into history attempts were made to receive approval to incorporate that number with another digit but to no avail. All identity of the 801st was to pass into the recesses of history.

After nearly 11 continuous years of service, the 801st was inactivated on 18 June 1953 and in place, destined to reach even greater heights, was the 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group.

April 21: The return of American POWs from North Korea began in Operation Little Switch. The 801st MAES accompanied 36 POWs on a C-124 flight to Tachikawa, Japan. 1953

Clark Philippines, 27 Jan 1946-22 Aug 1946

Clark, Philippines, 1 Mar 1950-14 Sep 1950

It all started on 10 December 1942 at Bowman Field, Kentucky. World War II brought an urgent need for air evacuation and it needed trained medical flight crews. Brigadier General David Grant helped come up with the idea of a specially trained medical flight corps. Training was to begin at Bowman Field, Kentucky in November of 1942 but due to the wars pressing need for medical crews the first two classes never really graduated and was sent to form up the 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron (801st MAES) in New Caledonia, South Pacific on 22 January 1943. The 801st supported many places in the Pacific to include Caledonia, Espirito Santo, Guadalcanal, New Zealand and finally landing in the Philippines at Clark AB on 24 Aug 45.

With the end of WWII, the 801st continued to fly missions transporting patients back and forth from Korea to Japan and onto Hawaii. On 14 September 1950 the 801st was officially moved to Tachikawa, Japan just a mere three months before the Korean War officially began. At the early onset of the Korean War the 801st evacuated 4,689 patients in December of 1950 from the Chosin Reservoir. C-47 transport planes of the 315th Air Division flew with the aeromedical crews of the 801st and flew into the most forward airstrips, even under enemy fire, and saved many American lives. The Air Force's 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron (MAES) was one of the first units to receive a Distinguished Unit Citation, for evacuating more 4700 casualties from the Chosin Reservoir. Many 801st flights originated from Sinanju airfield in late November, where 2,700 patients were evacuated. The 801st MAES helped the embattled 1st Marine Division at Chosin Reservoir make a successful fighting withdrawal to the port of Hungnam on the northeast coast of Korea.

Most of the flights out of Tachikawa flew C54s to a number of pick up points in Korea, including Kimpo, Yungdungpo, Wonjin, Taegu and Pusan, the latter base known as "Dogpatch" and transported patients back to Japan, either to Itami for treatment which was the major US Army Hospital in Japan or sometimes to Tachikawa. Military Air Transport Service used C-46, C-47, C-54, and C-124 aircraft to transport 137,950 patients between stations overseas and from OCONUS to the CONUS during the Korean War.

At the end of the Korean Conflict, on 18 June 1953, the 801st reformed as the 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group and was relocated to Clark AB, Philippines. It remained as the 6481st from 1953 to 1956 and flew C-47's, C-54's and C-131's to transport patients. Altogether the 801st and the 6481st transported over 311,683 patients in the Korean War.

The 801st and 802nd MAES were organized in late 1942 at Bowman Fld., Ky. and deployed overseas after a very short course of Air Evac. These two sqdns. were truly the pioneers of Air Evacuation. The 801st with 25 nurses and 75 medical technicians left the states, departing from Camp Stoneman, Ca. 10 Jan. 1943 aboard the Dutch freighter TJISADA E which was converted to a troop carrier. 28 days later, 14 Feb. 1943, it landed at Noumea, New Caledonia in the Pacific. They were stationed at Tontouta with the Univ. of Minn. Sta. Hosp. for rations only.

The 801st MAES which was the original Air Evac Sqdn. was assigned to the 13th AF. During the course of the squadron's life, it had 4 COs: Maj. James E. Crane, MC, Lt. Col. Charles G. Mixter, MC,

Maj. Wilbur A. Smith, MC and Capt. Paul R. Cronenwett, MC. The five officers of the outfit flew overseas to New Caledonia in Dec. 1942. The remainder followed later under Lt. C.D. Pack, MAC.

Evacuation of patients began from Guadalcanal through New Hebrides. The first American women to set foot on Guadalcanal, New Georgia and many other South Pacific Islands after the war in the Pacific began were flight nurses. Soon after arriving in New Caledonia, the flight nurses began taking over the duties of Air Evac which the 801st flight surgeons had assumed one month earlier in the closing days of the Guadalcanal campaign.

