



Women Veterans of World War I Interred in Yellowstone County, Montana

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(c) 2011
3d edition 2014

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Roll of Honor¹
American Nurses
World War I



Army Distinguished Service Cross
 awarded to 6 nurses, Army Nurse Corps



Navy Cross.
 awarded to 4 Navy nurses.



Silver Star Medal.
 awarded to 3 nurses,
 Army Nurse Corps (awarded 2007)



Distinguished Service Medal
 awarded to 27 nurses,
 Army Nurse Corps



French Croix de guerre
 (Cross of War)
 awarded to 29 nurses,
 Army Nurse Corps



Florence Nightingale Medal
 Awarded to 4 nurses
 Army Nurse Corps

¹ Gavin, Lettie; *They Also Served*; © 1997, University of Colorado Press. The total list of women nurses, civilian and military, who received official recognition for valor and service in World War I is extraordinary: too numerous to list here.

Distinguished Service Cross / Navy Cross / Air Force Cross

The Distinguished Service Cross (Army), Navy Cross (Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard) and Air Force Cross are the second highest military decorations awarded to the military for risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force. It is second only to the Medal of Honor. Actions meriting service crosses must be of such a high degree to be above those required for all other U.S. combat decorations but not meeting the criteria for the Medal of Honor.

Silver Star Medal

Silver Star Medal is the third-highest military decoration in America's hierarchy of valor that can be awarded to a member of any branch of the United States armed forces for valor in the face of the enemy. The Silver Star is awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States not justifying one of the two higher awards - Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, or the Air Force Cross, (the second-highest military decorations,) or the Medal of Honor: the highest decoration.

Distinguished Service Medal

Distinguished Service Medal is the highest non-valorous military decoration of the United States of America military which is issued for exceptionally meritorious service to the government of the United States in either a senior government service position or as a senior officer of the United States armed forces or other Uniformed services.

French Croix de guerre

The Croix de guerre, awarded by the French government, may either be bestowed as a unit award or to individuals who distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with enemy forces.

Florence Nightingale Medal

The International Committee of the Red Cross (IRC) instituted The Florence Nightingale Medal in 1912. This medal – the highest international distinction awarded to a nurse – honors exceptional courage and devotion to caring for the victims of armed conflict or other disasters, or exemplary services and a creative and pioneering spirit in the areas of public health or nursing education. The IRC still awards these medals every 2 years. Since 1912, the IRC has awarded only 1,337 Florence Nightingale Medals.²

² International Committee of the Red Cross resource page at: www.icrc.org

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Preface

*Day is done
Gone the sun
From the lake
From the hill
From the sky
All is well
Safely rest
God is high³*

She's buried in the eastern side of Mountview Cemetery, Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana:⁴ section 99 west, lot 54, grave 3. Her grave faces east to the morning sun. Someone carved the lyrics to the haunting bugle tune of Taps on her Veterans Administration white marble upright headstone. The VA didn't do this; they don't carve song lyrics on veterans' headstones.

Someone honored Florence Ames, a World War I nurse from Montana, with poignant words on her headstone. Who was she; why was she buried here and buried alone? A wartime nurse, what did she see; whom did she save; what was her story? No military rank is engraved on her headstone; why?

I thought of these the day I saw her headstone. Being a retired Army officer, Persian Gulf War veteran, and genealogist for almost 40 years, veterans cemeteries attract me. Were other World War I women buried nearby? My search began.

I locate women WWI veterans graves simply by walking among white marble or flat bronze Veterans Administration provided headstones, "trooping the line," as I call it, and trust to luck I find these women veterans. This is a tall order as Yellowstone County, MT covers just over 2,600 square miles and has 28 registered cemeteries and several private cemeteries. I walked through only cemeteries in Billings and neighboring city of Laurel. In 2010, I published a notice in the Billings, Montana Gazette newspaper asking for help in finding graves of other Yellowstone County women WWI veterans; this was marginally successful.⁵

This paper reports on women World War I veterans I have found buried in Billings and Laurel; they served mostly in US Army Nurse Corps. Sadly, no detailed history or records exist for Navy nurses.⁶ This paper does not report on all Montana's women who served in World War I. I am reasonably sure other women WWI veterans are interred in Yellowstone County, but as of this paper I haven't found them. I have an unofficial list of Yellowstone County women who entered the US Army Nurse

³ Inscription on the headstone of Florence Ames, nurse, Army Nurse Corps, WWI, Billings, MT

⁴ The eastern side of Mountview Cemetery is the old Billings City Cemetery.

⁵ If others reading this report know of more women WWI veterans buried nearby please contact me.

⁶ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, American Women in WWI, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

Corps in WWI from Billings, but determining what ultimately became of them would require significant effort beyond the scope of this report.⁷

Unless noted, I took all photographs in this report.

Last, why do this? America's last living American World War I veteran, Mr. Frank Buckles, died 27 February, 2011: interred with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. America's link to World War I now exists only in books and photographs – including women's service. The greatest tragedy facing an American military veteran is not they die in battle, or pass away at the end of a long life, but the tragedy is we forget them: forget them in life and forget them in death. We must never forget these women: their courage, compassion, service, and sacrifice to America. We honor them by remembering them.

Respectfully,

/s/

Edward E. Saunders
Laurel, Yellowstone County, Montana
April 2011

3d edition
April 2014

⁷ July 1973 fire at National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO, destroyed most WWI and WWII personnel records for veterans. These records are lost to history.

Acknowledgements

Mrs. Claire Myers Blurton, Reno, NV, for her information and photograph of her mother, the late Mrs. Florence Biddles Myers, Army Nurse Corps, WWI, buried in Mountview Cemetery, Billings, MT.

Mrs. Cynthia Myers-Morrison, for sharing with me her remarkable scrap book of her grandmother, Florence Biddles Myers.

The late Mr. Robert Fears, veteran, US Marine Corps, Billings, MT, and past Commandant, Marine Corps League of Montana, for his help with the history of the veterans memorials on the court house commons, Yellowstone County Courthouse, Billings, MT. Always an advocate for Montana's veterans, Bob passed away suddenly on a hunting trip in Oct 2010. I regret not meeting him sooner.

Research staff of Billings Parmley Library, Billings, MT, for their patience and expertise in answering my many questions and repairing the cantankerous microfilm viewing machines for me.

Research staff of Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT, for searching Montana state veterans' records and quickly reporting findings.

Smith Funeral Home, Billings, MT, for providing copies of their records.

Ms. Lettie Gavin's book, They Also Served © 1997, University of Colorado press: a valuable resource for the study of American women in World War I.

Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall's book, The First, The Few, The Forgotten, ©. 2002, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, is a current book about Navy and Marine Corps women in World War I.

Anne Leland and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu's work for Congressional Research Service, American War and Military Operations Casualties, Feb 2010, is the best single source for statistics on Americans serving in war.

W.W. Gail's book; Yellowstone County, Montana in the World War; © 1919, War Book Publishing Co., Billings MT, is an excellent but not validated source for information of Billings, MT men and women serving in WWI. It has mistakes and inconsistencies.

Year 1919 Annual Report of the Army Surgeon General is an invaluable aid in researching the organization, training, management, and nursing manpower needs of the US Army in WWI.

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Introduction

The “Great War”, or the “War to End All Wars”, began August 1914. People of the day didn’t call this war “World War I” because who would have thought a far more deadly world conflict loomed just 25 years later. World War I’s deadly unimaginable slaughter began depleting Europe’s manpower: almost 900 thousand British dead, almost 1.4 million French dead.⁸

In England, men who served in uniform and died on active duty, left unfilled jobs across the spectrum of civilian employment: blue-collar jobs, administrative office jobs, civil servant jobs and others. England quickly realized the vast untapped labor pool of women could no longer be ignored. Women had to work; British “Tommies”⁹ were dying by the tens of thousands. By 1916, 100 thousand British women worked as administrative clerks and still Britain needed more.¹⁰ Even France and Germany had to allow women to enter the workforce: none of the warring belligerents had a choice; they were short workers.

America tried its best to remain neutral and stay out of a war America deemed just another deadly squabble among Europe’s headstrong peoples. United States President Woodrow Wilson, elected in 1912 and reelected in 1916 on the slogan “he kept us out of the war,” opposed any military preparations for America to enter the war.¹¹ But events, such as the sinking of the US liner, Lusitania, in May of 1915, and other American cargo ships off England’s coast, began to sway America’s sentiments from staying neutral to vengeance. Germany’s relentless submarine war and presence of warships off America’s coast finally swayed American attitudes and Congress declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917.¹²

American military initially was reluctant to tap the vast labor pool of women in World War I: largely because of opinionated and prejudiced thought of the role of women in American society. But this couldn’t withstand manpower requirements of the day and ever increasing ground-swell of women’s equality in American society. 4.7 million American men mobilized for WWI.¹³ American military leaders, primarily Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels, had no choice but to recruit women to fill the manpower void left by deploying military men. All America – including the military - soon realized the wisdom of this decision.

