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War Relief in World War II: Women and the American Red Cross

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WAR RELIEF IN WORLD WAR II: WOMEN AND THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

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ABSTRACT

This paper recognizes the growth of the American Red Cross (ARC) and the contributions women throughout the network of the ARC made to various goals during World War Two. This paper focuses on the work women completed particularly on the home front. While some aspects of the ARC are publicized, others, particularly on the home front, are less well-known. As the demands for women within multiple aspects of the American workforce grew, organizations like the American Red Cross contributed to bridging the gap between women in the workforce and home needs. ARC volunteers also took on the responsibility of recruiting workers for the war effort in healthcare fields and serving as a friendly face to provide solace to those hospitalized during the war.

The American Red Cross and the World War Two War Effort documents previous historiographical accounts of ARC war work from WWI to WWII, before examining key areas of war work shouldered by women of the ARC.

INTRODUCTION

The world was in the grips of total war for a second time. The war affected every community, and total war meant that every citizen was expected to contribute to aiding the war effort, all in the name of victory. Men served in the armed forces by choice or through conscription, yet men serving in combat were far from the only individuals asked to make sacrifices by contributing to the war effort. Someone had to keep things running on the home front, usually wives and mothers. The female populations of the nations at war did not sit at home while war work beckoned. For the purposes of this study, war work specifically includes any work towards the war effort completed by civilians. Women became common laborers within the war effort as men enlisted or were drafted. Several examples of war work women assisted with were organizing fundraisers and supply drives, planning recreational activities for servicemen, and engaging in medical training at hospitals or in basic home health. Given the varied methods of assistance women provided, it is surprising that all these duties could be handled in communities around the United States by one organization, the American Red Cross.

To accomplish the myriad activities coinciding with winning the war, the American Red Cross, or ARC, split into several corps. By the start of WWII, it was already a well-known relief organization utilized during times of war within the United States and abroad. The ARC had already built a reputation as a source of aid during the American Civil War and World War One. Some of the ARC's objectives shifted due to changes required for medical service and the use of military units that specialized in medical care. However, the organization remained active in several locations, like the home front or away from the front line in a combat zone. Changes to

the exact methods of relief the ARC utilized did not mean the ARC field work ended. Women contributed to the war effort through service in the Pacific and European Theaters, but international travel was not a possibility for many American women. They had homes to maintain and children to care for, but the war effort called. Local ARC chapters offered women who had larger commitments within their home communities and a desire to offer help the chance to do so. Every community had areas of need that the ARC could reach, if volunteers were available. The scope of their help covered such a wide array of activities that no Red Crosser would volunteer and find they were superfluous.

The first section will delve into the service commonly associated with the ARC during wartime: medical aid, and assistance. The war effort for Red Crossers from a medical standpoint included either work as nursing staff or as social aides in civilian and military hospitals. Other times medical assistance equated to providing preventative care. The distribution of information focused on health retention raised awareness within communities. As early as 1935, the ARC created and distributed educational outreach programs for mothers or other family members who were primary caregivers[1]. The need for these forms of outreach rose as many physicians served in the armed forces, creating a shortage of medical providers on the home front. Preventative health targeted toward agricultural communities was also distributed. Agriculture met the national demand for food and produce. However, farm work was also dangerous. Farm machinery could do serious harm. Distances between farms and healthcare services meant getting treatment at home or going to a hospital took a long time. A large portion of the outreach materials focused on housekeeping to maintain a safe home through order.[2] Local ARC chapters became vital to their native communities, which meant chapters constantly recruited members for the duration of the war.

The second section of this study is dedicated to the morale support affiliations used by the ARC. Sometimes the best help offered was a physical reminder of the people waiting back home. This “morale maintenance” had both a “front-facing” and “back-facing” end. The “front-facing” element included Red Cross Canteens and Red Cross Clubs that were formed within communities. At these recreational areas, a friendly conversation, hot coffee, and doughnuts waited for men who were being shuffled to different postings. The Red Crossers who were placed in charge of these organizations saw that no visitor was bored, underfed, or lonely whether the visiting serviceman was posted nearby and became a regular or was passing through for an afternoon.

The third section of this study examines the “back-facing” side of morale work. The ARC proved instrumental in collecting or creating supplies to send overseas as relief. This does not count blood as a medical supply; that is included in the first section. This side of ARC morale work was highlighted by organization of home sewing and knitting drives to send items to soldiers, displaced persons, and prisoners of war by way of Red Cross care packages. Other forms of relief included organizing donations of food and scrap metal, as well as liberty bond sales. The proceeds of these drives and fundraisers would benefit local communities, or they would be used as fundraisers for the overall war effort.

1. Joel A. Tarr and Mark Tebeau, “Managing Danger in the Home Environment, 1900-1940,” *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 4 (July 1, 1996): pp. 807, https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/29.4.797.