From Jan. 1943 to Oct. 1944, when the squadron left the South Pacific to follow the advance of the tactical units of the Air Force into the Southwest Pacific, the 801st, using 13AF, Navy and Marine Skytrains, evacuated more than 40,000 patients from the forward areas, flying into Hollandra, New Guinea, Morotie, Biak, pines, Leyte, Manila, Mindanao and Cebu. Air Evac in the South Pacific reached a peak in March 1944, when the Japanese push was on at Bougainville. In ten days, the 801st evacuated more than 1,800 men to Guadalcanal and Espiritu Santo. As the attack died down in April, the work of the 801st tapered off. It remained at Guadalcanal until Oct. '44, when it moved to Biak Island off western New Guinea, operating there until March 1945, when it moved to Leyte in the Philippines. From Oct. 1944-April 1945, the squadron evacuated nearly 15,000 patients from Allied bases in the Philippines, the Netherlands, East Indies and Palau. In April, a peak of 3,877 was reached. Flight nurses and technicians averaged from 50 to 90 hours per month in the air, with flights averaging from 4 to 8 hrs. flying time in tropical weather fronts which added to the hazards of long over-water hops. To tired and hungry patients, "K" rations and hot coffee were welcome appetizers; even if "K" rations had been their diet for months. Flying fatigue was taking over. Personnel were sent on R and R (rest and recuperation) to Sydney, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand.

During the course of the 801st's tour in the Pacific, three of its personnel were killed in action or missing in action; 1st Lt. Burton A. Hall, MC (the first flight surgeon from the Bowman Fld., Ky. Group to be killed in action), 2nd Lt. Eloise Richardson, flight nurse and Eugene Barr, technician. The 801st was a very closely knit family unit and each of these losses was deeply felt by all.

Capt. Russell K. Ameter designed a canvas medical kit, complete for their needs. It was light, easy to carry, contained everything necessary for air evac. Capt. DeWitt C. Kissell designed the "Kissell Restrainer" for psychotic patients, a very handy gadget. Capt. Kissell was famous throughout the Southwest Pacific theater for his GI foot powder cure - every hour on the hour for "jungle rot". A remark was made that it was useless to go to the dispensary for anything while Capt. Kissell was there because no matter what one's diagnosis was they were given a can of GI foot powder!

May 1944, the squadron celebrated the second anniversary of the activation of the group. Jan. 1945, the nurses gave a party for the enlisted men who were celebrating their second anniversary overseas. The nurses, who went overseas with them had rotated back to the states and had replacements. The fact that the techs were still in the theater soon came to light and they began rotating back too. The work of the medical technicians and other enlisted personnel was of the highest caliber and the squadron was very proud of them. 1st Lt. Margaret Richey Raffa was the

original chief nurse with Capt. Lucy Joplin Wilson replacing her. All flight nurses were returned to the states, after serving 14-16 months overseas, to Bowman Fld., Ky. to attend the School of Air Evac. From there they were assigned to various bases from which they met planes with patients and transported them to hospitals nearest their home. All the nurses received the Air Medal with 4 bronze oak leaf clusters; Presidential Unit Award with oak leaf cluster, Outstanding Unit Award with 2 oak leaf clusters. On 14 Nov. 1944, all 801st personnel received a letter of appreciation for outstanding performance of duty in the combat zone with the South Pacific ATC from 30 June 1944-15 Oct. 44 from Col. A.C. Koonce, U.S.M.C.

801st Sqdn. Bismarck Archipelago; Leyte, Luzon, New Guinea, Northern Solomons, Southern Philippines and Western Pacific (ground). Received the Philippine Presidential unit citation for the period 17 October 1944-4 July 1945, GO 47-50.

Those of you, who had occasion to serve in or be air evacuated from Southeast Asia, may be familiar with the insignia of the 9th Air Medical Evacuation Squadron. While not presently in hand I understand that the beer can type of insignia worn by the members of this unit is practically the same as that once worn by the 801st Medical Air Evacuation Sqdn. The latter is a redesignation of the wartime 801st. The device was redesigned slightly in that the uniforms worn by Donald Duck and his nephews have been changed from olive drab to jungle green. Donald wears an old style aviator's helmet and Dewey wears a green beret. Depicted on the insignia is Donald with feet raised in air while the three nephews strain to carry Donald and the litter, all superimposed on a silver colored cloud (original was in white), all on a blue disk with red border.

Air Force Lineage and Honors

Created: 29 Jul 2020

Updated:

Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.
Unit history. 801 Medical Air Evacuation Squadron. 1953.