Stories Hidden and Lost

Fort Wayne Red Cross Nurses in the Great War

PEGGY SEIGEL

ABSTRACT: When the United States entered World War I, nurses from across the country answered the call of the American Red Cross and volunteered for both stateside and overseas duty. Author Peggy Seigel follows the stories of Fort Wayne, Indiana, nurses Elizabeth Melville and Margaret Phillips Church. Melville served in a Red Cross base hospital behind the battle lines in Contrexéville, France, and Phillips worked in a variety of settings for the Red Cross Children's Bureau. Both women called upon all their professional skills, as well as their stamina and courage, to meet the needs of wartime nursing.

KEYWORDS: American Red Cross, World War I, nursing, France, Fort Wayne

When the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, many Fort Wayne women found a new sense of purpose supporting what was now their country's war through work for the American Red Cross. Volunteers prepared supplies for military hospitals, ran canteens at local train stations for troops heading to East Coast embarkation centers, and took first aid and home healthcare classes. They served as local emergency drivers, looked after families of servicemen, and cared for sick soldiers on trains running between Fort Wayne and Chicago. In factories, at women's

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clubs, and by door-to-door canvasing, they enrolled members for the local chapter and raised funds for Red Cross wartime services. Seventy-nine nurses from the city and surrounding areas, recruited by the local Red Cross chapter, made a far greater commitment by serving overseas and at hastily organized stateside military bases and hospitals.[1]

World War I nurses followed precedents, established during the American Civil War and the Spanish-American War, of serving in military hospitals. Their experiences, however, differed significantly. For the first time, the American Red Cross recruited nurses as wartime members of the Army Nurse Corps. These women brought new medical skills and professionalism but also worked under severe nursing shortages and horrific conditions, treating casualties of modern warfare and the Spanish Influenza pandemic. Some American nurses became part of the "unparalleled" American Red Cross humanitarian aid program that linked American foreign policy with helping civilians devastated by war.[2]

Most of Fort Wayne's Red Cross nurses were first assigned to stateside military camps. From there, the national Red Cross sometimes, but not always, transferred them to military hospitals in France. In local newspapers packed with military news, reports of nurses were typically sparse; letters from individual nurses appeared occasionally. Amid the outbreak of extreme patriotism that suppressed wartime civil liberties, nurses' letters were censored for comments that might be viewed as critical of the war effort or helpful to the enemy. Unable to write the truth about their experiences,

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[1] Isabelle H. Taylor, *War Work of the Fort Wayne Chapter of the American Red Cross* (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1919), 94–95, 124, online at https://archive.org.details/warworkoffortwayne00tayl. Taylor lists six African American women who worked as canteen volunteers. Irene Byron, a widely recognized crusader against tuberculosis, died at Camp McArthur, Waco, Texas, becoming Fort Wayne's first nurse to die in service. "Miss Irene Byron Is Dead," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* March 28, 1918, p. 1.

[2] Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 2004); Susan Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917–1919* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1999), 2, 107; Lynn Dumenil, *The Second Line of Defense: American Women and World War I (*Chapel Hill, N. C., 2017), 135; Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford, U.K., 2013), 6, 38, 107; Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Niwot, Col., 1997), 43. In the early months of 1919, approximately 10,000 nurses were serving with the American Expeditionary Forces in Great Britain and France; approximately 700 other nurses worked directly for the American Red Cross. Lavinia Dock et al., *History of American Red Cross Nursing* (New York, 1922), 1014, online at https://archive.org/details/historyofamerica.00dock. Because federal service records from World War I were destroyed by fire, no "comprehensive data" exists to establish exact numbers of nurses. On the number and organization of base hospitals established during 1917, see Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 180, fn. 2, and 196, fn. 37. In August 1918, salaries of overseas nurses were increased from $60 to $65 per month. "At the Sign of the Red Cross, Red Cross Nurses," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* August 12, 1918, p. 2.

