



Army nurses at Anzio beachhead found mud and bugs part of the decor.

Anzio nurses

Women who were there recall bravery on the beachhead

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As rough seas off the coast of Anzio, Italy, tossed the landing crafts like discarded match sticks, the nurses of the 33rd Field Hospital fought to keep their footing and their breakfast. The sounds of high-pitched German airplane engines, exploding bombs, and anti-aircraft fire drowned out all human sounds except the almost deafening lub dubs of their own hearts as the sound beat again and again in their ears.

It was well past 0800, the time scheduled for the nurses to wade ashore on Anzio, and the Luftwaffe showed no signs of stopping their attack. The planes made run after run over the harbor, the staging area and the hospital tents, dropping their bombs and turning to repeat their attacks until their bombs and ammunition had been spent on the American and British troops below.

Each of the Army nurses with the 33rd Field Hospital was a veteran of combat situations. They had served

previously in North Africa and Sicily. And, since the hospital's creation in October of 1943 (the invasion of Italy was on Sept. 9, 1943) it had followed Gen. Mark Clark's Fifth Army as it made its way north. They had often cared for injured soldiers only a mile or two behind the front lines, and they had shared the GIs' hardships, the GIs' living conditions and the GIs' risks.

When the worst storm in more than 100 years hit Salerno on New Year's Eve, 1943, the nurses and medical personnel of the 33rd Field Hospital fought the elements for the safety of their patients. The storm had raged for hours, turning the hospital area into a field of mud. Just before midnight, the furor of the storm had grown so powerful, it was reclassified as a cyclone and threatened to level the 40 large tents that protected the more than 1,000 wounded GIs. As though summoned by the sound of a bell, corpsmen, doctors and nurses grabbed whatever clothes were closest to them and spilled into the blackness of the night. In the hours that followed, nurses, doctors and medical personnel

fought falling tent poles, driving rain and the hazard of downed electrical wires to evacuate all but 12 patients to the safety of a large warehouse miles from the hospital site.

Another battle still awaited them. Doctors, nurses and corpsmen laid hold of the poles and chains supporting the post operative tent and hung on with all their might. The 12 post operative patients inside could not be transported without serious risk to their lives, and if the tent offering their only physical protection from the elements went, there would be little chance for their survival.

In the darkness of a moonless night, with generators off line, and fallen electric wires hidden by ankle deep mud, nurses crawled from patient to patient. They worked by the light of flashlights carried in their mouths or tucked under their chins to leave their hands free. They worked quickly, disconnecting Wagenstein suction and intravenous infusions, lifting the wounded men to litters balanced on cinder blocks as close to the mud floor as possible. As they worked, the hand-

