

Second Lieutenant Marjorie Gertrude Morrow



Going by her middle name, Gertrude^[i], and most often known as Gert,^[ii] Second Lieutenant Marjorie Gertrude Morrow grew up as a small-town Iowa girl, becoming a nurse and sweet person. At age 27, she was killed near the front line at Anzio Beachhead in Italy.

GROWING UP IN IOWA

Born on May 17, 1916 in Algona, Kossuth County, Iowa ^[iii] to Merrill Martin Morrow and Mary Bessie “Bess” White Morrow, she was their middle child. He was from Newhall, IA^[iv] and she was from Rock Falls, IL.^[v] They were married in June of 1912 and two years later moved to Kossuth and settled on a farm in Union Township, northwest of Algona. Later, they moved to Algona.^[vi]

The couple had three children. Marjorie Gertrude had one older sister, Helen Estella, and one younger brother, Charles M.^[vii] In the 1930 census, Merrill Martin Morrow, who went by M.M., was an implement dealer of farm implements. In an article about Gert Morrow, it states “Mr. and Mrs. M. M. Morrow were well-known Algona farmers.”^[viii] It’s possible they had a small farm in addition to his selling farm implements but there are far more references to his dealing in John Deere products, demonstrating farm equipment, teaching how to use it and there are many advertisements for equipment for sale with M. M. Morrow’s name.

The entire family stayed busy with community activities. The family was a member of the Methodist Church where M.M. was the Assistant Sunday School Superintendent and known to take on solo singing parts at Christmas time.^[ix] He was a Mason^[x] and Bess belonged to the Women's Foreign Missionary Society^[xi] plus was vice-president and a member of the Child Study Club.^[xii] The couple enjoyed dinner with friends, bridge and Merrill enjoyed fishing according to local papers. Gert was a 4-H club member^[xiii] and her mother a 4-H leader.^[xiv] There are numerous mentions of Gert's socializing in the local sections of area small town papers - from activities at the high school to picnics, church events, summer camp and parties held at the home of friends. Despite the busy activities, things may have been a struggle for Gert because her mother was an invalid for about eight years.^[xv]

By 1932, things were different in the household. M.M. was now working at the Algona, IA office of Aetna Life Insurance. He began spending much of his time in Des Moines, 137 miles from home, as he worked to establish an Aetna Life Insurance office there to replace the one in Algona.^[xvi]

Then in 1932, when Gert was 16, her mother died following a lengthy illness.^[xvii] A month after her passing, her father moved the family to Des Moines where his office was now established.^[xviii] Until that time, Morrow attended Algona schools, where she participated in the Glee Club^[xix] and Red Cross fundraising drives^[xx]. She finished her high school years and graduated from Roosevelt High School in Des Moines in 1933. Despite the move, Gert made many visits to her former hometown, as noted in the local paper, where she participated in dances, picnics, and slumber parties with her friends.^[xxi]

Her father remarried in 1935 to Pauline Norton Worster Morrow, a widow, bringing Gert a younger stepbrother, Paul and a younger stepsister, Mary Ellen.^[xxii]

She followed her sister Ellen's footsteps^[xxiii] to Iowa Methodist School of Nursing, graduating in 1938 as a registered nurse.^[xxiv] Morrow worked in private practice with a doctor^[xxv] and at the Iowa Methodist Hospital at Ames, Iowa.^[xxvi]

She was remembered as "Sweet, gentle Gertrude was helpful and kind when I was a freshman in nurses' training," in the book "A Half Acre of Hell"—A Combat Nurse in WW II - Avis D. Schorer, author.^[xxvii]

HER MILITARY STORY

She enlisted in Ames, Iowa^[xxviii] in the army in October, 1942^[xxix] then did her training at Fort Francis E. Warren in Wyoming.^[xxx]

"Gert" Morrow was a nurse with the Army Nurse Corps, 95th Evacuation Hospital,^[xxxi] 400-bed hospital staffed with 40 doctors, 40 nurses and 220 enlisted soldiers.^[xxxii]

Morrow made good friends among her fellow nurses. In the book “Forever a Soldier,” she is described as a sweet girl devoted to her family.” Called “three good pals” in the book, Morrow worked and socialized with her dear friends Carrie T. Sheetz and Blanche Sigman. They perished with her.[\[xxxiii\]](#)

The nurses first landed at Casablanca, North Africa and set up a tent city hospital. They moved several times and from Bizerette, North Africa, they waited on the invasion of Italy. From there, they boarded a hospital ship.[\[xxxiv\]](#)

In a history of the 95th, it was said that the nurses of the 95th Evacuation Hospital “seemed to attract disaster[\[xxxv\]](#).”