⁸ Carnegie Endowment for Peace Study, year 1931

⁹ Slang for a British soldier is “Tommy,” from the powerful Rudyard Kipling poem “Tommy,” about a common British soldier – Tommy Atkins - whom nobody wanted or respected except in times of war.

¹⁰ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

¹¹ Farwell, Byron; Over There, The United States in the Great War; c. 1999, W.W. Norton & Co., NY NY

¹² Montana’s congresswoman, Jeanette Rankin, was one of 50 in the US House of Representatives to vote “No,” on going to war in World War I and the only member of Congress to vote “No,” for entering WWII.

¹³ Leland, Ann and Oboroceanu, M-J, Congressional Research Service, American War and Military Operations Casualties, Feb 2010

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Josephus Daniels's Decision

In 1917, US Secretary of the Navy, with a decidedly biblical name of “Josephus Daniels”, had a problem - he didn’t have enough sailors. US Navy was deploying its sailors to fill American fighting ships at sea at beginning of America’s entry into WWI. Number of US ships grew from 300 to 1,000 between January and December 1917.¹⁴ All of Daniels’s male naval clerks, (called “yeoman¹⁵”) on shore, now packed their sea bags and sailed.

Daniels needed shore replacements fast; he couldn’t fill the need through civil servants because of lengthy hiring process, and he didn’t have the money to pay for an expanded civilian work force.¹⁶ He wanted clerks who were military, subject to military orders, discipline, and payroll. Daniels also needed the ability to issue orders and move sailors at will. He asked his general counsel if any regulation or law prohibited women from serving in the navy as yeoman or clerks? Counsel found the answer in the fine print of the Naval Act of 1916.

Among other things, Naval Act of 1916 created a naval reserve force with four components. The fourth component, called the Naval Coast Defense Reserve Force, was open to “all persons who may be capable of performing special useful service for coastal defense.”¹⁷ Law didn’t specify gender restrictions: whether by design or omission is debatable. Daniels saw this and knew he now had authority to enlist women yeoman in the Naval Coast Defense Reserve Force – and he did. Because Daniels’s decision had force of naval orders, Daniels’s subordinate naval commanders couldn’t disregard enlisting women as yeoman.

On 21 March 1917, US Navy began enlisting women for duties in non-combat ratings as yeoman, radio electricians, pharmacists, chemists, draftsman, accountants, and telephone operators. Few requirements existed for the first women yeoman.¹⁸ They had to be between 18 and 35 years of age, “of good character and neat appearance.” US Navy preferred high school graduates with business or office skills and did not require a college degree.¹⁹

Navy’s fast enlistment process for females had no basic training. Female recruits passed a very basic physical exam, and then reported for work. As per Secretary Daniels’s order, women yeoman received same pay²⁰ and benefits as men.

¹⁴ Ebbert, Jean and Hall, Marie-Beth; The First, The Few, The Forgotten, Navy and Marine Corps Women In World War I; C. 2003, Navy Institute Press, Annapolis, MD

¹⁵ A navy yeoman performs secretarial and clerical work. They organize files, prepare correspondence; they type letters and orders.

¹⁶ Ebbert and Hall

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Racial discrimination existed however, of the 11, 880 enlisted women, only 14 were known to be black. (Ebbert and Hall)

¹⁹ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

²⁰ \$28.75 per month pay.

They were designated yeoman (F) for “female” to ensure they did not receive orders to report to a sailing ship.²¹ The navy designed uniforms for women with appropriate navy insignia and also created suitable housing for them.

By April 1916, 200 women enlisted as yeoman: the first officially recognized military enlisted women in nation’s history. None served as officers. By 1918, 11 thousand women had enlisted including 13 from Montana.^{22 23} They enlisted for a 4-year tour-of-duty or until released from active service. At war’s end, by special act, the secretary of the navy cut all women’s enlistments so they would be discharged by Oct 1920. An administrative error almost gave the women an “ordinary” discharge: meaning they could not reenlist, a restriction normally given to less-than-honorable discharges. The chief navy yeoman (F) discovered the error and with help of Navy staff, ensured yeoman (F)’s received honorable discharges.²⁴

Fifty-seven women yeomen (F) died on active duty: none by hostile fire. The majority of deaths, 44, were from disease: generally flu or complications from flu.²⁵

Photo # NH 53178-KN Chief Yeoman (F), by Anne Fuller Abbott



Yeoman (F) painting
(Naval Historical Center)



Navy Rear Admiral Victor Blue inspects
yeomen (F) in Washington, D.C. 1918.
(Naval Historical Center.)

²¹ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

²² US Archives, Folder NA3, Box 277, Record Group 45, as reported in Ebbert, Jean and Hall, Marie-Beth; The First, The Few, The Forgotten, Navy and Marine Corps Women In World War I; C. 2003, Navy Institute Press, Annapolis, MD

²³ As of this writing, I do not have a by-name list of the 13 Montana women.

²⁴ Ebbert, Jean and Hall, Marie-Beth; The First, The Few, The Forgotten, Navy and Marine Corps Women In World War I; C. 2003, Navy Institute Press, Annapolis, MD

²⁵ Ibid

By summer 1918, US Marine Corps faced similar manpower shortages as Navy. In August 1918, Commandant of the Marine Corps, General George Barnett, asked Secretary Daniels for authority to “enroll women in Marine Corps Reserves for clerical duty in Washington and at other Marine Corps offices in the US where their services might be used to replace men who might be qualified for active field service.” Daniels granted the authority.²⁶

By 1 Sept 1918, 31 women had passed Marine Corps entrance requirements and were on active duty. When the armistice was signed ending World War I, 277 female Marines were on active duty; a total of 305 served.²⁷

Women eagerly joined and honorably served in the US military before America even allowed them to vote in federal elections. On 4 June 1919, Congress proposed the 19th amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote in federal elections. America ratified the 19th amendment 18 August 1920.²⁸

The last veteran Navy yeoman (F), Charlotte Winters, died 27 March 2007 in Maryland. She was 109 years old and buried with full military honors in Frederick, Maryland.



Navy Yeoman (F) at Portsmouth Navy Yard, Maine
(Navy Historical Center)

²⁶ Ebbert, Jean and Hall, Marie-Beth; *The First, The Few, The Forgotten, Navy and Marine Corps Women In World War I*; C. 2003, Navy Institute Press, Annapolis, MD

²⁷ As of this writing I don't know of any from Montana.

²⁸ Wyoming was the first territory and first state to give women the right to vote in state elections when Wyoming became a territory in 1870 and state in July 1890.

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Katherine May Duvall
Yeoman (F), US Navy
Mountview Cemetery, Billings, MT



Born Katherine May Rifenburg to Sherman T. Rifenburg and Caroline Lillian Haas in Yankton, South Dakota on 30 May 1897, Katherine relocated often by the time she enlisted in the US Navy as a Yeoman in World War I. She and her family moved from Yankton to Mount Rainier, Washington, to Washington D.C.. She enlisted 3 Sep 1918, (presumably in Washington D.C.) with military serial number 18-434-13. She was honorably discharged 31 July 1919.²⁹ Her duty station as Navy yeoman third class (Y3) was in Washington D.C.³⁰

After WWI she moved to Casper, WY in 1930 and then in 1938 to Billings, MT. She married twice, first to a Mr. Chaffee or Chidley³¹ (unknown first name) and then to Alva T. Duvall on 6 Aug 1969 in Cody, WY. Alva and Katherine lived at 543 Wyoming Ave in Billings.



Katherine was past-president and chaplain of the Veterans of World War I auxiliary in Billings and also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Katherine died at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Miles City, MT on 29 May 1973. Katherine is buried in Mountview Cemetery, Billings, MT at section 01B, grave 218. This is the old veterans section in the north central part of Mountview. Katherine is buried next to her second husband, Alva. They died 3 weeks apart. Alva is also a World War I veteran.

²⁹ Record of interment, Smith Funeral Home, Billings, MT

³⁰ Information from her obituary in the Billings, MT *Gazette*; 30 May 1973.

³¹ Her obituary reads "Chaffee," but her marriage license in Park County, WY (Book 21, page 154, County Clerk's office) reads "Chidley."

