

The History of the Air Ambulance

We have all come to know the familiar sound of the helicopter overhead that is flying quickly from the scene of a tragic car crash to the nearest trauma center at a nearby hospital. We may have even known someone who has needed to utilize such air ambulance service. Do you know the history behind these marvelous methods of medical transportation?

Think back nearly a century ago. During World War I, air ambulances were first introduced. Between 1914 and 1918, a variety of military organization tested the use of flying ambulances to treat patients. Over time, this beginning has spawned into the air ambulances of today.

What later became the Royal Doctor Flying Service started in the year 1928. This milestone event was the first air ambulance service ever to exist. This service began in the Australian Outback. This non-profit organization was intended to provide service to people living in the remote areas of the Outback. The Royal Doctor Flying Service provided emergency medical care, as well as, primary care for individuals who found it difficult to reach general healthcare facilities or hospitals due to the distance.

In 1934, Marie Marvingt started an air ambulance service. This was the first civil air ambulance service in Africa. The air ambulance service was established in Morocco. Again, the remote areas and terrain played a role in the decision to begin this service in the specific location.

Marie Marvingt used her pioneering spirit and record-breaking personality to help others when she began the air ambulance unit. She was the first woman to fly combat missions as a bomber pilot. She also was a qualified nurse. Specializing in aviation medicine she was the perfect candidate to begin the air ambulance service in Morocco. In fact, she worked to establish air ambulance services worldwide.

It was in 1936 that a military air ambulance service assisted wounded. The injured were evacuated from the Spanish Civil War. The wounded received treatment in Nazi Germany.

The Saskatchewan government established the first civil air ambulance in North America in 1946. Regina, Canada was home to this landmark service. Still today the air ambulance service is in operation.

Only one year later in 1947, Schaefer Air Service began. This was the first air ambulance service in the U.S. Founded in Los Angeles, California by J. Walter

Schaefer. The Schaefer air ambulance service also became the first to be FAA certified in the United States.

It wasn't until November 1 of 1970, that the first German Air ambulance helicopter began service at the hospital of Harlaching, Munich. This unit was called Christoph 1. As the idea spread over Germany, the air ambulance service continued to grow rapidly. By 1975, Christoph 10 began service. Currently, around 80 helicopters are being used as air ambulances in Germany. Each unit is named after Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travelers.

Denver, Colorado was home to the first hospital-based air ambulance medical helicopter in the United States. In 1977, Flight for Life began. Soon, the helicopter air ambulances expanded to use other types of aircraft.

In 1977, Ontario, Canada a flight paramedic program began with a single rotor-wing aircraft. Today, this program has become the largest and most sophisticated air ambulance program in North America. The fleet is dispatched to over 17,000 missions annually.

Lee County, Florida began a public service air ambulance transport in 1978. They began using a Bell 47 then progressed to a BO 105. Currently, they use a BO 105 and an EC-145.

Today, the air ambulance industry has grown and expanded to become worldwide. Aircraft vary from helicopters to jets. The medical advances and technology has also grown to include high-tech tools and equipment that can effectively monitor and prolong life during medical emergencies in the air.