American Red Cross recruiting poster, 1917. During World War I, 79 nurses from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and the surrounding area served stateside and overseas with the American Red Cross.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

and trained to exhibit "professional poise," many nurses chose to keep their letters private or not to write at all. Furthermore, long workdays and nightly blackouts limited writing opportunities.[3]

This study will follow two of Fort Wayne's Red Cross nurses who served in France. Elizabeth Melville (1873–1951), a private duty nurse and Red Cross organizer, volunteered to go to Indianapolis's Base Hospital 32 in Contrexéville in northeastern France, one of the war's busiest medical centers. Pediatric and obstetrical nurse Margaret Phillips Church (1883–1969) was assigned to the Paris headquarters of the American Red Cross Children's Bureau. Far more than the "angels of the battlefield" or "mother protectors" portrayed in popular culture, Melville and Church blazed new roles for women as independent professionals. Removing part of their invisibility helps us understand their experiences of war and the challenges they faced upon returning home.[4]

Elizabeth Melville, Lilly Base Hospital 32, Contrexéville, France

In December 1917, a large service flag with forty stars hung near the altar of Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Fort Wayne. Nearby an honor roll board draped in an American flag listed the names of thirty-nine young servicemen and one Red Cross nurse, all church members. Forty-four-year-old Elizabeth Melville was the first local nurse to be assigned to France. In early September, she had taken the oath to serve with Indianapolis Base Hospital 32, also known as the Lilly Base Hospital, with the expectation that her unit would soon leave for France. A few days before Christmas, a holiday letter to Fort Wayne's "angels of mercy" from the local Red Cross chapter president revealed that Melville was finally en route to France.[5]

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[3] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 413. For a description of wartime suppression of civil liberties, see Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana, Ill., 2008), viii.

[4] See Dumenil, *Second Line of Defense*, 136, for common portrayals of nurses in the popular press.

[5] "Local Nurse To Sail for France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* September 7, 1917, p. 20 (quote); "Has Forty Members in Service," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* December 21, 1917, p. 24; "Fort Wayne Nurse to Sail for France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* September 7, 1917, p. 20; "Christmas Parcels Must Leave Monday," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* October 12, 1917, p. 1; "Writes from New York," *Fort Wayne Daily News,* December 6, 1917, p. 2; "Angels of Mercy Get Yuletide Tribute," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* December 22, 1917, p. 11. For a description of the rigorous application process for Red Cross nurses, see Nancy O'Brien Wagner, "Awfully Busy These Days: Red Cross Women in France During World War I," *Minnesota History* 63 (Spring 2012), 27. During 1916 and 1917, the American Red Cross organized 50 base hospitals, each funded and supplied by local Red Cross chapters. Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 315. Over the course of the war, American Red Cross nurses worked in 133 base hospitals operated by the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 196, n. 37.

Since graduation from Fort Wayne Hope Hospital's nursing program in 1902, Melville had built a reputation as "a capable woman and an expert in her line." In the summer of 1908, she attended a ten-week post-graduate course at the acclaimed Boston Floating Hospital, a children's summer charity hospital. Soon afterwards, she accepted a position as head nurse in Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital. Back in Fort Wayne in 1911, Melville became the city's first nurse to register with the American Red Cross Nursing Service to serve in case of natural disaster or war. In February 1917 as the United States moved towards war with Germany, she was charged with recruiting nurses from across northern Indiana to register for Red Cross wartime service. Called by Indianapolis organizers the following month, she joined Red Cross medical teams in New Castle and New Albany to care for tornado victims. Hospitals overflowing with injured and dying victims, mostly children, introduced her to what lay ahead in France. In a letter to Fort Wayne relatives, she wrote, "Really it is the worst ever, and actually is what the doctors call it, 'Hell on earth.'"[6]

