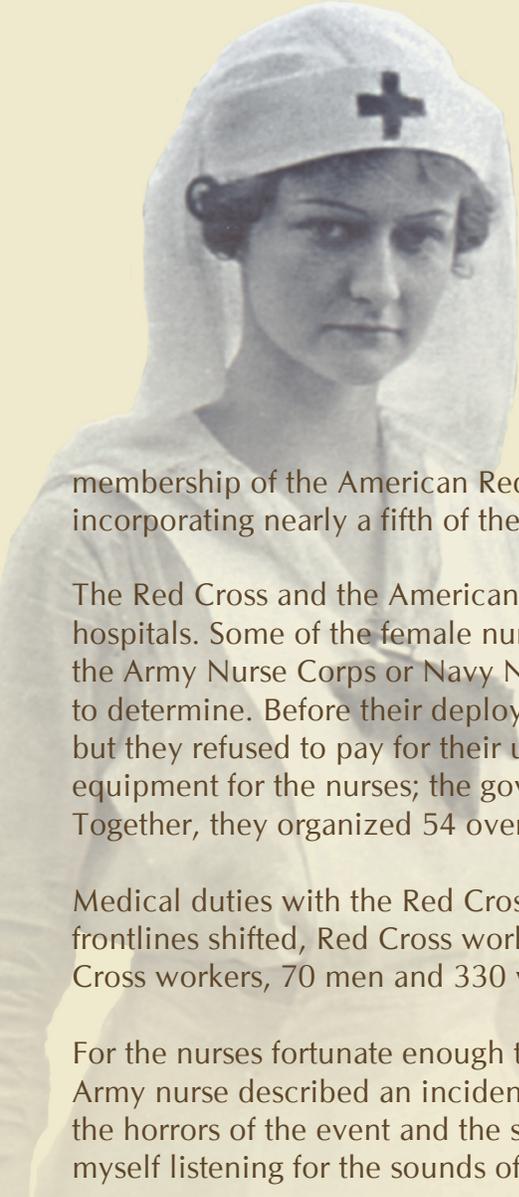


# “The Rose of No Man’s Land”

## The American Red Cross in World War I



Even before America’s entry into the Great War, service organizations had started sending aide to Europe and developing infrastructure for the possible American war effort. President Woodrow Wilson, honorary chairman of the Red Cross, encouraged Americans to volunteer for the Red Cross and other organizations such as the Y.M.C.A., Salvation Army, and Hebrew Benevolence Society.

On the homefront, the Red Cross raised over \$400 million in monies and materials through numerous campaigns and partnerships with organizations such as the Boy Scouts. As a result of the War, the membership of the American Red Cross surged from 107 local chapters in 1914 to 3,864 chapters by 1919, incorporating nearly a fifth of the entire U.S. population.

The Red Cross and the American military worked together to fund and develop mobile paramilitary hospitals. Some of the female nurses enlisted directly through the Red Cross whereas others enlisted with the Army Nurse Corps or Navy Nurse Corps, making the exact number of nurses serving overseas difficult to determine. Before their deployment, the government provided the nurses with lectures and vaccinations, but they refused to pay for their uniforms or equipment. The Red Cross helped by purchasing uniforms and equipment for the nurses; the government finally reimbursed the Red Cross for these expenditures in 1922. Together, they organized 54 overseas hospitals and four hospitals in the United States.

Medical duties with the Red Cross were supposed to keep women out of frontline combat. However, as the frontlines shifted, Red Cross workers often found themselves in danger. Approximately 400 American Red Cross workers, 70 men and 330 women, lost their lives in the line of service.

For the nurses fortunate enough to return home, the trauma of the War’s aftermath still haunted them. One Army nurse described an incident of a German air raid on the hospital where she worked. After describing the horrors of the event and the shrieks of the injured, she wrote, “Yet in the darkness of any night, I find myself listening for the sounds of that night and in memory, I hear an overtone of pain that seems to wrap itself around the earth’s stillness.”



Images courtesy US National Archives & Records Administration, Washington, DC; SC Historical Society, Charleston, SC

Despite the challenges they faced, either by German attacks, illness, emotional distress, or bureaucracy and stereotypes, American nurses proved their worth and set the stage for their involvement in future wars. Soldiers were grateful for their treatment by Red Cross as demonstrated during a funeral service for a nurse killed by a shell explosion when a doughboy honored the fallen nurse by singing “The Rose of No Man’s Land.”