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US Army Nurse Corps

America isn't a martial society and rarely – if ever – is prepared to manage the immediate need of war when war is forced upon America. Visionary leadership and creative thought were historically rare in US armed forces in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Barracks talk among soldiers is generals are always prepared to fight the last war. Squalid and foul conditions of world battlefields beginning in mid-19th century forced civilians to fill the need for soldier care when governments failed or never planned for the carnage of modern battle.

US Army Nurse Corps had its very early beginnings during the American Revolutionary War. American General Horatio Gates wrote General George Washington he (Gates) needed nurses to attend the sick and wounded American soldiers. By July 1775, Second Continental Congress allowed one nurse for every 10 patients and a supervisory nurse (matron) allocated per every 100 sick or wounded soldiers.³²

During the Crimean War in 1854, the celebrated and skilled English woman, Florence Nightingale, revolutionized inadequate British army medical services to cope with deplorable squalor and disease conditions facing British troops in the Crimea. She also began the world's first school of nursing at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.³³ When the American civil war began, private relief organizations began filling the void left by inadequate government preparations or actions to cope with the casualties of war on America's battlefields. US Army Medical Bureau existed but was largely ineffective. Florence Nightingale's efforts served as an example for soldier care. American women began volunteering their expertise and willingness to aid America's wounded and sick.

Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., first American woman to earn a medical degree in 1849, took the lead in organizing 3 thousand women in New York City to coordinate work of many smaller relief societies. Her efforts formed the nucleus of the Women's Central Association for Relief, or the W.C.A.R. The W.C.A.R. quickly became the United States Sanitary Commission, despite the early reluctance of President Lincoln who signed an order creating the Commission on 13 June 1861.³⁴

Sanitary Commission's demonstrated excellence in organization, efficiency and soldier care so impressed the newly appointed, younger, and effective, Army Medical Bureau's Surgeon-General William Hammond, that he issued an order requiring 1/3 of all Army nurses in general hospitals be women. By war's end, 3 thousand northern women had served as paid army nurses; several thousand continue working as volunteers and salaried staff of the Sanitary Commission.³⁵

³² US Army Women's Museum, Ft. Lee, VA

³³ McPherson, James; Battle Cry of Freedom; c. 1988, Oxford University Press, NY NY

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

Courage and effectiveness of these women began removing bricks of “weaker-gender” walls male-dominated medical profession had built for generations.

On Feb. 2, 1901, Congress passed the Army Reorganization Act and the Nurse Corps became a permanent corps of the Army Medical Department. Nurses were appointed to the Regular Army for a 3-year period, but were not given commissions as officers. Appointment could be renewed provided applicant had a “satisfactory record for efficiency, conduct and health.” The law directed the Surgeon General to maintain a list of qualified nurses willing to serve in an emergency. This began the Army Reserve Corps of women nurses.³⁶

American Red Cross - not US Army - provided training and manpower conduit to supply US Army’s nursing needs in WWI. Majority of nurses in US Army Nurse Corps began as Red Cross nurses. US Army did not create a school of nursing until 25 May 1918 to supply the increasing demand of skilled nurses required to meet the needs of war. By June 1918, US Army Nurse Corps had 3,524 regular army nurses and 17,956 reserve nurses equaling 21, 480 nurses. 11, 235 of these nurses served in 174 stations in the United States, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines; 10, 245 nurses were serving overseas or waiting embarkation to deploy overseas.³⁷

Racial barriers still existed, however; even though 150 thousand black American soldiers served overseas in WWI, the Army simply did not accept black nurses in any appreciable number for service.³⁸

In 1916, a year before United States entered WWI, medical and nursing personnel in America began a medical preparedness campaign outside of Army auspices. The goal ensured military reservists, Red Cross, and civil organizations worked together to maintain higher standards of hospital organization and patient care. Large civilian hospitals established “base hospitals:” smaller organizations within a larger civilian hospital. Red Cross administered and controlled these base hospitals when the government mobilized for war.³⁹ This “base hospital” concept would prove invaluable when in 1917 the Army activated these base hospitals for deployment overseas with the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

AEF had 238 base hospitals, built to specific designs, deployed to the European theater of operations by war’s end.⁴⁰ These hospitals could have up to 1 thousand beds. A layout of a base hospital is shown.⁴¹

³⁶ Army Medical Command, Historical Office.

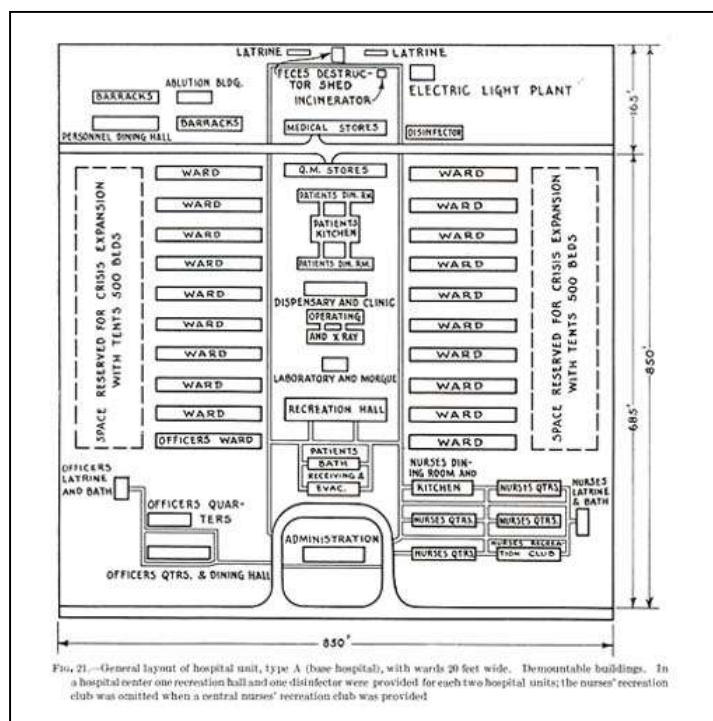
³⁷ Office of the Army Surgeon General, Annual Report, 1919

³⁸ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

³⁹ Jensen, Kimberly; Mobilizing Minerva, American Women in the First World War; © 2008, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL

⁴⁰ The Medical Dept of the US Army in WWI, vol II.

⁴¹ Office of the Historian, Army Medical Command



No nurse in WWI US Army Nurse Corps died from hostile fire.^{42 43} Of the 102 nurses who died on active duty overseas and 134 nurses who died on active duty in the United States from April 1917 to November 1918, most died from the flu or complications from flu.⁴⁴ Army Surgeon General records do not show any nurse from Montana having died overseas or stateside in America on active duty during WWI.

Army nurses during WWI were clearly in harm's way. Four received battle wounds. Six nurses received the Distinguished Service Cross:

one step below the Medal of Honor in America's hierarchy of valor. Twenty-seven received the Distinguished Service Medal; 29 received the French Croix de guerre.⁴⁵ One nurse from Billings, MT, Harriet O'Day, is reported to have received an individual citation by General Pershing, 12 Dec 1918, for "bravery and heroic conduct under shell fire at Fromerville, Argonne front, 2 Nov 1918."⁴⁶ In Aug 2007, three WWI Army nurses, Jane Rignel, Linnie Leckrone, and Irene Robar, were the first women in the US Army to receive the Silver Star medal. They were posthumously awarded the medal retroactive to WWI for heroism under fire.

US Army Nurse Corps began demobilizing immediately after WWI. At the end of June 1919, just 9,616 nurses remained, and by June 1920, only 1,551 nurses remained.⁴⁷ An outgrowth of their war experience was their awareness of lack of authority they had commensurate with their medical responsibilities. Because nurses in the Army Nurse Corps did not serve in the Army, but rather with the Army, these nurses were essentially non-entities subject to the administrative whims and controls surrounding them. Women nurses began questioning why they didn't have military rank to more effectively manage the work they performed.

⁴² Office of the Army Surgeon General, Annual Report, 1919

⁴³ 36 navy Nurses died during the war: none by hostile fire. Three Navy nurses received the Navy Cross, posthumously. The Navy Cross is the Navy's version of the Distinguished Service Cross

⁴⁴ Gavin, Lettie; *They Also Served*, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Gail, W.W.; *Yellowstone County, Montana in the World War*; © 1919, War Book Publishing Co., Billings MT

⁴⁷ Jensen, Kimberly; *Mobilizing Minerva, American Women in the First World War*; © 2008, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL

Congress did not agree with granting women nurses officer status and rejected the idea in 1919. In 1925 the War Department eased a bit and granted “relative rank” to nurses. This meant nurses could wear rank insignia, but not much else. During WWII, nurses pressed for commissioned rank again and received temporary commissions for the duration of the war. Finally in 1947 with passage of the Army-Nurses Act along with the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, did military nurses receive commissions, pay, and benefits commensurate with their rank.⁴⁸



Army Nurse Corps outdoor uniform
(From US Archives)

(r) Surgical ward,
Base Hospital 53
Langres, France.
(Army Medical Command photo)



Army nurse treating gas casualty in
France (Army Medical Command photo)



⁴⁸ Jensen, Kimberly; Mobilizing Minerva, American Women in the First World War; © 2008, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL

Florence Ames
Army Nurse Corps
Mountview Cemetery
Billings, MT



Florence Ames.
(Lithograph from W.W.
Gail's book.)

