

Our Army Hospitals

the 97th General Hospital frankfurt-am-main

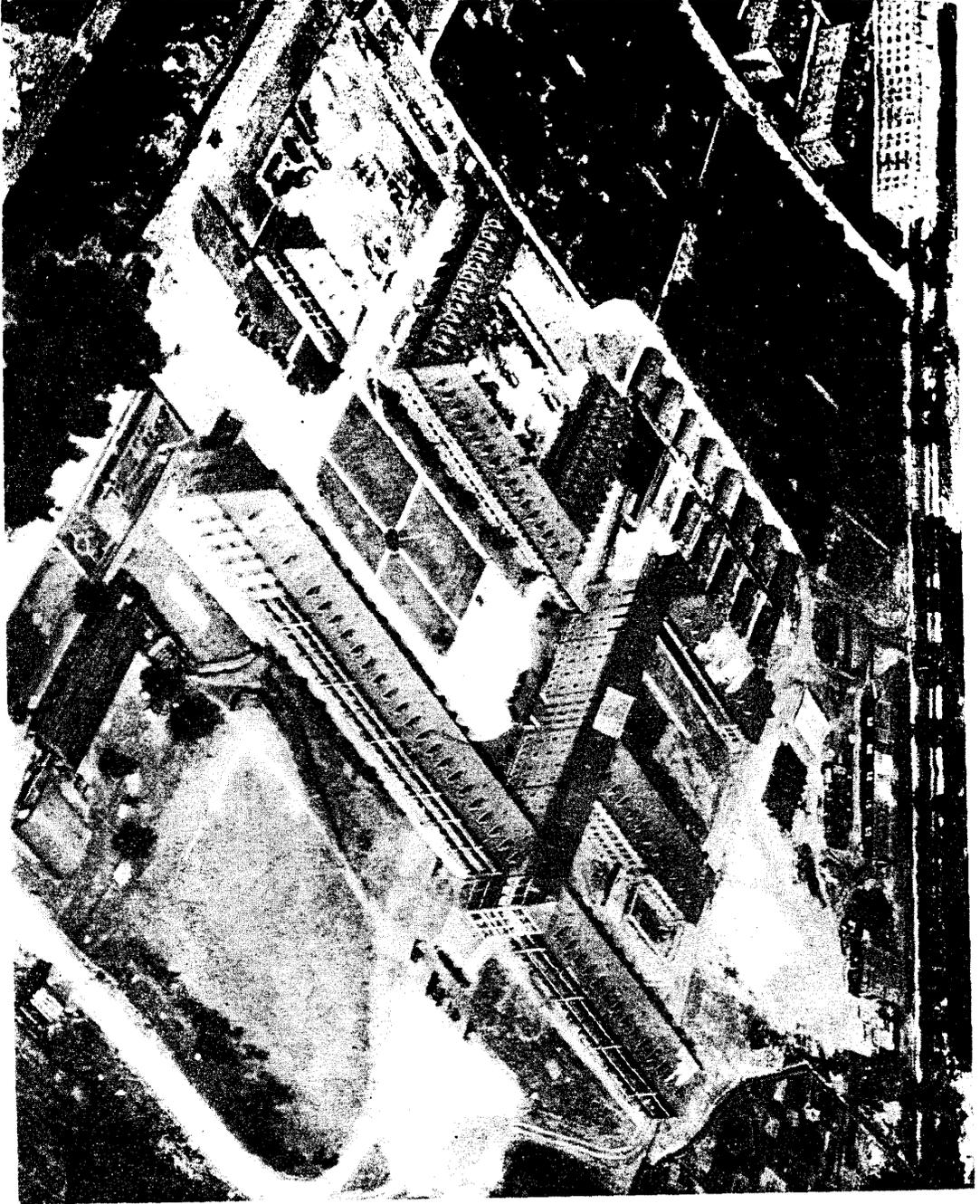


When the 97th General Hospital arrived in Frankfurt in July of 1945, it found a German hospital, completed in 1941, which was quite well equipped to take care of injured and ill Luftwaffe personnel - and occasionally a captured American airman. An architect's mural which still stands near the main entrance of the hospital indicates the sweeping landscapes and decorative gardening which had been planned. The leisurely, oval approach to the main entrance, the curved foyer and hidden courtyards, the long unsymmetrical ward buildings and the expansive parks which surrounded the hospital were the materials from which the Luftwaffe was going to mould an impressive institution. Yet in a diagram of the hospital, an imaginative eye can see outlines of a sorry swastika, like a Nazi dream which never had its fulfillment.