2. Tarr and Tebeau, “Managing Danger in the Home Environment,” 808.

The ARC was an effective vehicle for fundraising as the name "Red Cross" was already closely associated with charity and helping those most in need. Unfortunately, there were snags in the fundraising efforts. They were not the only organization raising funds or materials, the nation was still recovering from economic depression, and the main breadwinners of most households were either enlisted or drafted into the military. Still, in the name of the war effort, the fundraising initiatives continued throughout the course of the war.

The examples stated above are only a small sampling of Red Cross activities during WWII, but they are some of the areas where women contributed the most. Besides offering multiple opportunities for women of nearly any age to contribute to the war effort, ARC service offered these women a chance to help just as much at home, where the progress made by the ARC was measurable, as if they served overseas. The ARC provided multiple opportunities for volunteerism and benefits not only for soldiers going to and returning from war, but also as a mainstay within communities. However, many of the actions taken by local chapters have largely gone unrecognized for a variety of reasons. One such reason is because many Red Crossers were women who were encouraged to aid the war effort, but many had priorities they could not sacrifice at home, such as childcare. Another explanation is that the work they conducted was already a societal expectation, as altruism within a community led by women existed even when the nation was not at war. Still another reason is the rural nature of parts of the nation where the ARC was active and the fact that rural communities, either due to lack of resources or to the small-town knowledge that everyone is involved in everything, preserve less documentation of different activities.

With the consideration that there were several bars to accumulating materials surrounding the ARC during their WWII activities, this study will examine the services multiple chapters of the American Red Cross documented. Examples will include the well-known capacities of medical and morale-building work to illustrate how interwoven the war effort truly was in the heart of the nation. The women active within the ARC helped win the war. It is true that they did not perform combat missions or supply intelligence. The tasks they performed as acts of service provided aid and raised morale within their home communities. As the war influenced everyone's lives, the ARC offered stratagems to meet the shifting needs for health and relief at home, as well as caring for the needs of soldiers. American Red Cross women throughout the nation met the demands of war for both those fighting it and the communities at home affected by it.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Red Cross services during wartime extended from the establishment of the ARC after the American Civil War to increased activity during the First World War and interwar period, to the Second World War. The services and social perception of the ARC have been the focus of a few published works. These records have been classified as social history, gender studies, and economic history. All are written from a bottom-up approach. Studies have explained the evolutionary nature of the American branch of the Red Cross and the changes in the areas of service provided by the ARC. These studies documenting the contributions made covered medical help, disaster relief, and social outreach. The ARC altered services to meet the needs of whatever, and wherever, the current situation was.

One source that details the evolution of the American Red Cross through the First World

War is Julia F. Irwin's *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening*. Her work illustrates how humanitarianism became a social expectation by studying how "U.S. citizens and their government together defined foreign civilian aid as an American responsibility."[3] Similar points are made by Marian Moser Jones in *The American Red Cross: From Clara Barton to the New Deal.* Both sources outline the beginnings of the American Red Cross with a focus on humanitarian aid. Both works highlight the American Red Cross's origins as a military relief organization and illustrate the importance of care paid to civilians as much as to military personnel.

As the title suggests, Moser Jones covers the American Red Cross from the Civil War through the Great Depression. This includes its charter and how the American organization operated differently from the International Red Cross at its beginnings. For instance, instead of only reserving the American Red Cross for army aid in wartime, founder Clara Barton ensured that the ARC would also have the means to assist in national emergencies such as "floods, fires, epidemics, accidents, and social unrest in the United States and abroad."[4] By expanding the purview of the American organization of the Red Cross, Barton set a precedent for the humanitarian efforts of the ARC to also apply to civilians at home and in farther-flung places of the world. Barton may not have realized what shape those humanitarian efforts would take, but without her work to expand the mission, the ability of the ARC to lend aid would have fallen short. In a war more than seventy years past Barton's time and "the decades during which the American Red Cross emerged, grew to prominence, and reached its zenith as the primary purveyor of humanitarian relief…"[5] Mosher Jones' book also clearly illustrates the difficulties associated in the management of the ARC as multiple disasters at home were met with administrative changes in priorities from the White House. Each change meant that the ARC found themselves competing for authority and funding as other federal programs took shape.[6] This is contrasted with the earlier sentiments set forth in Irwin's book where Presidents William H. Taft and Woodrow Wilson both "recognized the ARC as a critical public instrument…"[7] This increased show of presidential support provided a strengthened sense of legitimacy and trustworthiness to the Red Cross name and insignia through WWI to WWII.

The timeline of the ARC's formation to the New Deal is better articulated in Moser Jones' book, but even this resource offers a limited scope of the specific actions taken by the ARC. Mosher Jones focuses more on the bureaucracy of running the organization and the beginnings of political maneuvering from voluntary organizations like the ARC, to government sponsorship. Administrative needs such as securing partnerships with other local aid foundations who were working towards similar goals and risk analysis involved with sending aid workers to foreign areas of disaster, famine, or war, all factor into Mosher Jones' study of the ARC.

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3. Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

4. Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 9.

5. Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*, 11, 418.

6. Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal, 418.*

7. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 35.

