

# THE ARMY NURSE CORPS: A COMMEMORATION OF WORLD WAR II SERVICE

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Introduction World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose. Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor." World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay on the critical support role of the Army Nurse Corps supplements a series of studies on the Army's campaigns of that war. This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Judith A. Bellafaire. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

GORDON R. SULLIVAN General, United States Army Chief of Staff

The Army Nurse Corps in World War II More than 59,000 American nurses served in the Army Nurse Corps during World War II. Nurses worked closer to the front lines than they ever had before. Within the "chain of evacuation" established by the Army Medical Department during the war, nurses served under fire in field hospitals and evacuation hospitals, on hospital trains and hospital ships, and as flight nurses on medical transport planes. The skill and dedication of these nurses contributed to the extremely low post-injury mortality rate among American military forces in every theater of the war. Overall, fewer than 4 percent of the American soldiers who received medical care in the field or underwent evacuation died from wounds or disease. The tremendous manpower needs faced by the United States during World War II created numerous new social and economic opportunities for American women. Both society as a whole and the United States military found an increasing number of roles for women. As large numbers of women entered industry and many of the professions for the first time, the need for nurses clarified the status of the nursing profession. The Army reflected this changing attitude in June 1944 when it granted its nurses officers' commissions and full retirement privileges, dependents' allowances, and equal pay. Moreover, the government provided free education to nursing students between 1943 and 1948. Military service took men and women from small towns and large cities across America and transported them around the world. Their wartime experiences broadened their lives as well as their expectations. After the war, many veterans, including nurses, took advantage of the increased educational opportunities provided for them by the government. World War II changed American society irrevocably and redefined the status and opportunities of the professional nurse.

*Early Operations in the Pacific* The Army Nurse Corps listed fewer than 1,000 nurses on its rolls on 7 December 1941, the day of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Eighty-two Army nurses were stationed in Hawaii serving at three Army medical facilities that infamous morning. Tripler Army Hospital was overwhelmed with hundreds of casualties suffering from severe burns and shock. The blood-spattered entrance stairs led to hallways where wounded men lay on the floor awaiting surgery. Army and Navy nurses and medics (enlisted men trained as orderlies) worked side by side with civilian nurses and doctors. As a steady stream of seriously wounded servicemen continued to arrive through the early afternoon, appalling shortages of medical supplies became apparent. Army doctrine kept medical supplies under lock and key, and bureaucratic delays prevented the immediate replacement of quickly used up stocks. Working under tremendous pressure, medical personnel faced shortages of instruments, suture material, and sterile supplies. Doctors performing major surgery passed scissors back and forth from one table to another. Doctors and nurses used cleaning rags as face masks and operated without gloves. Nurses at Schofield Hospital and Hickam Field faced similar difficult circumstances. The chief nurse at Hickam Field, 1st Lt. Annie G. Fox, was the first of many Army nurses to receive the Purple Heart. Established by General George Washington during the Revolutionary War, this decoration originally was for "outstanding performance of duty and meritorious acts of extraordinary fidelity." After 1932, however, the medal was usually restricted to those wounded or injured by enemy action. Although unwounded, Lieutenant Fox received her medal for "her fine example of calmness, courage, and leadership, which was of great benefit to the morale of all she came in contact with." The citation foreshadowed the nurses' contribution to World War II. Throughout 1941 the United States had responded to the increasing tensions in the Far East by deploying more troops in the Philippines. The number of Army nurses stationed on the islands grew proportionately to more than one hundred. Most nurses worked at Sternberg General Hospital in Manila and at Fort McKinley, 7 miles outside the city. However, a few nurses were at Fort Stotsenberg, 75 miles north of Manila, and two worked at Camp John Hay, located 200 miles to the north in the mountains. Several nurses worked on the island of Corregidor. The Japanese attacked the Philippines on 8 December, Philippine time. Clark Field, adjacent to the Army hospital at Fort Stotsenberg, suffered a three-hour air raid during which planes, barracks, and field shops were bombed. The hospital escaped damage, but the large number of casualties from the air attack overwhelmed the small staff. The chief nurse at Sternberg sent several of her nurses to Stotsenberg to help cope with the emergency. They remained at Stotsenberg until 27 December when they received orders to evacuate to Manila. By that time Japanese forces had landed on the main island of Luzon and were approaching the city of Manila from the north. All of the nurses stationed outside of Manila reached the city except for two nurses stranded at Camp John Hay, who were taken prisoner by the Japanese. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, declared Manila an open city and ordered the nurses to the island of Corregidor. MacArthur planned to hold Corregidor and the Bataan Peninsula and await supplies and reinforcement from the United States. He sent forty-five nurses from Corregidor to the Bataan Peninsula to prepare two emergency hospitals for U.S. and Filipino forces fighting on Bataan. General Hospital 1, near Limay, received casualties directly from the front lines. The hospital consisted of sixteen wooden buildings and was originally well supplied. More than 1,200 battle casualties requiring major surgery (traumatic amputations and head, chest, and abdominal wounds) were admitted to this hospital within a month.

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