

EDITORIALS

Nurses in the Headlines

NURSING has always been news in wartime. Haldora the Dane; nuns on many a battlefield; Florence Nightingale at Scutari; American nurses in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, and in most of the countries of Europe during and after World War I—through the centuries these and many more have contributed to the glorious traditions of nursing. British nurses in an inferno at Dunkerque that was more appalling than anything Dante ever portrayed; New Zealand nurses in the holocaust of Greece; American nurses at Pearl Harbor and at Bataan! Nurses are in the news. Horrible news and nerve-shattering dread for anxious families, but glorious news, too, for our nurses are measuring up to the best the world has known.

The *Times* (New York) of April 12, to illustrate a story of the bombing of a base hospital in Bataan, carried a picture of Lieutenant Josephine Nesbitt, Captain Maude C. Davison, and Second Lieutenant Helen M. Hennesey. Captain Davison, promoted to that rank in 1941, had been assigned to the corps in 1918 and had served with the Army of Occupation in Germany. Lieutenant Nesbitt, also a veteran of World War I, is one of the nurses who had been recommended for promotion by General MacArthur after the first attack on the Philippines. Lieutenant Hennesey has been in the Corps only since 1938. Later press reports indicate that the Army transferred all sixty-eight of the nurses stationed there from Bataan to Australia, where General MacArthur personally presented them to

“the press.” How they must have regretted that orders required them to leave their hundreds of patients.

The magazine section of the *Times* of April 12, undoubtedly made up and printed before the story of Bataan had been flashed through the ether, carried the now familiar recruiting legend “Needed: 50,000 nurses,” with the arresting by-line, “Nursing is now a big-time career.”

In a handful of recent clippings the following headlines are of particular interest. An Evansville (Indiana) paper boasts in a three-line head, “This Section Has Fifteen Nurses on War Duty,” and in smaller type, “Two more accepted and seven others await assignment.” The accompanying story tells of the needs of the armed forces and enrolment in the First Reserve of the American Red Cross. The *Ledger* of Ellwood City (Pennsylvania) and that of Elizabeth (New Jersey), respectively, were also expressing local pride when they proclaimed, “Former Local Girl Is Now Army Nurse” and, “Armed Services Attract Nurses.” We have dozens of similar clippings, with and without photographs, from all over the country.

“Chicago Nurses Like Australia,” announces a Chicago paper, over a two-column story from “somewhere in Australia,” and only the day before the Windy City’s *Tribune* had carried a four-column photograph of “Seven Nurses, All Second Lieutenants,” who had lined up for an Easter portrait, in white uniforms, capes, and caps, after attending church at Fort Sheridan.

"Nurse Becomes Officer's Bride!" Naturally that happens too; but the Corps, whether Army or Navy, loses a nurse!

Nurses received plenty of applause as they marched in the Army Day parades in towns and cities from Miami to Los Angeles and up and down the land to the Canadian border. The *Scranton* (Pennsylvania) *Times* shouted in twenty-four-point type that "Nurses Provide Colorful Unit of Parade," but, in general, the marching nurses didn't rate much attention in either the headlines or the newsreels, possibly because nursing is but a part of the general concept "Army." A week later, when 10,000 women volunteers marched down Fifth Avenue in New York, the streamer over a four-column picture of a segment of that huge parade read "Nurses and Police in the Parade to Aid the Campaign for Nurse's Aides." And that too is significant, for we shall need all the help the aides can possibly give plus the ultimate ounce of nurses' administrative capacity, if we are to contribute the best possible nursing to the winning of this war.

Headlines call attention to the exceptional, the unusual happenings, those things which persons with trained perceptions have thought worthy of record. Most of the heroism of nurses goes unrecognized, partly because most nursing is carried on where there are no trained observers, and partly because nurses are self disciplined and do not reveal what it costs to maintain poise in distracting situations, to carry on necessary routines without revealing boredom, and to conceal emotion when the very utmost of our skill and endurance have not sufficed.