Before returning to Fort Wayne on March 22, 1919, Elizabeth Melville wrote two letters that appeared in local newspapers. Both were addressed to local Red Cross leaders and written before the massive German offensives of spring and summer 1918. In both letters Melville reported general, sometimes misleading, information. Her limited correspondence nevertheless offers clues for understanding her wartime experiences.[7]

In letters dated February 10 and March 3, 1918—published March 10 and April 7—Melville wrote that she was responsible for "all the bedding and Red Cross supplies" for Base Hospital 32. She felt "very proud" of her "three supply rooms . . . stacked to the ceiling"; she thanked Fort Wayne volunteers for providing much-needed items ranging from bedding and clothing to hospital gauze. The Indianapolis medical unit had five former hotels ready for patients. Melville also reported details of daily life: the Atlantic crossing had been a "wonderful trip over." They had arrived safely with the exception of Indianapolis nurse Mae Berry, who was stricken

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[6] "Chairman of Local Red Cross Committee and Three New Red Cross Nurses Are Ready for Call to Front in Case of War," *Fort Wayne Daily News,* June 30, 1916, p. 1; "Open Headquarters for Red Cross Work," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* February 21, 1917, p. 7; "Fort Wayne to Rescue of Stricken Newcastle," *Fort Wayne Daily News,* March 15, 1917, pp. 3, 14; "Horrors of New Albany," *Fort Wayne Daily News,* March 27, 1917, p. 8; "Fort Wayne Nurse to Sail for France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* September 7, 1917, p. 20.

[7] "Urges Workers to Consecrate Effort," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* March 10, 1918, p. 5A; "Tells of Hospital Service in France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* April 7, 1918, p. 4B.

with pneumonia and had died soon after they reached France. Her unit was now "very comfortably located … in a beautiful part of France." A YMCA canteen was starting to show moving pictures. Voicing a common concern, Melville reported that mail was slow to reach the hospital, yet essential for morale. Grateful for receiving the *Journal-Gazette,* she also requested reading material and snacks.[8]

Wartime conditions clearly affected Melville's new life. She regretted that on a clear Sunday afternoon she was not allowed to go for an automobile ride. In both letters she referred to "lots and lots of things" that she wanted to write about that she knew would be cut by the censor. At the end of her first letter, she added, without explanation, "This is the saddest place on earth. The end cannot come any too soon." In her second letter, she requested that Red Cross volunteers include scrub rags in their next shipment. "When we got ready to clean our buildings we had nothing to clean with, and I feel sure the other units have had the same trouble," she wrote.

In March 1919, Fort Wayne welcomed Elizabeth Melville home as a "heroic army nurse … back after thrilling service." A month later, the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* published the most detailed known account of her service. As the article related, prior to sailing to Brest, France, in December 1917, Base 32 nurses had been stationed at Ellis Island. Because of threats by German U-boats, the normal ten-day crossing had required three weeks. Located in Alsace-Lorraine, Base Hospital 32 was one of the largest and busiest of the American base hospitals. There, Melville had cared for thousands of soldiers "wounded in almost every imaginable manner" and had lived through "scenes there that she will never forget." Such experiences, the article concluded, would be "of inestimable value to her in the practice of her profession."[9]

While more of Elizabeth Melville's wartime service thus became known, two things seem obvious: first, there was a much larger story to tell; second, Melville would probably not be the one to tell it. Her experiences would instead be more fully told in Base Hospital 32 histories, in letters of fellow

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[8] Ibid.

