

+ NURSES WEEK +



DAUGHTER OF THE REVOLUTION

Anita Newcomb McGee (1864-1940), is primarily known for her hand in developing the modern version of the Army Nurse Corps we have today. McGee had the opportunity to attend private school in Washington DC and would go on to attend classes across Europe. McGee would earn her medical degree at the present-day George Washington University, where she was commended for her work in dermatology and stood second in clinical medicine post examinations. She took a post graduate course in gynecology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Between 1892 and 1896 she was one of the very few women doctors practicing medicine in the DC area. She had military connections her whole life, McGee's father, Simon Newcomb, being a rear admiral for the US Navy. At the time of the Spanish-American Civil War breaking out in 1898, McGee spear-headed the creation of the Daughter of the Revolution Hospital Corps to train volunteer nurse for navy and army service. The Daughters of the American Revolution is a hereditary organization that is made up of women directly descended from men and women who contributed to the Revolutionary War effort, of whom McGee was a member. Today they are primarily an education and outreach non-profit that promotes patriotism. Impressed with her ability to organize and execute tasks on a wide scale, she was promoted to head of all nursing under the Army Surgeon General's Department. McGee was wholly committed to creating a permanent Nursing institution inside the hierarchy of the armed forces and continued that pursuit post war time. She went on to help draft the Army Reorganization Act which formalized the creation of the Army Nurse Corps. She left military service but continued leading a foundation of Spanish-American War Nurses. She went on to tour Japan during the Russo-Japanese war in 1902, establishing a field hospital for the Imperial Japanese Navy. The Japanese Minister of War would later grant her the title of 'Superior of Nurses' which was a rank equal to commissioned officers in the Japanese Army!



THE LEGACY OF THE ARMY NURSE CORPS



NURSES HELPED BUILD OUR NATION

As far back as the Revolutionary War, brave women had been the lynchpin in keeping the Continental Army functioning and able to recover between battles. Our first army nurses were volunteers; the wives, mothers, and sisters of those soldiers who fought for independence. Most of these nurses had no formal training as it wasn't until 1873 that civilian hospitals began offering nursing programs in America. Two months after the beginning of the Civil War, mental health care expert Dorothea Lynde Dix (who lived in Trenton, NJ) was appointed as the first Superintendent of Women Nurses for the Union Army. There was huge demand for nurses under the shadow of war time and many applicants received a condensed crash course of training overseen by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman in the United States to receive a medical degree. Many of these nurses working for the Union were still not actually on army payroll, but were either volunteers or sponsored by the US Sanitary Commission. This system was not the most efficient or organized. During the 1898 Spanish-American War more than 1,500 nurses were tending the wounded via contract. Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee was appointed as Acting Assistant Surgeon for the US Forces and so it was her job to oversee all the nurses the military employed. Dissatisfied with the current setup, following the war she helped draft the Army Reorganization Act which was legislation that founded an internal Nursing infrastructure that would become the Army Nurse Corps (abbreviated as ANC). On the second of February 1901, the Army Nurse Corps became official with the ratification of the Army Reorganization Act (31 Stat. 753). An average of 100 army nurses were in active duty at any given time, appointed for a three-year period/rotation.

INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

In 1917 the United States would declare war on the German Empire, bringing the nation into WWI. During the one year that the US was an active combatant in the war, 20,000 registered nurses were recruited by the military. They would be stationed across 60 hospitals and 50 ambulance companies across the Western Front. WWI was the first 'modern' war; advances in weapons technology brought the casualties to numbers previously unimaginable. One of the most potent horrors the war introduced was a new development in chemical warfare known as 'mustard gas'. By the end of the war, 30% of all casualties were attributed to chemical warfare. Mustard gas stayed active in the air for an unusually long time when sprayed and had a habit of poisoning entire battlefields. Soldiers exposed to the gas needed to begin decontamination procedures within 30 minutes of exposure. "We have been receiving patients that have been gassed and burned in a most mysterious way", Julia Stimson, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps had said. "They had burns on their bodies, on parts that are covered with clothing." Mustard Gas can cause extreme blistering and skin burns when it contacts human skin and can wreak havoc on the lungs when breathed in. An insidious element of the gas is that symptoms can start well after exposure, meaning determining if one was hit by mustard gas is difficult in the moment. Nurses would have to decontaminate afflicted soldiers by disposing of soldiers' clothes and a rigorous cleaning regimen, all before a soldier could be taken to a hospital for proper treatment. The treatments for mustard gas exposure were varied. Eye exposure would mandate near constant eye irrigation with alkaline solution until symptoms abated. The wards were so full of victims that nurses would start at one end of the hall and go patient by patient before wrapping around the first patient to start all over again. For soldiers who inhaled gas, nurses would administer a mixture of camphor, menthol, oil, and thyme, which would help patients expel inflamed material from their lungs.



An Army Nurse Corps Uniform from 1917

A WORLD ONCE AGAIN AT WAR

Demobilization post WWI saw the armed forces pare back its nurse corps numbers considerably but restructured the corps so that they could be expanded quickly should a new war take place, which was likely in the uncertain times following the end of the war. A new Army Reorganization Act in 1920 allowed, for the first time, Army Nurse Corp personnel to receive officer-equivalent ranks and army insignia for their uniforms. Despite this, nurses, who were all women at the time, were not afforded the same rights and privileges as their male officer counterparts outside of the Nurse Corps. One benefit was that nurses were allowed to take specialty courses at civilian schools while on full pay. Another benefit of rank was how it boosted efficiency by solidifying an internal tier system of authority and accountability, thus streamlining task delegation and reporting. Before 1941, there were less than 7,000 nurses in active duty for the armed forces. That changed after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into WWII. Domestic recruitment skyrocketed amidst the pain and anger of the attack. By the end of the war the US Military had over 57,000 Army nurses stationed on ships, flight teams, field camps and general hospitals. Brave women were providing medical care on the frontlines. Nurses had to dig foxholes outside of their tents in Anzio to care for soldiers while being bombarded by German rounds, or else taken as Prisoners of War by the Japanese, or helping victims recover from concentration camps. Our nurses brought about many wartime innovations in dealing with shock, emergency resuscitation, & emergency evacuation and large scale triage.



(Above) Wartime recruitment poster for army nurses.
(Left) A field nurse preparing an insulin shot.



"THE ANGELS OF BATAAN"