Born 12 Feb 1882, Florence Ames was the 8th of 9 children to William A. and Louisa A. (Balfour) Ames in Nebraska City, Otoe County, Nebraska.⁴⁹ By 1910 Florence was living in Billings and boarding with the F.H. Reynolds family.⁵⁰ She later resided at 211 Custer Ave in Billings.⁵¹

She was apparently a civilian nurse when she entered the Army Nurse Corps on 2 May 1918.⁵² She first reported to the US Base Hospital at Des Moines, IA until 5 Sept 1918. She deployed overseas and served with Base Hospital 65, at Camp Pontanezan, Brest, France until 14 Oct 1918. She then served with Base Hospital 61, Beaune, France; and then Base Hospital 90. Comerchy, France.

Army report for Base Hospital 61 reads in October 1918, (just after Florence arrived) the surgical ward had only three empty beds out of 500 beds available. The report continues to read the constant influx of wounded soldiers increased the hospital to 1,600 beds with almost half being surgical cases.⁵³

Florence was demobilized and relieved from active duty with the Army Nurse Corps on 26 May 1919, but apparently stayed in the reserves. Her total overseas time was from 25 Sep 1918 to 22 May 1919.^{54 55}

After WWI, Florence returned to Billings for a short time and then moved to California where she became a Public Health Service nurse. She was living in Santa Ana, CA in 1925. Florence traveled widely, with sailings to Hawaii in 1925, Panama in 1930, and Guatemala in 1939.⁵⁶ Florence moved to San Francisco and retired there in 1953.⁵⁷ She lived at 1200 Taylor Street, San Francisco and died of cancer

⁴⁹ 1900 US Federal Census, for Nebraska City, NE, Enumeration District 107, pg 88A, sheet 7.

⁵⁰ 1910 US Federal Census for Billings, MT

⁵¹ Montana State Historical Society, veteran's record card for Ames, Florence.

⁵² Ibid. Ames's card shows a code, "CL" meaning entered from civilian life.

⁵³ Office of the Army Surgeon General, Annual Report, 1919

⁵⁴ Montana State Historical Society, veteran's record card for Ames, Florence.

⁵⁵ One of the references in the Montana State Historical Society reads Florence was wounded in action and died in battle. I have found no other reference anywhere in any other book which corroborates any battle wounds. She certainly did not die in battle nor was she wounded.

⁵⁶ US Passenger and Immigration Lists.

⁵⁷ Billings, MT, Gazette, 13 Nov 1959, pg 5; obituary for Florence Ames.

in San Francisco at the Polyclinic Hospital, 1055 Pine Street, 21 Nov 1957. She never married nor had children.⁵⁸



Florence's sister, Emma Jane Ames (also never married) returned Florence's body to Billings, services were Wednesday, 27 Nov 1957. Florence is buried in Billings, Mountview Cemetery, section 99w, lot 54, grave 3.⁵⁹

Emma died 9 Nov 1959; she never married nor had children.⁶⁰ She is buried next to Florence in grave 4.



Sisters Emma (l) and Florence Ames's graves. Billings Mountview Cemetery.

⁵⁸ Death Certificate for Florence Ames. State of California, Office of Vital Records, District 3801, # 8733.

⁵⁹ I digitally colored her white marble gravestone for clarity of the engraving. The headstone is not yellow stained.

⁶⁰ Billings Gazette, obituary for Emma Ames, 13 Nov 1959, pg 5

Sigrid R. Grue
Army Nurse Corps
Mountview Cemetery
Billings, MT



Sigrid R. (Lofthus) Grue was born to Bjorn and Tarrand Lofthus in Devils Lake, ND, on 24 Feb 1893 and was living in Nesheim, Nelson County, ND in 1910.⁶¹ She graduated from St. Josephs Hospital of Nursing in Minot, ND.⁶² During WWI, she served at Army Base Hospital 21 in Denver, CO. US Army renamed Base Hospital 21, Fitzsimmons Army Hospital, after William T. Fitzsimmons: first medical officer killed-in-action during WWI. She served as a Red Cross nurse in Billings during WWII.⁶³

In 1929 she married Martin Grue in Billings. Sigrid died 21 Jun 1979. Martin died 8 Jul 1950 in Yellowstone County. Sigrid is buried in section 01B, grave 75 in the old veterans section of Mountview Cemetery. She was a member of the VFW auxiliary.

⁶¹ 1910 US Federal Census for North Dakota

⁶² Both Montana State Historical Society and North Dakota State Historical Society do not have records on Sigrid. The North Dakota State Adjutant General's office also does not have records on her: these from my telephone calls to these offices.

⁶³ Billings Gazette obituary for Sigrid R. Grue, 22 Jun 1979, pg 12A

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Susie Welborn McCrumb

Army Nurse Corps
Sunset Memorial Gardens
Billings, MT

Born 16 May 1893 at Elrod near Sommerset, Kentucky, Susie was the first child of Ulysses H. and Sarrah C. Welborn. They moved to Gallatin County, MT in 1904 and Susie grew up in the Waterman School District south of Belgrade, MT.⁶⁴ She graduated in 1917 from Scott-White Memorial Hospital in Temple, Texas, as a nurse. She began her nursing career in Holy Cross Hospital in Miles City, MT. Susie joined US Army Nurse Corps in May 1918.⁶⁵

Susie deployed to Base Hospital 53 in Langres⁶⁶, France in Sep 1918 and stayed in France after the war ended to care for soldiers too sick to travel. She also had her own personal tragedy when her brother, Frank Welborn, was killed-in-action in France during WWI.⁶⁷ Susie received honors for exceptional service.⁶⁸

After WWI, Susie returned to Montana and was living with her parents in Garfield County in 1920.⁶⁹ According to Susie, she was married once for 4 years, "but it didn't take."⁷⁰ Susie had no children. Susie worked as a nurse in Miles City and other nursing positions in Montana. She remained an active nurse until her 80's. Susie died 17 Aug 1996 in Billings and is buried in section 70C, lot #4, Sunset Memorial Gardens. She was the last survivor of WWI US Army Nurse Corps.⁷¹



Susie McCrumb's headstone. Sunset Memorial Gardens, Billings, MT

⁶⁴ 1910 Federal Census for Waterman School District #55, Gallatin County, MT Enumeration District 146

⁶⁵ Billings Gazette article, obituary for Susie McCrumb, 18 Aug 1996

⁶⁶ Pronounced "LAWN-gruh"

⁶⁷ Billings Gazette article, obituary for Susie McCrumb, 18 Aug 1996

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ 1920 US federal census for Garfield County, MT, enumeration district 117.

⁷⁰ Billings Gazette article, obituary for Susie McCrumb, 18 Aug 1996

⁷¹ Ibid

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Florence Biddles Myers

Army Nurse Corps
Mountview Cemetery
Billings, MT



Florence Myers in WWI Army Nurse Corps uniform.
(Photo courtesy Mrs. Claire Myers Blurton.)

Daughter of John Biddles and Sara Ann Graham, Florence Mary Marvel Biddles was born in Newton, Warwickshire, England, 10 Oct 1885.⁷² She received her medical training in England at the Royal Salop General Hospital at Shrewsbury. She served as a surgical nurse to a neurosurgeon in London.⁷³ Florence was a certified member of the Royal College of Nursing in Britain.⁷⁴

When WWI came, Germany repeatedly bombed London from May 1915 to 1916 using zeppelin airships. Florence served with the British Army in 1915, but because of the bombing, Florence moved to Canada in 1917. Florence decided to return to England, but Canadian authorities denied her request. She moved to America in 1918, joined the Army Nurse Corps in Buffalo, NY and was stationed at Camp Devens, MA. Florence also received American citizenship in 1919.⁷⁵

Florence then went to France to serve as a nurse in the Army Nurse Corps. She served at Base Hospital 53, Langres, France.^{76 77}

This report doesn't chronicle Base Hospital 53's history in northeast France near the battle lines, but readers must understand the adverse working conditions, mud, misery, extent of battle casualties and gas casualties seen there. The hospital had a large surgical mission where 75 beds were put into wards designed for 50 beds. All of this in the coldest, wettest fall and winter season in memory. Readers should

⁷² Smith Funeral Home records, Billings, MT

⁷³ My telephone conversation with Mrs. Claire Myers Blurton, Reno, NV: Florence's daughter.