[9] "Heroic Army Nurse Reaches Home City," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* March 24, 1919, p. 7; "City's First Nurse to Go to Army, Home Again," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* April 26, 1919, p. 13.

nurses published in newspapers across Indiana, and eventually in a diary of a "32" nurse that surfaced in 1986.[10]

The story that emerges from the sources is this: On Sunday morning, September 9, 1917, Elizabeth Melville boarded a Pullman train at Indianapolis Union Station for the twenty-four-hour trip to New York City. With her were fifty-eight other nurses recruited by Florence Martin, the former Indianapolis City Hospital nursing superintendent who now served as the group's chief nurse. Like Melville, the other nurses were recognized leaders. Although many had recently worked in Indianapolis, they represented towns across Indiana. They were single, mostly middle-class, self-supporting, Protestant, white, and of northern European descent. At age 44, Melville was most likely the oldest.[11]

Before leaving for France, the "32" nurses waited more than three months for an available military transport. First, they were stationed at the U.S. Army General Hospital (Columbia War Hospital) in the Bronx, then at St. Mary's Hospital in Hoboken, New Jersey. On October 15, they were ordered to Ellis Island where they waited another six weeks. They practiced military drills, slept in unheated barracks, were fitted for uniforms, and reluctantly attended daily French classes. During free time, they took in Broadway shows, attended society teas, and went sightseeing. A highlight during this period was the widely publicized Red Cross and Army parade of ten thousand women on October 4. Dressed in their new blue dress uniforms and hats, the "32" nurses marched 59 blocks down Fifth Avenue, sixteen abreast. Behind them were two thousand other nurses bound for France. By November, as nurse Maude Essig of Elkhart wrote, they "were sick of all this waiting." Finally, after dark on December 4 they left Hoboken, New Jersey, on board a former German luxury liner, the *George Washington*. Along with some 8,000 servicemen, the Base Hospital

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[10] Marie Cecile Chomel and Anselm Chomel, *Red Cross Chapter at Work* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1920); Benjamin D. Hitz, ed., *A History of Base Hospital 32 (Including Unit R)*, (Indianapolis, Ind., 1922); Alma S. Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France: The World War I Diary of Maude Frances Essig," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 82 (March 1986), 37–68; Maud Essig, "World War I Diary: My Trip Abroad with Uncle Sam," online at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu.

[11] Fifty-nine "32" nurses are listed in Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 20–21. See also Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 31; Katherine Burger Johnson, "Called to Serve: American Nurses Go to War, 1914–1918," Master's thesis, University of Louisville, 1993, online at https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd/701. According to Johnson, Red Cross nurses were normally required to be between 28 and 35 years old.

Base Hospital 32 Nurses Drilling at Columbia War Hospital, Bronx, New York, 1917. The American Red Cross nurses assigned to Base Hospital 32 in France learned French and practiced drills before boarding their ship to Europe.
Benjamin Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32* (1922)

32 unit of nurses, physicians, surgeons, dentists, enlisted men, and civilian workers, together for the first time, at last began their experience of war.[12]

Far from what most would describe as "a wonderful trip," Melville's three-week Atlantic crossing was often terrifying. Due to German submarine threats, passengers lived in absolute darkness after sunset, and their ship followed a zig-zag course. Escort ships and a torpedo destroyer were always ready to protect them. Abandon ship drills and sea sickness were ever present. Storms with eighty-five-mile-per-hour winds confined passengers below deck for days at a time. In a rare light moment, as they moved through the most dangerous submarine zones during their last day out from port at the Bay of Biscay, passengers and crew spotted dozens of dark submerged objects near their ship, setting off sirens warning of enemy attack. Within seconds, however, terror gave way to laughter when the black objects were recognized as porpoises.[13]

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[12] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 318, 420; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 22, 23; Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 45, 46; "Port of Brest," *Indianapolis Star,* February 8, 1919, p. 23. Six women civilians joined the unit in October 1917; by December, nine more nurses, not from Indiana, had been added. After the Armistice, Base Hospital 32 had sixty-five nurses.