Originally the hospital consisted of a main building seven thousand and seventy nine square meters in size, with five floors, four wings, a basement and sub-basement; an isolation building seven hundred and ninety square meters in size, with three floors; a utilities building two hundred and ninety square meters in size, with two floors; a generator building and a transformer building. When the Americans took the hospital for an installation of their own, several temporary buildings were constructed for additional facilities. Fourteen hospital Nissen-type hutments were added for convalescent wards; an enlisted men's recreational center was built with a bar and dance floor; three rectangular buildings were built for utilities work shops; a Red Cross building for patients' recreation was erected, as well as a timber type dining room being added to the official mess.

Approximately two hundred and thirty apartments were added to the hospital installation when a neighboring block of apartment buildings was assigned to the hospital for use in October of 1945. Between these apartment buildings and the hospital itself was a large gardening area

Aerial View of the 97th General Hospital



which also became the property of the United States Army and later provided food and flowers for the use of the hospital. Altogether the installation covers almost twenty acres of land.

During the period 1 August 1945 to 31 May 1946, the 97th General Hospital admitted more than 14,000 patients to the hospital, some 13,000 being U. S. Army personnel and approximately 1,300 being non-U. S. At the same time, 87,910 patients were treated at the outpatient dispensary. At one time the hospital had 980 of its authorized 1,000 T/O beds occupied.

The 97th General Hospital is one of the best equipped U. S. Army hospitals in Germany. Its facilities compare favorably with hospitals of similar capacity in the States. Because of its central location, it has been designated as a special treatment center, being capable of caring for all types of cases normally treated in an overseas theater. Recently a pediatric section has been added to the many specialized sections of the hospital, including gynecological, pre-natal and post-natal clinics, and the hospital is completely prepared to handle all admissions and treatments of this type.

Since September 1945, the 97th General Hospital has been commanded by Colonel Stewart G. Smith, MC, who is ably assisted by Lt. Colonel T. M. Carow, MC, his executive officer, and a well qualified professional staff. While redeployment has taken a heavy toll of specialists and presented many problems, the 97th General Hospital maintained a staff comparable to its facilities. As of 15 June 1946, the Medical Service was headed by Major S. S. Altshuler, MC, while Colonel Edmund Horgan, MC, was enroute to replace Captain O. R. Beusing, MC, as Chief of Surgical Service. The Dental Service was headed by Lt. Colonel C. M. Farber, DC, and the Nursing Service, by Lt. Colonel Doris E. Medlin, ANC, the Laboratory Service by Captain M. Kuschner, MC, and the X-ray service by Captain S. P. Barden, MC. Serving under the chiefs of services are specialists in gynecology and obstetrics, orthopediatrics, neuropsychiatry, dermatology, neuro-surgery, diseases of the eye, ear, nose and throat, and other branches of medicine and surgery, completing a team competent to give American soldiers the best medical service of any Army in the world.

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FRANKFURT

UNIT HISTORY OF THE 97TH GENERAL HOSPITAL

In July, 1923, General Hospital No. 97 was constituted in the organized Reserves in the State of Florida. The unit was redesignated as the 97th General Hospital in June, 1929, and on 25 June 1943 it was ordered into active duty at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

On 23 March 1944, the 97th General Hospital set sail aboard the USS Argentina for what the troops considered parts unknown.

On 3 April 1944 the unit docked at Greenock, Scotland and walked onto British soil on the way to a new home at Wheatley, England, six miles from Oxford. On 22 April 1944, the 97th General Hospital officially took command of hospital plant 4143 and began furnishing fourth echelon medical care for troops in the European theater of operations.

As was expected, the invasion of the continent and the bloody push up the Normandy peninsula by the allied armies, sent the 97th into high gear. Six days after D-Day, the 97th unloaded its first train load of injured, and by 2 August 1944, 1,449 battle casualties reached the 97th General Hospital.

With a sense of satisfaction in a job well done, the 97th General Hospital began preparations for another move in early spring of 1945.

On 29 March, the 385th Armored Battalion captured a huge hospital plant constructed by the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) in the battle for Frankfurt/Main, and held it until 15 April when the 180th General Hospital occupied the building and grounds -- in time this was to be the permanent station of the 97th General Hospital.

The 97th departed Wheatley on 30 June 1945 and headed for France. Four days later they arrived at Le Havre, France where for twenty days the troops waited. On 30 July, 400 days after the units activation, the 97th General Hospital formally took up residence at Army Hospital Plant 4377 in Frankfurt/Main, Germany.

