

Margraten: Lest We Forget

Our Patriotic Service Project at the American Cemetery in Margraten

Each Memorial Day, as part of our Patriotic Service mission, at the American Cemetery in Margraten, the Netherlands we place flowers at the gravestones of four American women and lay a wreath in honor of the 22 Vermont servicemen killed in the liberation of the Netherlands. This mission was started over 35 years ago by a Vermont Dame and former President, Mary Mollica, whose brother First Lt. William A. Root is among the 8300 buried there.

William Root was 29 years old when he was killed trying to save the life of his company commander near Wolfer, Germany on April 4, 1945. Mary traveled every year to the Netherlands to lay the Vermont wreath during Memorial Day ceremonies at Margraten. On one of her trips, she discovered the gravestones of four American women also killed at this time and decided to lay flowers at their gravesites as well.

Mary said, "As long as I'm able, I plan to go back every year. I hope that the young Colonial Dames will continue the tradition". And we do....

Who are the women buried at Margraten? Here are their stories....

Dorothy Jane Burdge:



Dorothy J. Burdge was a school teacher before going overseas as a Red Cross worker. She was sent overseas by the Red Cross in September 1943 and served in England and followed the American troops to Normandy, through France and Belgium and finally to Germany. She operated a Red Cross clubmobile with her sister Grace. She was killed in a plane crash in Germany.



1LT Wilma R. Vinsant:



Lieutenant Wilma R. Vinsant, war nurse, was killed in action in a flight over Germany on April 14, 1945. Death came when the plane in which she was accompanying wounded military evacuees, crashed near Muhlhausen. The heroic nurse was buried first in a temporary U.S. cemetery in Germany. Her nickname was 'Dolly'. She was born in San Benito, graduated from San Benito High school and went to Brownsville Junior College. Her future was cast when she went into training at John Senly Hospital in Galveston where she was certified as a registered nurse.



September 1, 1942 Dolly enlisted in the Army Nurse corps, and qualified as an air evacuation nurse. She graduated from the Army Air Force School at Bowman Field, two days before her 26th birthday. She went to England. In England Dolly fell in love and she and Major William L. Shea, Air Force navigator, married. Dolly came home the last time in November 1944. Actually, Dolly had a day off, but because another nurse was invited to a party, Dolly told her she would take her place so she could attend the party.

1LT Christine A. Gasvoda:



Statement from Harry C. Heal, O-462518, Captain, Air Corps, Pilot, Flight Leader: "I was leading the flight of fourteen planes, on the resupply and evacuation mission, Wing no. 225, in which plane 43-15086, piloted by 1st Lt R.D. Burchfiel, participated. We flew on the designated course and made our turn at Paderborn and headed for field R-16, located at Hildesheim. After flying about five minutes we ran into bad weather and I ordered my flight to make a 180 degree left turn and go back

to Paderborn. The formation, at that time was in trail. After we landed at Paderborn, the formation waited about two and one half hours but no message was received from the missing ship." She is remembered on YouTube. Follow this link:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqMEGSLcd74>



Anita R. Mc Kenney



Anita Mc Kenney came overseas to work for the War Shipping Administration. She also sang for the men, probably in a U.S.O. show, and she might have met her husband there. Anita Randall was married to Warren H. Mc Kenney. Anita died of head injuries caused in an car accident on 24 November 1945. Because her husband was also severely wounded, he couldn't attend her funeral. He decided, as next of kin, to have her buried in Margraten. According to her death report her occupation was housewife and she and her husband lived in Antwerp, Belgium.



Samples of the wreath and floral arrangements that are presented on behalf of NSCDA on Memorial Day at the American Cemetery.