While the documentation of the early days of the ARC are important to put the humanitarian efforts of the twentieth century in context, other sources are needed to examine specific examples of WWII involvement. Aside from a helpful timeline of different "eras" within ARC history, WWII-era Red Cross activities are reserved for the epilogue in Moser Jones' book, and Irwin's book is primarily focused on WWI. The research presented in these two works is helpful in highlighting the importance of the ARC's emphasis of volunteerism as civic duty.

The economics of the American Red Cross (and the war effort in general) is outlined in Stephanie Clemens' *Civic Gifts*: *Voluntarism and the Making of the American Nation-State.* This book looks at overall attitudes towards monetary giving from the inception of the ARC under Clara Barton through the New Deal era. President William H. Taft sent open communication to state governors stating if the governors needed "…large and unusual relief measures, you are invited to make the freest use of services…" provided by the Red Cross.[8] Financial gifts to the ARC grew after 1935 as corporate giving through matching grants allowed companies to charitably give while avoiding government red tape, and include the public with the match promises.[9] Clemens' work also examines the growth of the ARC as local chapters build into the larger institution known today since those ties built "…a web of relationships that cut cross-region."[10] Among the examples of monetary donations and the social ties created by fundraising initiatives, several examples of Red Cross drives are highlighted. Clemens' work shifts from only comparing and illustrating how the ARC changed over time to looking deeper into the impact of economic donations, governmental oversight, and other fundraising efforts with a larger emphasis on the Second World War.[11]

As federal funding and a growing reputation expanded the American Red Cross' influence, there was an emphasis placed on home-health and safety. In the article *Managing Danger in the Home Front Environment: 1900-1940*, Joel A. Tarr and Mark Tebeau outline the evolution, out of necessity, that changed how home life was perceived. They repeat the idea that women were the "most responsible" for managing the safety of the home, and, in different times of war, the absence of men made this frame of mind more than simply a stereotype or gender role.[12] The social movement of women becoming "house managers" was happening before the outbreak of world war, particularly as sanitation and the awareness of "house diseases" and their prevention grew.[13] Tarr and Tebeau also outline growing awareness of home accidents. As early as 1917, they report that home accidents could interfere with a person's ability to work in the industrialized workforces around the nation. The ARC took a more active role in home safety shortly before the outbreak of World War II, especially among rural communities with the formation of the Home and Farm Accident Prevention Program. This program was provided by a

8. Elisabeth Stephanie Clemens, *Civic Gifts: Voluntarism and the Making of the American Nation-State* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press, 2020), 111.

9. Clemens, *Civic Gifts*, 131.

10. Clemens, *Civic Gifts,* 106.

11. Clemens, *Civic Gifts,* 131

12. Tarr and Tebeau, "Managing Danger in the Home Environment," 798.

13. Tarr and Tebeau, "Managing Danger in the Home Environment," 798.

web of connected local ARC chapters.[14] The program in its early days was not immediately effective as it was mostly a campaign centered around public service announcement radio broadcasts and short films. In 1941, the ARC sponsored classes of accident prevention and safety procedures after the Farm Accident Program was combined with the Water Safety Program. However, it was concluded that the results were "at best, slow and uncertain."[15]

"World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates," by Mary Schweitzer examined participation rates of women in the labor force during WWII. This article mentions ARC women taking on childcare duties so other women could fill jobs elsewhere. Childcare was provided more as a health and safety check for children who were home with an illness rather than those with a need for around-the-clock care.[16] This article addresses the popular stereotype of women jumping into wartime jobs. Schweitzer shows how the stereotype does not often account for the women who were already wives and mothers with preexisting responsibilities for whom dropping everything to go to work was not always a straightforward task. As Schweitzer stated, single women and childless wives of men who had already deployed were in the workforce since 1940.[17] The rates of women participants in war work, as well as their ages and marital statuses, shifted during the war years. By 1943, the lack of male workers was so apparent that women who had previously avoided leaving the home were called to several industries, creating the need for Red Cross childcare. The rates of female workers who did not want to leave the home for the workforce would drop by 1944 as men began returning home.[18]

Home-health services, including childcare for sick children, were not the only healthcare-related assistance offered by the ARC. Nursing within the ARC was a familiar wartime service that was decreasing by the Second World War, as organizations like the Army Nurse Corps offered direct assistance. However, this did not discourage or bring an end to an ARC presence in both military and civilian hospitals. The Gray Lady Service is a documented corps within the ARC that was given authorization to assist with socialization and convalescence, as well as organizing supplies to be used in local hospitals. Sheri Robb's article titled, "Marian Erdman: Contributions of an American Red Cross Hospital Recreation Worker"[19] is a case study into a specific aspect of Red Cross hospital care Robb explains how music as therapy, while not officially recognized as a scientific course of treatment in the 1940s, was a method of treatment several Red Crossers utilized to put convalescent patients at ease. Even if it was not given an official designation, music helped "alleviate homesickness" and "lift spirts" while also encouraging those participants in the program to designate musical therapy as "an organized [20] One such participant, Marian Erdman, served at three different military hospitals as a recreation

14. Tarr and Tebeau, "Managing Danger in the Home Environment," 807.

15. Tarr and Tebeau, "Managing Danger in the Home Environment," 808.

16. Mary M. Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (1980): pp. 89-95, http://www.jstor.org.unk.idm.oclc.org/stable/2120427. 94.

17. Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates," 92.

18. Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rates," 93.

19. Sheri L. Robb, "Marian Erdman: Contributions of an American Red Cross Hospital Recreation Worker," *Journal of Music Therapy* 36, no. 4 (January 1999), 316.

20. Robb, "Marian Erdman," 317.

worker. Although her focus was on music, she was required to serve in multiple recreation roles as the need arose. This required her to attend the customary training courses in Washington, D.C.,[2122]

Amy Platt's "Go to the Yard as a Worker, Not as a Woman" illustrates wartime experiences in several areas for Oregon women, including the work of an individual who helped establish Red Cross Clubs and canteens overseas.[23] The institution of these tiny zones of Americana offered a taste (literally, many clubs served American style cuisine) of home. By reminding soldiers of the familiar, Red Cross canteens and clubs were able to relieve a bit of tension and maintain a soldier's emotional well-being.

Women in the workforce expanded as more and more men were called to join the military or fill other necessary war-related positions. The contributions of women to the war effort also increased as the war continued at the home front as well, including with service in the American Red Cross. This type of service to the ARC was primarily staffed by volunteers who worked within the larger outfit of Red Cross workers by dividing into local chapters to meet the needs of the community as well as soldiers. Here, women would train future Red Crossers for various forms of volunteerism. Common activities of the Red Cross ranged from the more mundane health and safety public awareness campaigns to war drives for bond sales, fundraising, or other supplies. Many local Red Crossers served soldiers' needs as they returned stateside for rest and recreation or convalescent care.

Although these works build on the work done by historians, they each demonstrate that past scholarship has not provided many detailed examples of volunteerism during the Second World War especially through the well-known organization of the ARC. Specifically, they show a gap in what the day-to-day examples of volunteerism looked like at home in the United States. Therefore, the following research aims to compile a more detailed construction of what everyday women did as a part of their lives for the war years during the 1940s.

THE ARC ON HEALTH AND SAFETY

Calling on Nurses

American Red Cross assistance within the healthcare field was established long before the outbreak of the Second World War. By the 1940s groups of nursing corps, like the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, were attached directly to the military. However, this did not eliminate nursing efforts made by the ARC. The ARC was behind much of the Nurse Corps recruitment. At the outset of World War II, ARC nurses were civilians even when tied to a military branch, though individuals like Edith Nourse Rogers worked to change that classification as some women's relief groups like the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps gained official recognition by the military.[24] Yet the women of the ARC Nursing Services retained civilian status, and even

22. Robb, "Marian Erdman," 320.

23. Amy E. Platt, ""Go into the Yard as a Worker, Not as a Woman": Oregon Women During World War II, a Digital Exhibit on the Oregon History Project," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (2015): pp. 234-248.

24. "Congressional Record May 27, 1943 78th Congress - 1st Session," 89 Congressional Record May 27, 1943 78th Congress - 1st Session 8 (1943), 4992-5001

while official ARC nurses took a backseat in combat situations, there were still calls for "volunteer nursing aides" throughout the course of the war. An estimate from an Omaha, Nebraska, paper stated that twenty percent of the city's doctors and professional nurses had gone to war. So, the Red Cross would be looked to fill the deficit with the volunteer aides, whom the papers deemed a "godsend."[25] These volunteer nurses wore the blue and white of Red Cross medical volunteers and would take positions in local hospitals, as nurses who had previous training joined military medical service. As the ARC nurses became regulated, many nurses also found themselves leading training sessions in both emergency aid as well as in home-health aid. An extant photograph in the Library of Congress's collection shows a group of three "Red Cross student nurses" practicing an emergency transition splint on the arm of a "victim" of an unexpected injury, such as one might see in an air raid.[26]

The ARC recruited women from a broad demographic, especially as more and more medically trained personnel left for overseas military duties. On their recruitment tools women were asked several questions regarding their education backgrounds, including their experience and nursing specializations. Ladies wishing to join the Nursing Service were required to submit a questionnaire listing their qualifications. A prospective nurse was asked about her current employment and whether that employment was tied to a pre-existing government service.[27] They were also asked about what training courses they would be interested in teaching as well as any physical limitations that would need to be taken into consideration.[28] The Nursing Service accepted recruits from different stages of life, including those who already had nurse's training to the totally inexperienced, and single or married women. There were two different "reserves" of nurses. The First Reserve was for single women and women under the age of forty, whose line on the questionnaire only asked them to go into detail regarding what kind of service they would prefer. The Second Reserve was for married women, those over forty years, or those who had a disability that might impede their performance of certain duties. This second group was not asked about occupational preference, but rather what kinds of barriers stood between them and performing their duties. An emphasis was placed on their service being required in cases of "national emergency."[29]