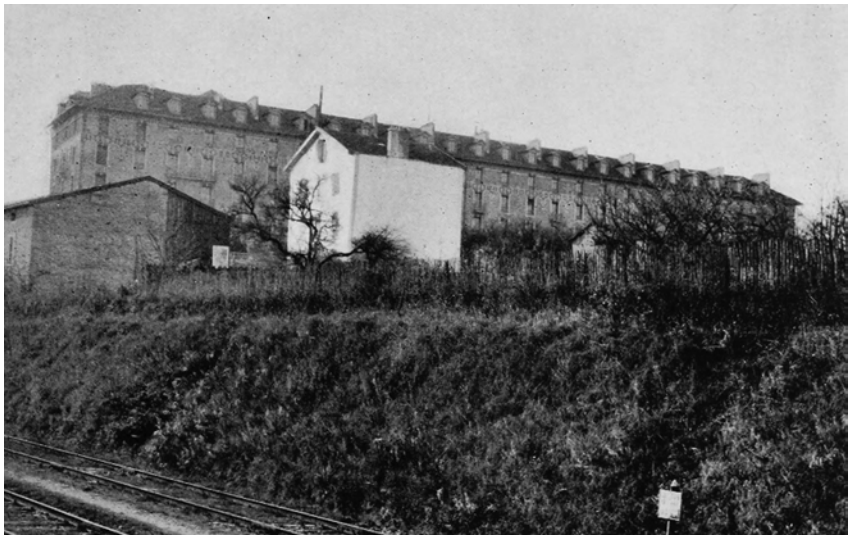
[13] Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 29–37; Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 49. Alys Weitendorf wrote home that six sailors were blown overboard during the storm. "Local Nurse is Fond of Duties," *Columbus Republic*, February 16, 1918, p. 5.

"This is the saddest place on earth. The end cannot come too soon," Elizabeth Melville wrote on February 10, 1918, after she had been in Contrexéville a little less than six weeks. Histories of Base Hospital 32, as well as reports from other nurses, give context to her comments.

Following their arrival at Brest on December 20, 1917, medical personnel were held on ship for four days to allow American troops to go ashore. On Christmas Eve, they began a two-and-a-half-day journey on a slow train. Confined in dark, unheated six-person compartments, with no bathrooms, the nurses ate canned rations and tried to keep warm under heavy clothes. Outside their frosted windows, snow began to fall. On Christmas Day and late into the night they passed train stations crowded with French soldiers. At 3:00 a.m. on December 26, their train stopped at a nondescript building. Walking through two feet of new snow, the women learned that they had arrived in Contrexéville, a summer resort town some forty miles behind the battlefront and within hearing distance of gunfire.[14]

Contrexéville, France. The French resort city housed Red Cross Base Hospital 32, which occupied five large buildings as well as the city's thermal baths.
Benjamin Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32* (1922)

[14] "War Nurse [Mayme O'Connell] Writes Home," *Franklin Evening Star*, February 7, 1918, p. 3; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 41–42; "Hoosier Doctor Pleased with Hospital in France," *Indianapolis Star,* April 1, 1918, p. 3.



Hospital A, Red Cross Base Hospital 32, Contrexéville, France. Housed in the Hotel Cosmopolitain, Hospital A was the largest of the buildings making up the base hospital and served as the main surgical ward.
Benjamin Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32* (1922)

For their first two nights, the nurses slept in a filthy unheated building recently occupied by French soldiers. All toilets were frozen. Although their quarters improved in the next weeks, sleeping rooms were crowded. Small stoves with little fuel constituted their only source of heat. Because of frozen pipes, water had to be carried in from the outside.