⁷⁴ Smith Funeral Home records, Billings, MT

⁷⁵ US Naturalization Records, certificate P. 35701, 5 Aug 1919, Ft. Sheridan, IL for Florence Biddles.

⁷⁶ The visible sleeve patch on Florence's uniform is the Coat of Arms of the City of Langres, France. The Mayor of Langres authorized personnel of Base Hospital 53 to wear Langres' arms. An excellent history of Base Hospital 53 is on the Internet at: <http://www.ourstory.info/library/2-ww1/BH53/hosp53.htm>

⁷⁷ Another Army Nurse Corps veteran buried in Billings, Susie Welborn McCrumb, also served at Base Hospital 53.

not get the impression these base hospitals were large, spacious, well-heated municipal hospitals – they weren't. Shortages of blankets, heating oil, coal, clothing, and other supplies were common.⁷⁸



Possibly Florence B. Myers

Nurses of Base Hospital 53, Langres, France,
(unknown date)
(Photo courtesy of Claire Myers Blurton)



Coat-of-Arms to the City of
Langres, France. Authorized for
wear to the personnel of Base
Hospital 53. (Internet photograph)

Florence left the service in 1919 and joined US Public Health Service in 1920. In 1920 she was living in Chicago.⁷⁹ Florence then worked at St. Paul, MN and then Fort Harrison, MT in Helena. She married Neil W. Myers, also a WWI veteran, in Chicago, IL, 4 Oct 1921.⁸⁰ Florence was a Red Cross nurse and an Army Nurse Corps reserve nurse from 1920 – 1942.⁸¹

Neil and Florence moved to Billings where they operated Myers Dental Laboratories for years. They retired in 1947 and moved to a farm near Fromberg, MT. They lived there until his death in 1957. Florence moved to St. John's Lutheran Home and lived there until her death.⁸²

At her death, Florence was a member of American Legion Post 4, Billings, MT, and a member of World War I Barracks #470 and World War I Auxiliary #740.

⁷⁸ Year 1919 Army Surgeon General's Report

⁷⁹ 1920 US federal census for Chicago, IL, ward 2.

⁸⁰ Mrs. Claire Myers Blurton said her parents met while her father, Neil, was a patient at Fort Harrison, MT.

⁸¹ Smith Funeral Home records, Billings, MT

⁸² Ibid

Being a military veteran, Neil was buried in the old veterans section in Billings, Mountview Cemetery. At the time of his burial, only one person could be interred per plot in the veterans' section. Florence wanted to be as close as she could to Neil so she bought a burial lot not far from his.⁸³ My photo below shows her grave (upper right flag) near his (lower left flag).⁸⁴



Headstone, Florence
Biddles Myers
Mountview Cemetery,
Billings, MT

⁸³ Mrs. Claire Myers Blurton

⁸⁴ I placed the American flags next to their graves for clarity; I removed the flags upon completion of the photographs.

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Harriet Marie (O'Day) Nielsen

US Army Nurse Corps
St. Anthony's Cemetery
(Laurel City Cemetery)
Laurel, MT



Harriet M. O'Day, school nurse. Photograph from The Poly, Billings Polytechnic School, 1927 annual.

Daughter of William and Elizabeth O'Day, Harriet was born 16 Feb 1890 in Sumner, Iowa. As a child she moved with her parents to St. Paul, MN and in 1906 moved to Billings, MT. 1910 federal census reads Harriett was living in Fergus County, MT with her mother, Elizabeth and step-father, Samuel Lutz. After graduating from high school in Billings, Harriet entered nurses training at St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul, MN. Following her nurse training, she returned to Billings where she worked as a Red Cross registered nurse.

On 14 Nov 1917 she entered US Army Nurse Corps. The Army assigned Harriett to Fort Riley Base Hospital, Fort Riley, KS. The Army sent Harriet overseas on 15 June 1918 where she served in war-ravaged France in Champagne, at Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, Verdun, and in the Meuse-Argonne.

U.S. Army assigned Harriet to Evacuation Hospital 4, France, on the war-ravaged front lines about 2 ½ miles west of the human cauldron of Verdun. Year 1919 Army Surgeon General's report reads working conditions were among the worst of the war with cold, rain, mud, and severely crowded hospitals with battle and gas casualties.⁸⁵ One nurse at Evac 4, Sigrid M. Jorgensen, wrote, "The mud and the cold will always be associated with our stay at Fromerville. Our uniforms had considerably changed. Instead of clean uniforms with white trimmings and caps, we were wearing high rubber boots, trench coats and rain hats, not to speak of layers of underwear. The mud was so deep we could hardly get about and the work was piling in on us. The wounded kept coming in. Our last camp at Fromerville was hardship, sacrifice and toil from the day we came there. Something told us that this was the last fight and that it was going to be to the bitter end"⁸⁶

On 3 Nov 1918, at 11:00 a.m. at Evac 4, German forces opened fire with artillery on the hospital for 4 continuous hours. Three explosive shells struck the billet where 15 soldiers slept. Two sergeants were killed, 9 privates and 1 officer were

⁸⁵ US Army Surgeon General's report, 1919.

⁸⁶ Report of Sigrid M. Jorgensen, Army Nurse Corps, WWI, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 200, Records of the American National Red Cross, 1917-1934, 942.11/102, Box 850

wounded. Chief Nurse Cassie White, herself knocked down by explosions, ordered all available nurses, including Harriett O'Day, to evacuate patients. Nurse Jorgensen wrote, "The (Germans) got our range and threw shells with headquarters being shelled down completely, shells struck tents, shrapnel flew in every direction. The concussion of the air when these huge shells burst was terrible. I am glad to say there was not one coward among our nurses. Some carried stretchers, others went about with bandages and dressings. Others did their best to cover the boys.⁸⁷ One nurse, Sylvene A. Nye, received the French Croix de Guerre with gilt star for Nye's heroism that day at Evac 4.⁸⁸

American Expeditionary Force commander, General John J. Pershing officially recognized the Army Nurse Corps nurses at Evac 4, for "heroic conduct when Evacuation Hospital 4 was shelled by enemy artillery" this included Harriet O'Day.⁸⁹

To care for the American wounded who could not yet be moved, Harriett stayed in France after warring countries signed an armistice ending hostilities. Nurse Jorgensen wrote, "It is not the discomforts we think of, because they were small compared to the joy it was to have been permitted to be up with our boys at the time when they needed us most. I do not believe if the time came again when we were needed, everyone of us who went to the front would ask to go again."⁹⁰

Harriet remained in France for some time after WWI. She was discharged on 10 July 1919 at Hoboken, NJ. Harriet returned to Billings. After WWI 1920 federal census reads Harriett was 29 years old, a nurse, and living in San Diego, CA with her mother, Elizabeth O'Day.⁹¹ (Samuel Lutz was still living in Fergus County, MT in 1920 per the US census.)

Harriett returned to Billings and for a time in 1924 served in Panama. In 1927 Harriett was a nursing instructor at the Billings Polytechnic Institute: forerunner of present Rocky Mountain College.⁹² Harriett was also active in the Montana Nursing Association. Year 1930 federal census reads she was living in Billings at 114 Ave D. She married Jens C. Nielsen, a WWI veteran, on 18 April 1936 at Hardin, MT. They had no children.

⁸⁷ Report of Sigrid M. Jorgensen, Army Nurse Corps, WWI, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 200, Records of the American National Red Cross, 1917-1934, 942.11/102, Box 850

⁸⁸ Tri-counties Genealogical Society, Bradford County, PA

⁸⁹ The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review, Jan 1919, Lakeside Publishing Co., NY NY, Vol #62 & #63.

⁹⁰ Report of Sigrid M. Jorgensen, Army Nurse Corps, WWI, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 200, Records of the American National Red Cross, 1917-1934, 942.11/102, Box 850

⁹¹ 1920 US federal census for San Diego, CA; enumeration district 275

⁹² The Poly; Billings Polytechnic School, annual for year 1927.

Jens died 16 Jan 1973 at Miles City, MT, Veterans Administration Hospital. After a life of nursing, Harriett died 8 Jan 1976 in Billings. They are both buried side-by-side at St. Anthony's Cemetery (Laurel City Cemetery), Laurel, MT.



