

303rd STATION HOSPITAL
303RD BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
MOLESWORTH, ENGLAND
1942-1945

Located near Thrapton, the 303rd Station Hospital was established in September 1943 as a 750 bed hospital to provide medical attention to wounded men returning from combat and for illness and accidents of Molesworth Base personnel. They also served Polebrook (351st BG), Grafton Underwood (384th BG) and wounded from Continental Europe after D-day. It was expanded to a 1,500 bed hospital after D-day. The original Commanding Officer was Major **Thompson** followed by Colonels **Smith**, **Abramson** and **Ragan**. Seventy-five nurses had accommodations at the nearby Lilford Hall. The hospital was disbanded in May 1945.



Major Louis "Mel" Schulstad (360th BS Lead Crew Pilot and 303rd BG(H) Group Operations Officer) & Lt Geraldine Broz - Married 2 May 1944 by Merritt O. "Chappie" Slawson in London. Best Man was Major Melvin T. McCoy.



Captain William E. Eisenhart (359th BS Lead Crew Pilot and Operations Officer) & Lt Mary Shore - Married 12 January 1945 by 303rd BG(H) Chaplain Merritt O. "Chappie" Slawson, at the Westminster Abbey Chapel in London. Best Man was Mel Schulstad.

At least two 303rd BG(H) Officers married nurses from the 303rd Station Hospital. Major **Louis "Mel" Schulstad** married Nurse **Geraldine Broz** and Captain **William E. Eisenhart** married Nurse **Mary Shore**.

THE 303RD STATION HOSPITAL
written from memory by Frances Nunn (Greenan)

In the spring of 1943, Major Thomas Thompson, an orthopedic surgeon at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, began recruiting personnel for an overseas medical unit. In July, 1943, the 303rd Station Hospital was formed at Camp McCall, North Carolina. Major Thompson was the original commanding officer of the unit.

1Lt **Florine Thompson** was assigned as Chief nurse. 2Lt **Gladys Gilliland**, head nurse of the enlisted mens orthopedic ward and 2Lt **Frances Nunn**, head nurse of the Officers Orthopedic Ward at Walter Reed received orders red border on 10 July 1943 to report to the 303 Station Hospital at Camp McCall. Additional female personnel assigned were a dietitian, physical therapist, and three Red Cross Workers.

It is my recollection that the entire enlisted and male officers personnel were assigned to the unit at Camp McCall. During July and August we were engaged in overseas training including the infiltration course and the obstacle course. These exercises included the female personnel. I recall gas mask drills, many lectures and required swimming. During this training period major Thompson left the unit. LtCol **Smith** was assigned as commanding officer of the unit.

On the 23rd of August 1943, the 303rd Station Hospital including thirty-nine male officers, five female officers, three Red Cross workers and 392 enlisted men were ordered "To proceed from Camp McCall to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, to arrive no later than 1600, 31st August 1943. This is a permanent change of station, movement by motor and/or rail." We were, on our way. The entire unit less the advanced party left Camp McCall by troop train.

At Camp Kilmer we were joined by seventy-two 2Lt Army Nurses. Twenty-two came from Camp Campbell, Kentucky, twenty-five from Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and twenty-five from Fort Knox, Kentucky.

The short time we were at Camp Kilmer was full of activity. The nurses exchanged their white duty uniforms for tan and white seersucker field uniforms and caps. Their Class A uniforms were exchanged for O.D. issues. We were issued a set of fatigues and field equipment including gas masks, mess kits and canteens. I can remember forming lines for everything from shoes and boots to tent poles. By the time we left to embark on the "Empress of Russia," I believe we were glad to be going anywhere. Rumor had it our destination was "MURMANSK."

The "Empress of Russia" was a Canadian cruise ship. We left New York Harbor on 5 Sept. 1943, but had to return to port because we could not keep up with the convoy of troop ships. Finally on Sept. 8th-9th, we sailed again as part of a convoy of ships loaded with war supplies. We were in the middle of the convoy and could see ships in all directions from us. We sailed the northern route and were on board a total of twenty-one days.

There was much fog on the trip and a constant zig-zagging to avoid the threat of submarines. Our life preservers, "Mae Wests," were constant companions. We had many ship-board drills, and many rumors of ash cans being dropped. We finally landed in the Firth of Clyde at Glasgow, Scotland, where we were met by a bag-pipe brigade as we disembarked and a contingent of volunteers serving tea in our new canteen cups.

We traveled by train from Glasgow to Peterborough and to Thrapston, England, where we were met by Ambulances that took us to the 303rd Station Hospital location. The first night we slept in the hospital wards. The next morning, the nurses were taken to Lilford Hall where the nurses were quartered for the next two years.