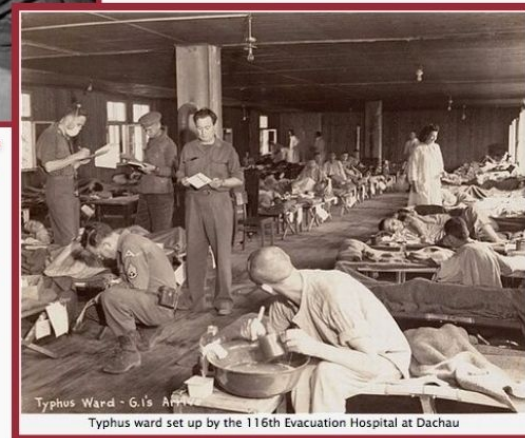
Most people may picture military nurses working away from the front lines, inside medical tents or hospitals, insulated from direct danger. This was not true for 77 women in the Philippines who found themselves prisoners of war. The Philippines were a sought after posting for nurses given how far off it was and how favorable the climate was. This idyllic station was disrupted when the Japanese began their assault on the Philippines in January of 1942. The US and Philippine Commonwealth's forces consolidated around the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island. The American and Filipino forces dug their heels in and held the line of three months against the Japanese advance, costing the Imperial Army valuable time. On April 9th, 1942 the US had no choice to surrender, resulting in over 75,000 POWs, 77 of them were nurses. This was the largest group of American women captured by the enemy during the course of the entire war. In July the Nurses were transferred to Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila. The camp was a POW city of over 6,000 soldiers. The nurses immediately set work putting together the Santa Catalina Hospital within the work camps ground. Their first task was starting a campaign among fellow prisoners to prevent the buildup of unsanitary conditions seen in other camps that led to camp-wide epidemics. The nurses had to treat injuries and illness with a shoestring supply line. Their most pressing adversary within the camp was starvation and malnutrition. The average soldier interned at Santo Tomas would lose over 32% of their body weight during their internment. These nurses had to live and operate in these conditions for three whole years of the war. Back at home, the stories of the POW women still serving their country captured the imagination of Americans at home. Lt. Juanita Redmond was stationed in the Philippines during the Japanese assault, having just been evacuated before the fall of Bataan and Corregidor and her memoir of her experiences became a national bestseller. Three motion pictures dramatizing the 'Angels of Bataan' were made congruent to their imprisonment. 1943's 'So Proudly We Hail!' was based directly off of Lt. Redmond's book, and screenings were attended recruitment booths staffed by Red Cross volunteers. Despite the increased awareness back at home, it would still be years before the women would finally be liberated on February 23rd, 1945. A 2002 study carried out by the Federal Department of Military Affairs determined that the nurses each lost roughly 30% of their body weight during imprisonment and would go on to experience service-connected disability on par with equivalent male POW survivors. Despite this, all 77 women survived their trials, their strength and compassion in the face of extreme adversity shining as a bright example for all those that follow in their footsteps.

LIBERATION AT DACHAU

By April of 1945, the war in Europe had begun winding down. The Allied forces were making progress, moving deeper and deeper into Bavaria. Dachau was a Nazi

Concentration camp

liberated by the Allies on April 29th by the 42nd & 45th Infantry Divisions and the 20th Armored Division of the US. There were 67,665 registered prisoners at Dachau. 22,100 of these were Jews while 43,350 were labeled 'political prisoners', while the remaining population falling into other ethnic and identity backgrounds. On April 26th, in advance of the American arrival, the Nazi's sent 7,000 of their prisoners on a death march into the cold and filled more than 30 railway cars with bodies, in attempt to dispose of evidence. They were too late, and the US forces were able to catch up to the marching prisoners and save those who hadn't died from exposure, starvation, or cruelty. Eighty nurses attached to the 116th and 127th evacuation hospitals could not be prepared for what they would discover upon entering the camp in early May. Lt. Charlotte Johnson Treadwell was right in the center of things, trying to make sense of the tragedy. Her team got to work immediately, cleaning and converting the prison barracks into hospital wards, building over 450 beds and eventually expanding the premises three times its original size to meet the needs of the victims. "Corpsmen brought them in one after another after another," Lt. Treadwell said. "We did anything we could to help them. We tried to give them vitamin shots, but they were still so scared, after all the Germans had done to them, that they fought us. They were terrified." Patients often had to be assist fed by nurses as they were too infirm or despondent to take care of themselves. A lot of the prisoners had deteriorated so much that conventional food would provide an adverse reaction, so glucose injections and intravenous feeding was demanded. Our Army nurses witnessed humanity at its darkest and most bleak and yet still carried the light of hope and compassion forward.



Typhus Ward - G.I.s Army
Typhus ward set up by the 116th Evacuation Hospital at Dachau

BREAKING THE COLOR LINE

Like many institutions of America at the time, the ANC was immune to the effects of segregation. At the beginning of the organization's inception, women of color were banned from entry into Corps, and this would persist for the following four decades. Enter Mabel Keaton Staupers (1890-1989); Born in Barbados in 1890, Staupers emigrated to Harlem, New York with her family at the age of 13. After attaining full US citizenship she would go on to attend Nursing School in Washington DC. Staupers would go on to become the Executive Secretary of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. The NACGN has three main objectives; First, to advance the standards & best interests of trained Nurses. Second, to break down discrimination in the nursing profession. Third, to develop leadership within the ranks of black nurses.