Training for service with the American Red Cross was a fast affair, but it included several criteria to prepare nurses for any wartime eventuality. Even if a nurse did not volunteer to go overseas, all ARC nurses were trained in trauma assessment and emergency aid, as battlefield care was different from what most nurses, even professionals before the war began, were accustomed to. The six-week training courses consisting of small groups occurred in Washington, D.C. Training at the D.C. headquarters meant that "campus" would have had a mix

25. "Many Nurses, Doctors Gone Red Cross Aides Are Called 'Godsend,'" *Sunday World Herald*, February 28, 1943, 58 no. .26 edition, sec. A, p. 8.

26. Helene Fritz, *Nurse Training. Student Nurses,* photograph, *Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Farm Security Administration), United States Office of War Administration, accessed April 16, 2023.

27. Agnes H. Stanfield, "Questionnaire for the Nursing Service with the American Red Cross" (College Park, n.d.).

28. Stanfield, "Questionnaire for the Nursing Service with the American Red Cross" (College Park, n.d.).

29. Stanfield, "Questionnaire for the Nursing Service with the American Red Cross"

of trainees, gaining skills in nursing and other medical related fields, recreation (which sometimes crossed the line into the medical field), the motor corps, and more. Once training was complete the new recruits were placed in their assignments, some overseas, some stateside. In the later war years training was completed without a trip to the Washington offices. When most of the labor was coming from volunteers to the ARC instead of paid staff, the training courses were conducted within a volunteer's home chapter.

Nursing on the home front did not only extend to hospital assistance, so ARC nurses were also trained for health problems that were more likely to arise at home. In a time when whole communities were expected to contribute to winning the war, there was no time to fill hospital beds unnecessarily. All Red Cross nurses were trained in disease prevention as well as how to administer vaccinations. Just as important as combat nurse training, the ARC built upon home-education health initiatives from decades before. ARC chapters reached out to their own communities to educate the public (mainly women) on how to best manage their homes to be as safe as possible. This included disease prevention, but also fire and water safety instructions. Home-health training courses were led by different members of ARC nursing staff, and high schools adopted "Red Cross Home Nursing" for use in their curriculum.[30] The textbook covered first aid lessons, methods for recognizing signs of illness, and how to prepare for an emergency.[31]

Home-health was also not solely reliant on whomever was left at home to manage. Part of the ARC's legacy was having some of their volunteers available to assist with childcare, particularly if a child was home sick and their caretaker was working. With war work demanding shift rotations that could not always accommodate an absent worker, who did mothers call when a child was down with an illness and would otherwise be left unattended? Their local chapter of the American Red Cross. Depending on the resources available for each local chapter, calls would be made to wherever chapter "headquarters" met. If the community had a "chapter house," office staff would send a volunteer to the residence of the sick child, and the mother could go to her shift.

The Gray Lady Corps

Assistance in the medical field by local Red Crossers did not always relate directly to nursing in a medical field. Bridging the gap between medical and recreational assistance is where one of the ARC's prominent sources of volunteers is found. Officially, they were known as the "Red Cross Hospital and Recreation Corps," but colloquially, this group became known as the "Gray Ladies."[32] These volunteers were an element of the Red Cross beginning during the First World War yet have gone largely unrecognized in the scope of popular memory, with few academic publications readily available. Although most Gray Ladies didn't fit the flashier aesthetic of Hollywood ingenue single ladies stepping up to assist the war effort overseas, they did contribute to the war effort. In fact, most Gray Ladies were married and oftentimes over forty

30. Lulu St. Clair Blaine, "American Red Cross Home Nursing," *American Journal of Public Health* 34, no. 8 (August 1, 1944): p. 908.

31. St. Clair Blaine, "American Red Cross Home Nursing," *American Journal of Public Health*, 908.

32. "Women an Important Part of American Red Cross History," American Red Cross (American Red Cross, February 28, 2023).

(though membership requirements stated anyone between twenty-one and fifty could apply).[33] Even though a large portion of the Gray Ladies were middle-aged, their nickname was not a jibe at their age. Rather, it was due to their assigned uniform color of gray. Dresses were most common, but uniforms also consisted of a gray skirt and blouse, that were paired with a coif and veil.[34] Because the women of the Gray Lady Corps were active within their home communities, volunteering in multiple organizations, and did not require outside promotion, their actions were already understood by their peers. It was also not unheard of to forgo accolades during the war as the kind of work volunteers undertook was an expectation of war work. Excessive accolades could have been interpreted as distasteful or selfish. This is not to say that these women were invisible. There are several newspaper articles covering areas of Gray Lady work, from graduation ceremonies, to varying daily activities they performed.[35]

The primary objective of the Gray Lady Corps, as their official moniker suggests, was morale upkeep at different hospitals. This included brightening the spirits of both injured and unwell servicemen, in addition to the greater community. Recreation within the bounds of a hospital may seem like an impossible task, but the Gray Ladies rose to the challenge. Part of the training for a Gray Lady was like Nursing Service training. The training included a brief probationary period at a hospital, conversing with patients, and spending several minutes with one person or a small group for much needed socialization, which was not always possible for regular hospital staff. Activities like reading with patients were popular. Gray Ladies may have been associates of a hospital, but the rush of regular hospital staff was the opposite of what a Gray Lady was expected to do. They were specifically assigned to perform tasks that "hospital nurses and Red Cross nurse's aides did not have time to do."[36] Regardless of the task requested of them, the Gray Ladies were kept busy. The women in gray could step in to make beds or assist in nurseries, provided the babies did not require overly specialized treatment.