The Curious Case of Agnes Talcott

Citizens of Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana genuinely honor, appreciate, and remember America's servicemen and servicewomen. In 1997, United Veterans Council of Billings finished building war memorials on Yellowstone County courthouse commons. These memorials are to the fallen of Yellowstone County beginning with the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korean War, and Vietnam War. Purple Heart Memorial is nearby.⁹³



One day, as I silently perused these names memorialized as being killed-in-action or dying on active duty, 2 names from World War I jumped out: Agnes Talcott and Loraine York.⁹⁴ Agnes Talcott - a woman from Yellowstone County killed-in-action, or dying while on active duty in World War I? As I walked from the memorial I also noticed bronze medallions embedded in the sidewalk leading to the flagpole at the memorial. Agnes has a medallion there too. In 2010, I asked Bob Fears if he knew where these medallions came from? He said these medallions existed in another municipal park in Billings, and United Veterans Council of Billings simply moved the medallions to the courthouse memorial.

All of this seemed extraordinary to me, and I had to find Agnes's history and circumstances of her death.

I began checking Billings, Mountview Cemetery burial records. Agnes Talcott is indeed buried in Mountview in section 99w, lot 68, grave 6. With help of Mr. Lee Stadtmiller, superintendent, Mountview Cemetery, I quickly found Agnes's grave, and noticed she did not have a military veterans headstone. She was also buried between

⁹³ The late Mr. Bob Fears, US Marine Corps veteran, took the time one day to tell me the history of the memorials.

⁹⁴ I'll cover Loraine York in the next chapter, "All in a Name."

her parents: Albert M. Talcott and Hattie M. Talcott. Her father's headstone reads he was a veteran of the American Civil War: an infantryman from Wisconsin. Why didn't Agnes, the daughter of a war veteran and supposed WWI veteran herself, also have a veterans' headstone? My search began in earnest.



Albert Talcott
father
Union Army
Civil War

Agnes Talcott
daughter

Hattie Talcott
mother

The Albert and Hattie Talcott family
Mountview Cemetery, Billings, MT



Agnes Talcott lithograph
from W.W. Gail's book



Newspaper obituaries - if they exist - are gold mines or bust: depending on who wrote the obituary. I went to Billings Parmly Library and to their Montana Room of much older rare books, manuscripts, and microfilms of old Billings Gazette newspapers. Gazette printed Agnes's obituary Sunday, 3 Nov 1918, page 5, column 1.

Born 19 June 1892 in South Dakota to Albert M. and Hattie M. Talcott, Agnes and the Talcott family moved to The Dalles, Oregon by April 1910.⁹⁵ They moved to Billings, MT in 1915 and lived at 444 Clark Ave.⁹⁶ Agnes began her nurse training in summer 1917 in Billings. She then went to Methodist Deaconess Hospital in Bozeman to complete a 2-year nurse training program.⁹⁷

Montana was not immune to the global influenza epidemic of 1918; influenza killed an estimated 50 million or more worldwide. Agnes contracted the disease and died in Bozeman at Methodist Deaconess Hospital: her mother and sister at her side. Two of Agnes' brothers, Burt and Lynn, were serving in the US Army at the time of her death.⁹⁸

Agnes's Montana death certificate reads she was a single, white, female; never married, no children. She was 26 years, 4 months, 11 days old at her death. Her occupation was (quote) "nurse in training."⁹⁹ Montana State Historical Society had only Agnes's obituary on file, and nothing relating to any military service.

Very complete WWI US Army nurse casualty records and US National Archive records do not show anyone - nurse or otherwise - named "Agnes Talcott" as being killed-in-action or dying on active duty while serving in the Army Nurse Corps.¹⁰⁰ To restate, no American nurse in WWI died as a result of hostile fire. 236 Army nurses did die overseas and stateside while on active duty: mostly from disease, the flu being the prime cause of death.¹⁰¹

W.W. Gail's book, © 1919, of Yellowstone County men and women serving in World War I, has inconsistencies.¹⁰² Gail includes by-name lists and lithographs of many of these people. Gail's book includes a list of Red Cross nurses entering the service from Billings; I've included this list and summary of each nurse, at Appendix A. Gail doesn't include Agnes Talcott in this list.

⁹⁵ 1910 federal census for The Dalles, OR, Enumeration District 303, Ward 2, south

⁹⁶ Gail, W.W.; Yellowstone County, Montana in the World War; © 1919, War Book Publishing Co., Billings MT

⁹⁷ Billings Gazette newspaper, obituary for Agnes Talcott, 3 Nov 1918.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ State of Montana, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death of Agnes Mildred Talcott, File # 137 / 1879

¹⁰⁰ Gavin, Lettie; They Also Served, c. 1997, University of Colorado Press

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² A copy of Gail's book is in Billings Parmly Library, Montana Room.

Gail's book has an "In Memoriam" page honoring just 5 Yellowstone County servicemen and 1 Yellowstone County woman who died: presumably killed-in-action or dying while on active duty. The woman mentioned is Agnes Talcott. Gail's note about Agnes is she "entered the service" June 1918.

Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial lists 55 names – including Agnes's - as having been killed-in-action, or died while on active duty in WWI. Why Gail's book, published immediately after WWI, doesn't memorialize all 55 names, I don't know. Why Gail's book specifically memorializes Agnes, I don't know. Why her name is on the Veterans Memorial on the courthouse commons at all, I can only theorize. My theory is well-intended people did the best they could with the information they had, and that includes information from W.W. Gail's book.

But facts are: Agnes Talcott was a nurse-in-training who died of flu in Bozeman. She was not killed in action, and she did not die while on active duty as she was not yet serving in the Army Nurse Corps or any other nursing organization.

So what to do now? Nothing. Had she lived, I am sure Agnes Mildred Talcott would have served the US Army (or Navy) Nurse Corps as best she could, with courage, skill, compassion and dedication commensurate with the demonstrated standards of the Nurse Corps in World War I. Let her name on the Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial proudly represent the 236 nurses of the Army Nurse Corps¹⁰³ who did die while on active duty: many of whom probably lie in obscure graves abroad and in America without a marker indicating their service to this nation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ To restate, information about the Navy nurse corps in WWI is practically nonexistent.

¹⁰⁴ Effective June 2010, if a military veteran is not buried in a state or national veterans cemetery, or those veterans buried without a government grave marker, the Veterans Administration will provide free-of-charge, a bronze medallion to place at the veterans grave, to highlight the veteran's service to America. Details at: www.cem.va.gov

All in the Name – “Sibil,” “Fay,” and “Lorraine”

A researcher faces challenges in finding a single, comprehensive list of military veterans from earlier wars: records exist, but they are spotty and many times incomplete. July 1973 fire at National Personnel Records Center, St Louis, MO, destroyed most WWI, WWII, and Korean War veteran personnel records. Many times a genealogist or researcher is left with simply walking among headstones in much older cemeteries and trust-to-luck you will find military veterans by finding their distinctive Veterans Administration (VA) provided headstones.¹⁰⁵



In 2010 I began “trooping the line” in Yellowstone County cemeteries and recording WWI veterans I found identified by their VA headstones. A problem arose; many headstones have names we normally associate with women: such as “Fay,” and “Sibil.” Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial also lists a “Lorraine York,” as presumably being killed-in-action. Were Fay, Sibil, and Lorraine, men or women WWI veterans? I had to be sure.

Sibil E. Blodgette’s grave in Billings, Mountview Cemetery, will quickly grab your attention because of the Aero Squadron. Sibil is buried in Lot 1A, grave 25 in Mountview’s old veterans section. Sibil’s headstone reads Sibil was a chauffeur for the 109th Aero Squadron in WWI. The 109th Aero Squadron, activated 28 August 1917 was an aviation section in the US Army Signal Corps.¹⁰⁶

I began to think “Sibil” was male as WWI US Army didn’t allow women to drive as chauffeurs or drivers. I found Sibil’s obituary in Billings Gazette newspaper, 8 December 1961. “Sibil” was actually Mr. (*my emphasis*) Sibil Edward Blodgette, a.k.a. Edward S. Blodgette, or E. S. Blodgette. He was a WWI veteran and member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Born in Blair, WI, Edward lived along Duck Creek near Billings and died in Lewistown. He married Grace Richardson in Columbus, MT, 1 Dec 1920.

¹⁰⁵ In 2009, Yellowstone County, MT, Commissioner Jim Reno began a county-wide initiative to automate all Yellowstone County, MT cemetery records and putting those records on-line. Genealogists and historians everywhere can thank him for this.