Photo of Mabel Keaton Staupers

From her position within the NACGN, Staupers was able to lead the charge in desegregation of the military's nursing units. Staupers would meet with Eleanor Roosevelt and together, along with the activists they cultivated, put pressure on the War Department to remove arbitrary restrictions. The War Department began to reconsider their policy. In 1941 the Army announced that they would be allowing 56 African-American nurses to work in the black military installations at Camp Livingston and Fort Bragg. This number would gradually increase over time, increasing to 160 by 1943. Staupers was still not satisfied. She was made furious by then Surgeon General, Norman T. Kirk's proposal to draft white women as nurses when there were plenty of qualified African-American Nurses ready and able to willingly fill the nurse shortage gap at the time. She would criticize this policy publicly, emphasizing the hypocrisy. The Army bent, and in 1945 they would change policy so that their nursing program was open to all applicants regardless of race. After this major milestone, Mabel Staupers would dissolve the NACGN as she believed the organization's stated mission was well on its way to completion. In 1951 the NAACP would honor her with the Spingarn Medal for her effort in advancing the rights of all African-American workers.

VALDIVAN EARTHQUAKE

In the year 1960, the nation of Chile experienced the worst earthquake in recorded history. The quake measured 9.5 on the Richter Scale hit on May 22nd at 19:11GMT and lasted for *ten whole minutes*. The consequences were widespread even beyond the immediate damage wrought by the initial earthquake, with tsunamis, landslides, and fires following. Over 6,000 casualties were reported at the time, but estimates range higher. The Chilean government reached out to the United States for assistance. On May 25th, over 60 army nurses from Fort Bragg, the 7th Field Hospital, and Fort Belvoir were airlifted to South America to help respond to the crisis. The two hospitals that supplied medical aid for the Valdivian region were completely destroyed. Less than 72 hours after the Army Nurse Corps landed in Chile there were functioning medical faculties again. The United States had donated a significant amount of new equipment to the Chilean government and so one of the ANC's missions was to train domestic personnel on its operation. The ANC went on to build a tent city and field kitchens to help shelter and feed the many citizens displaced after having their homes destroyed. All of this was done through the use of interpreters due to the language barrier. By the end of June, when relative stability was restored, ANC Nurses were treated almost as pseudo-celebrities, often being stopped in the street by on-lookers wishing to convey their thanks.

NURSING IN VIETNAM

Gender was not usually a factor in determining what duty a nurse may be assigned to perform. The trials the military faced during the Vietnam War caused conflict with established policy. At this time all servicewomen were noncombatants only and were not expected to partake in work that carried reasonable risk to their safety. Given the isolated, dangerous, and austere conditions of many of these postings, for the first time the ANC appointed male nurse officers. "Our first night in Vietnam we slept in tents ... on the ground - we didn't have cots," recalled Lieutenant Colonel William Berry. "Our first few showers were taken in a creek. Patient wards were also set up in tents on the bare ground. Eventually, concrete slabs were put down and the tents were set up on them". Medical outposts needed to be mobile, and as such lots of manual labor was required to move equipment and sand bags across difficult terrain and to dig ditches. In 1966, the 3d Surgical Hospital reorganized into one of the first all-male nursing units due to increase threat of hostility in the region. "No matter how seriously [the soldiers] were wounded, they were always asked "How's my buddy doing?" The other question that most of them ask is "When can I go back to my unit?" Lt. Berry would go on to say, "From what I hear from today's Army nurses, the character of the American Soldier has not changed. They still are more concerned about their comrades than themselves and they still ask when they can return to Unit - we are really blessed to have this national treasure."



Photo of the 3d Hospital Unit, 1966