Lilford Hall, Family home of Lord Lilford since 1635 – Nurses' Quarters, 303rd Station Hospital

Lord Lilford lived in one wing of the castle and was reported to have said he would just as soon have a Nazi bomb hit the castle as seventy-five American Army nurses. There was cold running water in the castle and an abolition hut in the rear for bathing. Our first test of survival was to keep the fireplace burning as there was no central heating.

Our first task in organizing the hospital wards was to standardize them. The medicine cabinets, linen closets, kitchens, etc. were all set up the same so that nursing personnel could easily adjust from one ward to another. They were also standardized so that we could work with "torches," as the English called them, if it became necessary. Nursing personnel worked twelve hour shifts, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. with two hours off during the shift, if possible. There was an occasional 48 hour V.O.C.O.

We were originally designated as the 303rd Station Hospital with a 750 bed capacity. After D-Day we expanded the hospital to 1500 beds. This was done by erecting fifteen bed tents attached to the nissen hut wards.

We had as many as three hundred patients arrive at one time. I believe the rail-head was Thrapston. I remember the ambulances lined up to transport the patients. There were many patients with shrapnel wounds and many with frozen feet.

Colonel **Smith** left the unit as Commanding Officer sometime during 1943. Col. Abramson was assigned as Commanding officer following Colonel **Smith**. Colonel **Abramson** was replaced by Colonel Tillman A. **Ragan** who remained with the unit until we were broken up sometime in the spring of 1945.

Some of the nurses were transferred to the 230th General Hospital for transfer to the Pacific Theatre. Following cessation of hostilities in the Pacific some of the nurses were assigned to various units for the Army of occupation or for transfer to the U.S.A.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A NURSE AT THE 303RD STATION HOSPITAL

by Mary Eisenhart

After a very long trip from Camp Atterbury, Indiana, I arrived 24 September 1943 at the new 303rd Station Hospital on the estate of Lord Lilford near Northampton and Molesworth. The hospital facilities and beds were being set up in numerous Nissan huts on the estate's spacious grounds, while the nurses were housed in Lilford Hall, a 17th Century manor.

Living in a castle might sound luxurious, but it was actually quite Spartan. I shared a room on the second floor with five other nurses. We had GI cots, a footlocker, no closets, no chairs, bare wooden floors and a fireplace which was our only source of heat. The toilet was down a corridor while the bath house was a separate building to the rear of the castle. We adapted well, and I don't recall a lot of complaining.

There was a definite aura of urgency to be operational as soon as possible. Morale was good and there was a sense that we were united as a team to perform our assigned role in the war effort. The first main body of medical personnel included about 70 nurses, 400 enlisted men and 40 officers, divided evenly between doctors and administrative staff.

Our first patients came from Molesworth and other nearby air bases. We were constantly aware of the potential for receiving those who were wounded on the almost daily bombing missions. I can vividly remember the roar of the bombers and the sight of them as they assembled overhead to get into formation for sorties on the continent.

After D-Day, the hospital was expanded to 1,500 beds. After the invasion, we had as many as 300 patients arrive at one time. I believe the rail head was at Thrapston. I remember the ambulances lined up to transpo the patients, many with shrapnel wounds, others with frozen feet. The hospital prided itself on being able to unload incoming trains and ferry all patients to the hospital in less than 6 minutes.

For duty hours, we were issued brown and white wrap around seersucker dresses and caps to match, a war sweater and the traditional nurse's cape. For off duty, we had an O.D. jacket, skirt and tie, slacks, tailored dress and trench coat. For drill exercises in the courtyard, we were issued fatigues, combat boots, a helmet and gas mask. We were told that Lord Lilford sometimes watched us do our drilling.

The Officer's Club for our unit was on the ground floor Lilford Hall. Many officers from nearby bases were frequent visitors, and reciprocally, the nurses were invited to attend dances at their clubs. We were transported in the back of big 6 X 6 canvas covered trucks. Not exactly a limo, but didn't hamper us. We also rode the truck to surrounding towns and cities to sample the local culture.

It was always a special treat to go to London by train and then riding the tube and staying at the American Red Cross hostel. I have vivid images of great theater, blackouts, taxis driving in the fog with dim lights, air raid sirens, evidence of terrible bomb damage, seeing bombed-out victims of the war sleeping in the tube stations. So many military people from so many different places filling the streets, Piccadilly Circus, Soho, Trafalgar, Buckingham Palace – these are some of the many things I remember about that great city.

I left England on 25 March 1945. The time I spent there will always be special to me. It's where I met and wed Bill Eisenhart, a 303rd Bomb Group pilot, and we've been happily married for more than half a century. Over the years we've returned to London and Lilford Hall from time to time. I'm always mindful that the events of 1943-1945 in England were a most important part of my life.