A basic requirement of the corps was to serve a minimum of fifty hours a month (though many served more) and the corps served in nine area hospitals in the Omaha, Nebraska, area alone - all of the corps members happy to write a letter, read one to a patient, or even drop off books or magazines if active conversation was not wanted.[37] As the demand for nurses continued to rise and nursing aides were not always available, occasionally Gray Ladies were called to fill gaps at an administrative level. They would guide families to and from waiting rooms, assist with clerical work to free nurses from desks, and feed "cast and eye" patients – those who were left with mobility impairments because of injury or surgical recovery.[38]

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33. "Seek 60 Women to Serve as Red Cross Gray Ladies," *Evening World Herald*, October 7, 1942, 58 no. 8 edition, p. 14.

34. "Graduation Ceremonies Held for 71 Gray Ladies," *Evening World Herald*, June 18, 1942, 57 n0. 244 edition, p. 12. The full coif and veil uniform was mostly reserved for press or official functions, not during daily activity.

35. World Herald, "Graduation Ceremonies Held for 71 Gray Ladies," June 18, 1942,
See also: "Gray Ladies' Chief Duty Is Talking With Patients," *Sunday World Herald*, December 17, 1944, 60 no. 16 edition, p. 56.; "Gray Ladies to Host Picnic at Elmwood," *Sunday World Herald*, July 19, 1942, 75 no. 45 edition, sec. E, p. 67; "New Class for Gray Ladies," *Sunday World Herald*, August 27, 1944, 59 no. 52 edition, sec. E, p. 6.

35. "Gray Ladies' Chief Duty Is Talking With Patients," *Sunday World Herald*, December 17, 1944, 60 no. 16 edition, p. 56.

37. Sunday World Herald, "Gray Ladies' Chief Duty Is Talking With Patients," December 17, 1944.

38. Gray Ladies Work Harder," *Morning World Herald*, July 30, 1942, 77 no 258 edition, sec. A, p. 62.

Lifeblood of War Relief

During the war several areas of focus for the ARC intersected. One area where medical assistance intersected with supply and relief efforts most was blood supply. The program to benefit the armed services through supplying blood for transfusions was launched in 1941, with the most blood stored in blood banks in June of 1944.[39] This program proved crucial to providing blood to the military and civilians injured in areas of war, as blood transfusions were one of the only ways to quickly and successfully combat shock.[40] The Red Cross was the sole organization tasked with collecting blood, testing it, storing it in banks, and shipping it overseas. All communities with a Red Cross presence took part in blood drives to ensure the need for blood was met. This included distributing educational material, as well as print and radio ads requesting the public's help. One such advertisement, found in an edition of *Time*, played on the public's sense of duty and a little bit of fear, as it accuses the "7th Column" of carelessness, with recklessly endangering the lives of Americans not enlisted. Playing on the now well-known home health angle and combined with the new need for blood donors, Americans were urged to donate their blood to the Red Cross without delay. The ad even went so far as to inform the public that "plasma can now be dried and stored indefinitely."[41] This would purportedly help those squeamish or indecisive donors avoiding excuses about blood not making it to a certain theater of war without becoming compromised.

Within the same issue of *Time*, an article that discussed several aspects of ARC war work highlighted the blood supply program. Once again, sharing the convenience of dried plasma in transit to New Guinea in word and photographic evidence, the article emphasized the importance donated blood had on the lives of soldiers. At the time of the issue's publication in 1943, total blood donations received by the Red Cross numbered 1.5 million pints. The need was ever present, as the article pleaded for "almost four times more" that amount to meet military demands.[42]

Newspapers across the nation encouraged continued donations, ensuring the calls were not kept to brief mentions in ads. An article out of the *Pittsburgh Press* remarked on how painless the process was and that the donation only took ten minutes, so readers did not have to fear a lengthy absence from work or home.[43] In Fort Worth, the press encouraged donations by drumming up a youthful rabbi. A feature article named him as Fort Worth's "only member of the

39. "Red Cross Nursing: WWII 1941-1945," American Red Cross (American Red Cross), accessed April 16, 2023, https://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/history/nursing.html.

40. American Red Cross, "Red Cross Nursing: WWII 1941-1945"
Blood banking services would expand for civilians outside of the war as supply centers opening in the United States by the late 1940s.

