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Our Army Nurses

Mary Gardner Holland
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As a collection of biographical sketches, *Our Army Nurses* is a great personalized accounting of approximately 100 Civil War women—including some of the more familiar names like Clara Barton and Dorothea Lynde Dix.

In the line of fire and on the battlefields, the reader is there, sensing the fear and living the risk these women took. For example, in Annie Etheridge's story, "…the soldier whose wound she was dressing was struck by a shell and literally torn to pieces. Her dress was often pierced by bullets, but she fortunately escaped unhurt except a slight wound on the left hand received at Chancellorsville." The actions and directions in numerous stories depict these women performing surgical, nursing or wartime aid. One or two inject the hope and patriotism so prevalent at the time.

Of note is Elida Rumsey Fowle's story—this 19-year-old began serving her country through song, and later, through storytelling and the opening of a free library and reading room for soldiers. Rumsey married John A. Fowle in the Representative's Hall: "…the couple were receiving congratulations, when a soldier in the gallery shouted, 'Won't the bride sing the Star Spangled Banner?' and she did, then and there in her bridal dress, with never more of fervor in her voice."

Author Holland was herself in service, under Dix, and begins the glossary with her own account of her final services rendered to soldiers before they passed to the heavenly land, and of bearing the burden to tell the next of kin, sometimes face to face. Her determination to compile and secure the addresses of these women and reiterate their first-person testimonies, originally in 1895, reflects the same passion evident throughout the book.

Our Army Nurses is a most fascinating read, and will give readers new insights into women's true place in war.
NANCY TAMBURELLO (September / October 1998)

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