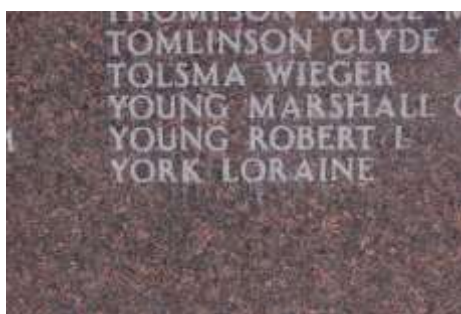
¹⁰⁶ US Army Historical Center



Fay French's grave is farther away from Blodgett's. Again, I suspected "Fay" was male as I knew the US Army did not assign women to ammunition units. But war begets strange things; necessity is the mother of invention. Who knows what the US Army did in WWI to get things done.

Mr. Fayette F. French's obituary is in the Billings Gazette, 23 April, 1966. Born in Grattenger, Iowa, 26 Jan 1896, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Albert French, "Fay" came to Montana in 1912 and homesteaded in Stillwater County. He served in WWI with the 13th Ammunition Train Regiment, and after the war worked as an automobile mechanic until he retired. Fay's obituary doesn't mention marriage or children. He died at VA hospital in Sheridan, WY.

Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial on the courthouse commons lists Yellowstone County military veterans killed-in-action or having died while on active duty. I've already explained the memorial in my chapter on Agnes Talcott. Another WWI name on the Memorial caught my eye: Loraine York. Loraine's name is just 6 names down from Talcott's. York also had a bronze medallion, similar to Agnes Talcott, embedded in the sidewalk leading to the flag pole. Again, was the person Mr. Loraine York, or Miss Loraine York? My Army training always taught me not to assume, but to find out.



York's name on Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial



Bronze medallion for York in sidewalk near flagpole, Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial.

I couldn't find Loraine York's grave anywhere in Yellowstone County, nor could I find an obituary in the Billings Gazette newspaper. Who was this person and why couldn't I find any information on them? I found a certain Loraine D. York, 10 years old, son of Horace J. York, in the 1910 federal census for Billings County, (*my emphasis*) North Dakota. This Loraine York would have become of age by WWI, but was he the Loraine York on Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial?

My search of North Dakota WWI veterans could not find this certain Loraine York anywhere in North Dakota.¹⁰⁷ However, my query to the Montana Historical Society for a Loraine York struck gold. They had a card on file for Private (Mr.) Loraine York, Army serial number 43-574, from Marco, Sheridan County, MT.

Born in Birnamrood, WI, Loraine York moved to North Dakota as a boy and lived in Billings County, ND and later moved to Mandan, Morton County, ND. While living in Marco, Sheridan County, MT, he enlisted in the Montana National Guard at Fort Harrison, MT, on 31 July 1917 when he was 18 years old. He was assigned to Co. F, 2nd Infantry, Montana National Guard from 31 Jul 1917 to 8 Jan 1918. He was later assigned to Co. H, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division – the “Big Red One.” US Army promoted Loraine to Private First Class on 29 May 1918.

Loraine fought in France, in WWI. On 31 May 1918, the Army listed him as missing-in-action, presumed dead. I found him listed on the Tablets of the Missing, at the Somme American Cemetery, France.¹⁰⁸ This gallant young man from Montana fought and died for his country, and he never came home. That's why I couldn't find him.

You might ask why is a WWI soldier from Marco, Sheridan County, MT memorialized on the Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial? W.W. Gail's book on Yellowstone County WWI veterans has Loraine York listed in the book's “In Memoriam” section.¹⁰⁹ Loraine's data card with the Montana Historical Society reads his mother, Mrs. Frank Tibbetts, lived in Billings, MT at the time of Loraine's death. That is probably how Loraine York is listed in Gail's book and then subsequently on the Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial.

It's irrelevant to me a technicality might have put a Sheridan County, MT veteran on a Yellowstone County Veterans Memorial. Loraine was a son of Montana who fought for his country and never came home. If any Montana county is to memorialize Montana's fallen, I am proud to say let it be Yellowstone County.

¹⁰⁷ My efforts included telephone calls to: the Dickinson, ND funeral home; Medora, ND Chamber of Commerce; Medora, ND Public Works Dept; Sexton, Medora, ND cemetery; North Dakota Historical Society; Weige Funeral Home, Mandan, ND; North Dakota Veterans Cemetery, and Mandan, ND City Cemetery.

¹⁰⁸ American Battle Monuments Commission, World War I listing. The Somme American Cemetery is at Bony, France and holds the remains of 1,844 dead and lists the names of 333 missing.

¹⁰⁹ Gail, W.W.; Yellowstone County, Montana in the World War; © 1919, War Book Publishing Co., Billings MT

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Epilogue

Colonel Ruby Bradley, US Army Nurse Corps



Colonel Bradley has no ties to Montana, but her extraordinary service as a US Army officer, nurse, and soldier merits mention. Born 19 Dec 1907 in Spencer, West Virginia, Ruby Bradley entered the US Army Nurse Corps in 1934. When Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, (then) First Lieutenant Bradley served as chief surgical nurse at Camp John Hay, Baguio City, on the Philippine island of Luzon. When Japanese forces bombed and overran Camp John Hay, the American contingent, including 1LT Bradley, surrendered. Japanese turned Camp John Hay into an internment camp and held 1LT Bradley and over 500 others there.

In 1943, Japanese moved Bradley and others to Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila: where Japanese kept women, civilians and children. She spent the next 2 years in deteriorating conditions at Santo Tomas. Toward the end of her confinement weighing only 86 pounds from disease and near starvation rations, 1LT Bradley used her (now) baggy uniform to smuggle food and medicines to save lives. She assisted in 230 operations and helped deliver 13 newborn babies.

American forces liberated Santo Tomas on 3 February 1945. 1LT Bradley returned to America, regained her strength, and was promoted to Captain. In 1950 she was chief nurse, 171st Evacuation Hospital, Korea. During the Korean War, communist forces overran the 171st, Captain Bradley refused to leave until her patients were on ambulances to safety. An empty ambulance exploded directly behind her from shell fire. When someone in her chain-of-command remembered she had been a WWII prisoner-of-war, the Army ordered her out of Korea.

On 4 March, 1958, the Army promoted her to permanent rank of Colonel: the first woman in US Army history to achieve that. In 1963, Colonel Ruby Bradley, 55 years old, retired from 33 years of active duty. With her 34 decorations and citations for bravery under fire, including the Florence Nightingale Medal, International Red Cross's highest international honor, *Colonel Bradley, US Army Nurse Corps, remains to date the most decorated female in US military history.*¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Dr. Mary E. Walker, MD, 1832-1919, is the highest decorated female. She received the Medal of Honor during the American Civil War. Revoked in 1917, President Jimmy Carter restored it in 1977.

She died 28 May, 2002, at age 94, and was interred with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, Washington D.C.

On 27 May 2011, I visited Arlington National Cemetery; while there I wanted to find Colonel Ruby Bradley's grave. She is buried in Section 21, grave 318. Behind and southwest of the Tomb of the Unknowns, Section 21 is exclusively for nurses who served the United States military. A wonderfully designed nursing memorial and monument stands above the nurses's graves. COL Bradley is buried not far from this monument. These are my photographs.



COL Bradley's grave



Nurses' monument in Arlington National Cemetery, Section 21. Plaque is on base of monument.



Section 21, Arlington National Cemetery. COL Bradley's grave is in the upper right near the trees. Nurses' monument is upper left on top of hill.

Appendix A

W.W. Gail's book lists these US Army Nurse Corps nurses as entering service from Billings, Yellowstone County, Montana.¹¹¹ Information below is from his book and my research. Determining what eventually became of these women is beyond the scope of this report. Unless noted, Yellowstone County doesn't have any marriage record from 1 Jan 1919 through 31 Dec 1940 for the names shown, and unless noted, none of these women are buried in Billings or Laurel by the names shown.

Ames, Florence

Buried in Billings, Mountview Cemetery, Florence Ames is included in this report.

Barrow, Minna E. (Minnie)

Born about 1894 in New York, Minna was first a Red Cross and then entered the Army Nurse Corps, at Billings, MT on 20 Oct 1917. She was trained at Newark, NJ, and assigned to Ft. Riley, KS, Base Hospital. Minna was sent overseas Aug 1918 and assigned to Base Hospital 57, Paris, France. Served at Juilley Evacuation Hospital; discharged 12 June 1919.