41. Time, "Don't Give Your Blood to the 7th Column," March 8, 1943, p. 6. The 7th Column was the home front propaganda term for recklessness or carelessness.

42. "Red Badge of Courage," *Time Magazine*, March 8, 1943, pp. 11-12.

43. Georgia Powers, "Giving Blood to Uncle Sam Proves Painless Donation," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 14, 1941, 50, 173 edition, p. 37.

Gallon Club" as of 1944.[44] In some locations donations were made easier on donors by having mobile blood units travel across state lines to encourage further donations. Such an instance took place in Omaha, Nebraska. At said blood drive, a mere 100 people volunteered for a blood donation when a goal of over 1,000 had been set by the Douglas County Red Cross, so a chapter from Kansas City was asked to bring a mobile blood center in order to create one in a more reachable location.[45]

RECREATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Canteen and Club Services

The American Red Cross during World War II is also famous for its recreational support outside of hospital wards. These interpersonal volunteer positions included serving the public with a positive attitude. This brief oasis from the realities of war came about by way of the Red Cross Canteen Services. These canteens could be mobile (trucks with canteen appliances and supplies,) or permanent (fixed locations) and were established in a war zone or at home. Calling them an oasis was no exaggeration. Depending on which canteen soldiers entered, the canteen may have been the only reminder of what home was like for miles. As volunteers met them in cheerful blue, patrons could find a moment's respite from whatever was happening outside of the canteen doors. Even the Clubmobile versions of canteen service, while perhaps not as easily a form of visual escapism, met them within active war zones. Regardless of where the canteen was, visitors, mostly soldiers but also civilian military workers and even other Red Crossers, could find American-style food and drink, candy or chocolate, cigarettes, and small games like playing cards so long as the supply was reliable. By far, the most famous fixture at any Red Cross canteen, even the ones that had four wheels, was coffee and doughnuts. Many canteen workers were fondly remembered as being a part of the "Donut Dollies" into the post-WWII era, with Dollies active as late as the Vietnam conflict.[46] All these goods, and the conversation that accompanied them, were free of charge.

The canteens were a place to sit and relax and enjoy the limited creature comforts many servicemen had gone without. They could chat with each other or the volunteers, but they could also use the quiet moments to write letters or reread correspondence from home. Some canteens even offered light medical care. As most Red Crossers had musical abilities or travelled with a record player, most canteens were a place to get entertainment as well. Canteen volunteers would put on small variety shows or sit down at a piano for a sing-along with the troops. Group games like bingo were also enjoyed. Some canteens were so large that they were a club, rather than a canteen. Due to the number of people needed to operate them, the clubs were less numerous. London boasted a large club, known as The Rainbow Corner, that never shut down. The Rainbow Corner was used as a regular canteen and as a pit stop for Red Crossers as they made

44. Nadeane Walker, "Gallon Club Rabbi, at 24, Versatile Man," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, February 27, 1944, 64 Ed. 7 edition, p. 23
The Rabbi had been donating his rare AB blood type since he was sixteen; even if he had to lie about his age to do so.

45. "Red Cross Asks for Blood Donations," *Evening World Herald*, February 15, 1944, 59, ed. 138 edition, p. 1.

46. "'Donut Dollies' Supported Members of the Military during Vietnam, Other Wars," American Red Cross (American Red Cross, 2022), https://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/news/2021/donut-dollies-supported-us-service-members-during-vietnam-war.html.

their way from the United States to further reaches of Europe.

One such stateside club was at Offutt Airfield (today, Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska). The Red Cross operated the canteen so soldiers coming to Nebraska, or headed to their next destination, would have a listening ear and refreshments that brought back a little bit of home.[47] Another small canteen could be found in Omaha in Union Station, where soldiers could wait for their next train.[48] Keeping the canteens fully staffed was important, and difficult, so there were often calls for more workers in local newspapers. Luckily, for most canteen staff the training was quick and could be condensed to the "minimum" if staff shortages were getting desperate.[49]

Supplies and Relief

Fundraising and drives to raise materials, if not actual funds, was not an unheard-of wartime request. The sale of war bonds goes back nearly as far as the history of the United States and the American Red Cross was no stranger to supporting a war drive. The ARC took part in several different war drives, including those for money, scrap metal, and clothing. What makes most of the various drives unique from other aspects of the ARC is that those who benefitted from these drives were often community members. Sometimes beneficiaries of the drives would be victims of war elsewhere, such as orphans or the homeless who lost their homes because of bombings, but several drives stayed within local communities. Major fundraising initiatives, or War Fund Drives, were used to assist military families who had lost their only breadwinner as they adjusted to a household that was down one member. These drives would try to reach all members of a community, soliciting donations from individuals off the street, going door-to-door, or asking larger businesses for fundraising assistance.