Her hospital ship, HMHS “Newfoundland,”[\[xxxvi\]](#) a British hospital ship, crossed the Mediterranean to Salerno but due to heavy raids and bombing, they could not land and headed out 30 miles to sea.[\[xxxvii\]](#)

The Newfoundland was bombed[\[xxxviii\]](#) and fired on by German planes outside the Gulf of Salerno’[\[xxxix\]](#) on September 25, 1944.[\[xl\]](#) The first bomb hit near the ship at 5 a.m. blowing the doors off of hinges, shattering walls and breaking mirrors.[\[xli\]](#) Morrow survived the injuries she received in that September, 1943 bombing.[\[xlii\]](#) According to newspaper reports of the day, dispatches emphasized that “the coolness of the nurses helped prevent heavy casualties in the period when the bombs were shattering walls and blowing doors from hinges of the mercy ship.[\[xliii\]](#) The nurses climbed down into lifeboats. “Some of the girls would start down the ladders nude and the sailors would pull them back and give them their pants,” The Plain Speaker reported.[\[xliv\]](#)

Some of the lifeboats turned out to be damaged. At one point, there were 76 people in one lifeboat. The women used their helmets to bail water. Another hospital ship, St. Andrew[\[xlv\]](#), took the nurses to North Africa for treatment and rest.[\[xlvi\]](#)

Next, she was with the evacuation hospital as it followed the first landings of American troops on Sicily.[\[xlvii\]](#) At that time, American forces were digging in as the Germans opened a counter drive on land and in the air.[\[xlviii\]](#)

Air bombardments continued day and night and the shelling seemed to be indiscriminate.[\[xlix\]](#) There were continuous air raids, with many casualties, hard work and only occasional times of rest in foxholes.[\[l\]](#)

THE BLACKEST DAY

It was a very busy day for the 95th “with about 400 patients in the hospital, loaded ambulances coming in with freshly wounded, and the operating rooms, shock wards, and x-ray sections working at full capacity, at about 1,545 (patients),” from an excerpt of the official account.[\[li\]](#) It was the first time in a month that Morrow and her friends received mail.[\[lii\]](#)

Major Arthur B. deGrandpre, a surgeon attached to the 95th Evac Hospital, wrote in his diary: “(It was) the blackest day in the history of the 95th Evacuation Hospital. About 14:30 (hours), a German bomber came over being chased by a British Spitfire. The enemy pilot dropped his load of bombs in our area – seven small antipersonnel bombs. Spitfire shooting at him.”^[liii]

The Stars and Stripes newspaper told the tale of Morrow’s last day. It reported in a February 8th, 1944 edition that the previous day had been perilous for the 95th Evacuation Hospital.

A Luftwaffe pilot blasted the hospital area, a half-mile from the nearest military target, dropping fragmentation bombs in an area containing a large cloth Red Cross. These butterfly type bombs were designed to explode after a contact five feet above the ground, the newspaper reported. One bomb hit the edge of the cloth. The antipersonnel bombs fell on the operating, administrative and ward areas.

“We heard the crash. We jumped for our helmets and then it was over, and we were all outside with all the bandages we could get, taking care of the wounded and covering up the dead. It was all we could do,” said nurse Second Lt. Helen Anderson of the bombing a few hours earlier.^[liv]

HER DEATH

Marjorie Gertrude “Gert” Morrow became a casualty of WW2 that day.

During the Battle of Anzio, Italy on February 7, 1944,^[lv] Second Lieutenant Morrow, Army Nurse Corps, was killed while completing the administration of blood plasma to a patient,^[lvi] as noted in “The Courageous Medics of Anzio.^[lvii]” She was hit at Anzio Beachhead^[lviii] and died from her wounds that night.^[lix] She was one of the three nurses killed when the 95th was bombed by a German plane as it fled from a British fighter over Nettuno.^[lx] The other two nurses who died were her close friends, Lieutenant and Chief Nurse Blanche Sigman and Second Lieutenant and Assistant Chief Nurse Carrie T. Sheetz.^[lxi]

COMMENDATIONS

Marjorie G. Morrow commendations include:

Purple Heart Medal

Red Cross Medal^[lxii]

World War II Victor Medal

European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal^[lxiii]

MEMORIALS

1962: The Library at Iowa Methodist School of Nursing, Des Moines, was named for 2nd Lt. Marjorie Gertrude Morrow. A memorial plaque to Lt. Morrow is in the library, reported *The Mason City Globe-Gazette, Mason City, Iowa* on May 28, 1962. [\[lxiv\]](#) Her medals are on display there. [\[lxv\]](#) There were 300 present at the memorial presentation given by the Nursing Alumni Association. [\[lxvi\]](#)

**1962: **Morrow was honored as a “Career Nurse” by the Iowa Methodist Hospital News magazine. “She will always be claimed as the hospital’s own heroine of World War II.” [\[lxvii\]](#)

HER GRAVE

She is buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial, Nettuno, Città Metropolitana di Roma Capitale, Lazio, Italy. [\[lxviii\]](#) A memorial marker resides at Mount Olivet Cemetery, Key West, Dubuque County, Iowa. [\[lxix\]](#)

ABOUT THIS STORY

This story is part of the Stories Behind the Stars project (see www.storiesbehindthestars.org). This is a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WWII fallen here on Fold3. **Can you help write these stories?** Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

[\[i\] http://iagenweb.org/wwii/WWII_Women/M_Name/MorrowMarjorieGertrude.html](http://iagenweb.org/wwii/WWII_Women/M_Name/MorrowMarjorieGertrude.html)