Upon arrival at the 97th General Hospital in Frankfurt, all personnel worked diligently and tirelessly to solve the many problems initially encountered in the new facility.

With the influx of dependents to Europe after 1946, it was necessary to accommodate to the new nature of the patient load. One of the big accomplishments was the construction of three additional wings (F, G and H) in 1952 followed by construction of an emergency room, chapel, library, mess hall, officers' club, and a theater.

The 97th was selected for special service to aid in the Berlin air-lift in 1948-49; for its support of the operation, it was awarded the "Army of Occupation Medal with the Berlin Air-Lift Device".

On 1 January 1954, the hospital was redesignated US Army Hospital, Frankfurt operated by the 97th General Hospital with a total expandible bed capacity of 1,000.

The 97th General Hospital and the Frankfurt Army Regional Medical Center (FARMC) is the largest and busiest in Europe. Comprised of 11 troop medical clinics, 22 dental clinics, 3 veterinary detachments and numerous other field and TO & E units spanning a 100 mile radius. The 97th General Hospital is authorized an operating bed level of 330 plus 30 remaining overnight beds for evacuation patients. The hospital functions as the medical evaluation center for patients being evacuated to the United States. It also operates a regional neonatal intensive care unit for the dependents of US Army Forces in Europe. The hospital provides specialized treatment in 22 areas to include: allergy, audiology, cardiology, dermatology, gastroenterology, internal medicine, dentistry, neurology, obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedics, pediatrics, pulmonary disease, psychiatry, rheumatology and urology. The 97th General Hospital and the Frankfurt Army Regional Medical Center continues to function as the home of concerned care.

FRANKFURT

HISTORY OF THE BUILDING

In 1936 the world was still in the grips of the depression, the Roman-Berlin axis had been formed, and Hitler had sent German troops into the Rhineland in defiance of the Versailles Treaty. It was a year before the German occupation of Austria and the Munich Pact, two years before the invasion of Poland. That year the German ministry in Berlin ordered the construction of a hospital in Frankfurt/Main. The hospital was to hold 300 beds in peacetime and was to be able to convert to a 600-bed capacity in time of war without any structural changes.

Professor Bonatz, a private architect, was hired by the ministry to design the hospital. The plans, completed in 1938 were approved by Hitler and under his command the construction of the hospital began. Polish labor was utilized in constructing the new facility. The hospital, as designed and executed, was one of the most modern in Germany. Professor Bonatz approached the design of the hospital as if it were a factory with the end product being the operation. A unique characteristic in the construction was the use of steam pipes serving both as heating elements and as reinforcement for the cement walls and ceilings. This method was used to economize on steel which was needed for the armament industry. This was the first building in Germany to be constructed.

In August, 1939, only minor construction actually remained such as the laying of linoleum and plastering of the exterior. Construction was completed in time for the invasion of Poland and the arrival of the first casualties.

Two major portions of the original plans that were not completed were a landing strip for an area to one side of Betts and a permanent mess hall where G and H wings now are. Although the hospital was built during a period of war, there are no underground tunnels connecting the hospital with other sections of Frankfurt.

During the hospital's occupation by the Germans, it was used as a 350-bed luxury German Air Force (Luftwaffe) hospital. A-wing was occupied by patients with a prolonged recovery period and allied prisoners needing hospitalization. The French were kept on the ground floor, the Americans on the second, and the British on the third. It is said that this pattern was developed because the Germans had some respect for the French, less for the Americans, and the least for the British; and bombings would inflict greatest casualties on the upper floors. The reason for this was probably because the French did not participate in the air raids that destroyed many German cities.

B-wing contained the recovery wards and psychiatric service. C-wing was the central block around which the rest of the hospital was designed. It contained operating rooms, pharmacy, laboratories and the morgue. EM and NCO living quarters were in the D-wing, privates in the attic and NCO's one floor below. The basement and sub-basement were used for storage and contained the sewage, electrical, steam and heating systems. These two levels were heavily reinforced with thick walls and protected windows and were to be used in case of an air attack (the hospital received no such damage during the war). The German mess hall was in a temporary prefab building where the officer's club is presently located.

South of the hospital were stables (horses, sheep, pigs and birds for experiments and serum) and a large garden area which provided some of the fresh greens for the mess hall. Most doctors lived in Bad Vilbel or Rhein Main and commuted by bus. (History has it that they worked eight hours on duty, four on call and 8 free).

On March 29, 1945, the 385th Armored Battalion captured the hospital plant in the Battle for Frankfurt/Main and held it until April 15th when the 180th General Hospital occupied the building and grounds--which later became the permanent station of the 97th General Hospital.