Clothing drives sought old clothing and other items to be donated to groups in need. These donations were the exception to all proceeds of war drives staying within a community. Occasionally, donated clothing or newly homemade goods were sent to orphanages or organizations for refugees. The Red Cross also offered aid packages in prisoner of war camps. In addition to clothing, a Red Cross care package contained soap, meat, and cans of margarine or other food items. Depending on availability or destination, it may not have been possible to consume all the items, but things like chocolate, or instant chocolate powder, and cigarettes were also included. The number of cigarette packs would vary, as one Omaha, Nebraska newspaper explained, because they were used as "filler" items.[50] These care packages would be sent to groups in most need through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who would also try to exchange letters of prisoners of war, monitor the treatment of the prisoners, and offer

47. Dorothy Uhl, "Airport Canteen," *Sunday World Herald*, July 9, 1944, 45 edition, sec. C, p. 38, https://www.newspapers.com/image/882446760/?terms=Red%20Cross.

48. Marjorie Disbrow, "War Work Routine Familiar for Many Omaha Women," *Sunday World Herald*, February 8, 1942, 57 no.22 edition, p. 57.
This train station is now the Durham Museum.

49. "New Call Made for Canteen Aids," *Evening World Herald*, December 3, 1945, 61 Ed. 76 edition, p. 10.

50. "Red Cross Food Goes to Allied Prisoners," *Omaha Daily Journal-Stockman*, March 25, 1944, 58 Ed. 242 edition, p. 3.

medical and spiritual outreach. The effectiveness and success of the ICRC's actions has been scrutinized since the war ended, but whether they were as effective as originally stated or not does not alter the fact that this branch of the American Red Cross still handled the distribution of collected relief goods. Very rarely, Red Cross workers were also captured and became prisoners of war themselves; they would write, when permitted, informing whoever received their mail of goods that were extremely scarce. If those POWs were lucky, more goods of value or higher priority items would be sent in the next care package.

Not everything was collected for refugees, displaced persons, or prisoners of war. Sometimes knitted goods like vests and socks were asked for especially and sewing circles (privately organized, or ones run through the Red Cross) would donate their goods to be sent to the military so soldiers would receive a handmade item in Red Cross organized care packages too. Items such as socks, vests, or washcloths were knitted and sent overseas to help pad other items within a care package as well.[51]

CONCLUSION

The work conducted by the American Red Cross during World War II was extensive. Traditional nursing efforts that had survived major military actions were forced to change to meet the demand for service while matching a more formalized government organization with military oversight. This required the traditional Nursing Service to take on a slightly more administrative role of recruiter and teacher as opposed to active nurse on the front lines. New ARC nurses had to constantly be trained for various forms of medical preparedness, so they could serve as leaders and teachers themselves. American Red Cross nurses also had to provide healthcare for those left at home by assisting in hospitals, especially as more of the healthcare personnel with more extensive experience were called to combat zones. Where available, nursing volunteers educated the public on ways to prevent accidents and stave off disease, including training younger generations to be more aware of their own health and safety.

The American Red Cross also got behind the valuable wartime activity of blood collection and distribution. The new methods of screening and saving blood for extended transport were a true lifesaving measure, not only an example of the valued service of the ARC. Soldiers and civilians alike benefitted from the Red Cross's efforts to collect blood. In terms of legacy, this one has outlived most of the ARC's wartime activities, as Red Cross blood donation campaigns are still a solid presence in communities around the nation.

Recreational activities and raising morale were steady fixtures of ARC during the Second World War. Whether hospital patients benefitted from the kind smiles that accompanied the steady hands of a Gray Lady feeding them, or reading a novel aloud for a half-hour, and any of the other tasks the women Gray Ladies were asked to complete, the outreach helped patients in recovery.

Diversions from the reality of war were not reserved for those confined to a hospital ward. The steady establishment and management of Red Cross clubs, Clubmobiles and canteens within the United States and near battlefields worked to preserve the mental health of the men in the armed forces. While women of each club or canteen could not offer indefinite relief from wartime service, they were able to remind those in uniform that they were not alone or forgotten.

51. Clemens, *Civic Gifts*, 147.

Involving a community was part of the expectation of a world experiencing total war. Community involvement during WWII was not always a grand display of support. Instead, the American Red Cross worked with the community by organizing several different methods to help the war effort. Sometimes that also meant working together as a community for the good of those within the community. At other times, it meant donating what an individual had to help people they would never meet. Money could help them procure medicine, food, or other items. Donated goods would go to help clothe families in need or people separated from loved ones and forced into new and strange, sometimes hostile, environments to begin the slow process of starting life over. Packages filled with goods could be used to comfort soldiers, refugees, or prisoners of war. These goods could go a long way in preserving a life. Even if that individual did not know those involved in creating and distributing the care packages, they were connected to someone else, who also benefitted from that single action.

The American Red Cross was not always front and center in World War II. Most of the individuals involved with the organization never made front-page headlines or had a decisive hand in obtaining military victory. But the individuals who wore each uniform, at home and abroad, played a vital role in wartime activity. These Red Crossers, most of them women and volunteers, sacrificed their time to rally their communities to do their part in aiding the war effort.

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