Of all the stories of the magnificent valor, initiative, and bedrock determination of our men that have come out of the war, we like best that of the sailor on the sinking "Peary" as told in the *New York Post*:

I saw the last American sailor continue to fire the remaining gun with dead and wounded all around him. The water came steadily higher and finally began creeping up the deck. But the gunner kept firing even while the water arose over the base platform. I saw him still at the gun controls—loading, aiming, and firing, unaided—when the "Peary" went down, stern first. The hero is unhonored. His name is unknown. Nobody now living had recognized him.¹

Our liking for that particular example of fortitude derives, we suspect, from a conviction that many nurses have that same quality of stick-to-it-iveness.

There are some among us who go about asserting that the younger nurses are not dependable, that nursing has lost its glamour, and that it is more difficult to secure enough nurses to meet the military needs than it was in the last war. By what extraordinary biological or educational process could American mothers produce the men whose exploits make our hearts fairly burst with pride, and daughters who are "not dependable" and who want only glamorous jobs? The answer is: They could not and they have not! Read the headlines! They represent only an infinitesimal part of what nurses are doing and what they are. Let the oldsters among us thank God that the traditions of Haldora, and the Sisters, and of Miss Nightingale are being carried by the sisters of heroes—the nurses who say "Okay, I'm ready for duty."

Conference on War Nursing

Time is short! When the secretaries, and other representatives, of all the *state* nursing councils on defense met in Chicago on March 23, to confer with representatives of the co-ordinating bodies—the Nursing Council on Na-

¹ WELLER, GEORGE: Old Girl Hadn't Much Left But a Daring Crew. *New York Post*, April 3, 1942.

of the Subcommittee, enumerated and elaborated somewhat on its functions pointing out that the situation calls for sacrifice by individuals and communities. When we have faced this realistically we shall think more quickly and work more effectively to secure nurses for the Army and Navy, to increase our supply of nurses, and to dilute nursing by providing teaching and competent supervision for volunteer and other auxiliary workers.

Pearl McIver, Senior Public Health Nursing Consultant, U. S. Public Health Service, provided facts and figures in relation to the use of federal funds to increase the nurse power of the nation.

Many of the basic data which were discussed and interpreted by the various speakers have already been published in the *Journal*. The program for Volunteer Nurse's Aides (page 507), delightfully presented by Mrs. Walter Lippmann, has been demonstrated to be "not a fad, or a frill, or a boondoggle," but a growing army of sincere and very useful workers.

In each discussion period, questions flew and experiences were shared. "It was just wonderful to be able to talk with representatives from states like mine," said one ardent young secretary from a rural state, while a more mature one writes, "I shall try to give the nurses here as much of the knowledge, the earnestness, the *need for immediate all-out action* as I possibly can." If the number of requests for the suggested *Guide for the Distribution of Nursing Service During War*, is a criterion, the conference served its purpose and the programs of the state councils are gaining momentum. Nursing is going all-out for Victory!

The Biennial

TO WIN THE WAR! That is the present object of every loyal American. War puts a tremendous strain upon our railroads

(a reminder to make reservations early!), it puts added responsibilities on every nurse, it speeds up the tempo of living, the exigencies of war call for every particle of the reserve power of the profession and for dynamic leadership from those in positions of authority. Why then "pile Pelion upon Ossa," by adding responsibility for planning and participating in a convention? Why was the convention not canceled when war was declared?

The question has, of course, been raised and most carefully considered by the Board of Directors. Quite aside from such obligations as contracts for exhibit space and other commitments, the fundamental reason for a convention in wartime, the government permitting, is that nurses secure both professional and spiritual reassurance through the shared experiences a well-planned convention makes possible.

The program planned by the three national organizations for the convention in Chicago the week of May 18 is positively kaleidoscopic. Time will be budgeted and careful selections from the total program will be made by those who have acquired a "convention technic." They arrive early and register promptly. If they are delegates they first check the meetings they must attend. They then check those of major interest to them. They arrange to exchange notes. Frequently they will have written in advance for appointments with friends or those from whom they would seek advice.

Go prepared to profit from the convention. To aid you the *Journal* has published over forty pages of information, culminating in an outline of the four joint programs (see April, page 443) and the complete programs of the three organizations in the first advertising section of this magazine. Wars are not won at conventions, but we predict that the will to win, by no means dormant in nurses, will gain new power at Chicago.