After WWI the 1920 federal census for Billings, MT reads Minnie was 26 years old, single, and Billings, and was a nurse.¹¹²

Blankvoort, Margaretha

Born in The Netherlands about 1891, she sailed from Rotterdam and arrived in New York on 3 Oct 1916.¹¹³ She was trained a nurse in The Netherlands and entered the Army Nurse Corps in Billings on 18 Oct 1917. She served overseas.

No further information found.

¹¹¹ Gail, W.W.; Yellowstone County, Montana in the World War; © 1919, War Book Publishing Co., Billings MT

¹¹² Year 1920 US federal census for Billings, MT, enumeration district 167

¹¹³ Immigration and Passenger Lists for the Port of New York.

Covert, Emily C. (Mrs. Emily Covert Heaton)

Born 1888 in North Dakota, Emily was 22 years of age in the 1910 federal census for Dickey County, ND. She was a step-daughter to James W. Filshier. Her occupation then was "school teacher."¹¹⁴ She was trained as a nurse at the University of Minnesota. Emily entered service April 2 1918 at Billings as Army nurse and left at once in May 1918 for Lakewood NJ to join Base Hospital No 26: also know as the Mayo Unit.

On 3 June 1918 she sailed to France via Liverpool, England. Stationed at Base Hospital Center Allerey Soane et Loire, France. Mrs Heaton was Assistant Chief Nurse in Base Hospital 26 from July 1918 until the latter part of January 1919. The Red Cross first organized this hospital, but the Army assumed responsibility for it. Sailed from Brest, France in February 1919, and discharged April 16, 1919.¹¹⁵

She returned to Billings after WWI where she was elected president of the Montana State Association of Graduate Nurses in 1921.¹¹⁶ Emily lived at 1110 N 30th Street, Billings. She moved to Portland, OR, where she was living in 1930 and superintendent of Good Samaritan Hospital. She died in March 1974 either in Portland or Eugene, OR.¹¹⁷

Darcy, Agatha

Army Nurse Corps, Billings. Entered service 23 Aug 1918. Trained at Camp Custer, Battle Creek, MI; sent overseas Nov 1918. Assigned to Base Hospital 136, Replacement Unit 2, Vannes, France.

From Miles City, MT, Agatha graduated with high honors from a 3-year nursing school at St. Vincents Hospital, Billings. Among her classmates were: Clara Link, and Maude Osborne.¹¹⁸

Flynn, Catherine

Born Nov 1892 in Butte, MT, Catherine was trained at St. Vincents Hospital, Billings, MT and entered the Army Nurse Corps from Billings in July 1917. She was assigned to Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver, Washington, as head nurse. Catherine was discharged 4 March 1919.

¹¹⁴ 1910 US federal census for Dickey County, ND, enumeration district 14

¹¹⁵ North Dakota University Quarterly, Jan 1920.

¹¹⁶ American Journal of Nursing, Vol 21 1921.

¹¹⁷ Social Security Death Index

¹¹⁸ Billings Gazette newspaper, 15 May 1918.

Latch, Mathilda Mary

Born 1892 in Montana, she was trained at St. Vincents hospital. She entered the service in March 1918 and served in the Infantry Hospital, Student Army Training Corps, Seattle, WA. Mathilda later served as a volunteer nurse in Billings.

After WWI, 1920 federal census reads she lived in Rosebud County, MT.¹¹⁹

Lifbom, Emma

Red Cross, Army Nurse Corps, Billings. Entered service March 1918; trained at Fort Stevens, OR; sent overseas Dec 1918; served in France.

No further information found.

Link, Clara A.

Born in Grand Rapids, WI, Clara was trained at St. Vincents Hospital, Billings, MT. She entered the Army Nurse Corps at Billings in Oct 1918. Clara was assigned to Camp Custer, Battle Creek, MI. Transferred to Base Hospital 4, Camp Fitz-John Porter, NY

After WWI the 1920 federal census reads Clara was a registered nurse in Billings.¹²⁰

Mecklenburg, Dora

Born 1887 in Minnesota, Dora was trained a nurse at Northwestern University. While living in Helena, she entered the Army Nurse Corps at Billings, MT, 20 Oct 1917 and assigned to Fort Riley Base Hospital, Fort Riley, KS. Dora was sent overseas Aug 1918 and assigned to Base Hospital 57, Paris, France where she was in charge of Department of Medical Service.

After WWI the 1920 she was a Red Cross nurse living in Snow Township, Anoka County, MN.¹²¹ The 1921 American Journal of Nursing reads Dora was living in Great Falls, MT and elected treasurer of the Montana State Association of Graduate Nurses.¹²²

¹¹⁹ 1920 US federal census for Rosebud County, MT, enumeration district 112

¹²⁰ 1920 US federal census for Billings, MT, enumeration district 161

¹²¹ 1920 US federal census for Snow Township, Anoka County, MN, enumeration district 12

¹²² American Journal of Nursing, Vol 21 1921.

O'Day, Harriett M.

Buried in St. Anthony's Cemetery (Laurel City Cemetery) Laurel, MT, Harriett M. O'Day is included in this report.

Osborne, Maude

Born 1897 in Shepard, MT, Maude was trained a nurse at St. Vincents Hospital, Billings. She entered the Army Nurse Corps, 22 Aug 1918. Maude was trained at Camp Dodge, Des Moines, IA, and sent overseas Nov 1918. Assigned to Base Hospital 70; transferred to Base Hospital 88, both in France.

After WWI, 1920 federal census reads Maude was living in Rawlins, WY with her mother and step-father, Charles Mitchell. Maude's occupation was "trained nurse."

Petersen, Clara

Born 1887 in Nebraska, Clara lived at 35 Broadwater Ave, Billings, MT. First a Red Cross nurse, Clara entered the Army Nurse Corps in Sep 1917. She was trained at Camp Upton, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY and sent overseas 5 Aug 1918. Clara was assigned to Base Hospital 11, France.

After WWI the 1920 federal census reads Clara was a "trained nurse" living in Sheridan, WY living with her sister and brother-in-law, Carl M. Christensen.¹²³

Rasmussen, Agnes

Red Cross, Army Nurse Corps; lived at 227 N. 30th St, Billings. Agnes entered the service Nov 1917; trained at St. John's Hospital, Cheyenne, WY. She was sent overseas Oct 1918, and served at Base Hospital 69, Savenay, France.

No further information found.

¹²³ 1920 US federal census for Sheridan, WY; enumeration district 108

Samson, Mrs Anne Rutledge

Red Cross, S.N.C¹²⁴, Laurel, MT. Entered service Oct 1918. Trained at Camp Lewis, Washington, and served at Camp Lewis Base Hospital. She was discharged 1 March 1919.

No further information found.

Youmans, Mrs Edith (Clayton Daniel)

Born 1880 in Pennsylvania, Edith was a Red Cross nurse living at 539 Clark Ave. She entered service Sep 1917 and was trained at Geneva, NY. Edith was assigned to Home Defense Service.

After WWI the 1920 federal census reads Edith was living in Billings with her husband, Clayton. The census does not list Edith's occupation.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ I don't know if this is a typographical error in Gail's book or not. It may be A.N.C. for Army Nurse Corps. I haven't found any reference anywhere to what "S.N.C." means, including any Student Nurse Corps.

¹²⁵ 1920 US federal census for Billings, MT; enumeration district 246

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About the Author

A tenth-generation American, Ed received his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wyoming and commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the US Regular Army through the Army's Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. A career Army officer, Ed is a graduate of the Army's Command and General Staff College and earned his Master of Arts Degree. Except for World War I ("Grandpa Saunders had bad hearing,") and Vietnam ("I was registered and ready, but never called up,") a member of Ed's paternal lineage has fought in every war America has had from the Revolutionary War to the Global War on Terrorism,

Ed served 22 years and 16 days on active duty in the Army and retired with rank of Lieutenant Colonel. A ground combat veteran of the Persian Gulf War, including the Battle of Khafji, Saudi Arabia, his many military decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, and Valorous Unit Award.

After Army service, Ed worked for Northrop-Grumman Corporation in strategic policy initiatives and research.

He and his wife live outside of Laurel, MT, where Ed stays active in veterans and civic affairs. An avid photographer, American Civil War and western history buff, genealogist, ham radio operator, and wood worker, Ed is a life member of Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 10, Billings, MT.

Digital copies of this manuscript, in .pdf format, are available free-of-charge for the asking; contact Ed at saundersee@yahoo.com for information. If you would like a color printed and spiral-bound copy, contact Ed for printing and mailing costs.



The Saunders. Three generations of military service to America: (father) **Ross Saunders**, US Army, WWII; (son) **Ed Saunders**, US Army, Persian Gulf War; (grandson) **Ben Saunders**, USMC, Global War on Terrorism