Conditions of the five hotels that Unit 32 would convert into hospitals were "extremely unsanitary." Even though heavy work generally fell on the enlisted men, nurses often labored alongside them, because hospital beds had been increased from 500 to 1,250 in anticipation of spring campaigns. In a letter home in January, nurse Alys Weitendorf of Columbus, Indiana, wrote that although she was still healthy, her situation was "no place for anyone without an iron constitution." Physical work became even more onerous for Melville and others who remained at Base 32 when half of the nursing staff and twenty-five enlisted men were transferred to nearby Chaumont to treat American soldiers of the 42nd Division, who had endured extreme exposure during a forty-seven-mile march.[15]

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[15] Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 49–50, 53; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 51, 58; "Local Nurse Is Fond of Duties," *Columbus Republic*, February 16, 1918, p. 5. Before the end of

Melville's description of Contrexéville as "the saddest place on earth" likely also referred to the suffering of the French people after two-and-a-half years of war. Other "32" nurses wrote home about the "sad, serious expression[s]" of French women, most dressed in mourning, whom they met in the streets. The winter of 1917–1918 was reportedly the coldest on record. Few children wore shoes; fuel was scarce and expensive. "The people of the United States have no conception of what the war means to the French people," Mayme O'Connell of Muncie wrote.[16]

During the third week of March, the first convoy of three hundred soldiers from the 42nd Division arrived, most with mustard gas burns. With limited supplies and equipment, nurses struggled to relieve the patients' painful breathing and widespread blistering. To cope with ever-increasing numbers of patients, twenty-one nurses from Hospital Unit R from southeastern Iowa joined the Indianapolis unit in March. Still, Base 32 nurses faced untenable obstacles. Until spring, their buildings lacked indoor water, making cleaning wounds, even basic sanitation, extremely difficult. Water had to be brought in and carried up multiple flights of stairs by the enlisted men, then carefully heated by the nurses over a small burner. Starting in May, wounded soldiers were taken directly from the trains to the renovated resort bathhouse, freeing nurses for essential highly skilled care. Shrapnel wounds, exposure to gas and liquid fire, and amputations required x-ray screening, surgery, and constant attention to prevent infection. By late summer, Base 32 nurses also treated soldiers and fellow hospital personnel for influenza and pneumonia. [17]

Two brief descriptions of Elizabeth Melville at Hospital 32 suggest her warm, confident personality. In early summer, a Fort Wayne soldier reported to the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* that Melville had visited him daily and had shared copies of the hometown newspaper with him while he had been hospitalized for minor surgery. "She is only one of many of the Red Cross nurses who do their very best in caring for and cheering the boys over here," wrote McCall. On September 7, nurse Maud Essig recorded

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the war, six "32" nurses returned home because of "ill health." Chomel, *Red Cross Chapter at Work*, 242. Florence Martin reversed her order for nurses to do heavy cleaning in the middle of February.

[16] "Portland Girl Now in France Tells of Conditions There," *Muncie Star Press*, February 8, 1918, p. 11.

[17] Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 42, 53–54, 58; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 58–59, 74–75; Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 129–30, 133. Hospital Unit R added twelve doctors, twenty-one nurses, and fifty enlisted men.

The thermal baths at Contrexéville, 1918. The Red Cross took over the resort facility, both to receive soldiers coming from the front and to offer therapeutic baths to convalescing patients.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

in her diary that for a celebration of their first anniversary since leaving Indianapolis, "Miss Melville gave a very interesting and humorous survey of our experiences as a Unit to date." Unfortunately, Melville disappeared from public record during the horrific months that followed.[18]

All summer and into the fall, as fighting raged around Chateau-Thierry, then the Marne River, soldiers were brought to Base 32 on hospital trains directly from the battlefields, flooding "the hospital beyond its capacities." Working "against time and death," nurses experienced a "baptism by fire." "Convoy after convoy arrived, and officers, nurses and enlisted men alike worked at long stretches, and rested when they could," one Base 32 historian remembered. "On July 22nd five hundred and thirteen patients from the Twenty-sixth Division, northwest of Chateau-Thierry, arrived, followed on the next day by two hundred and forty-nine more. Three days later more than three hundred injured soldiers were admitted, making a total of considerably more than one thousand patients received within four days." Emergency cots and mattresses covered every available

[18] "Find Hoosier Folk in Base Hospital," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* July 10, 1918, p. 2; Essig, "My Trip Abroad with Uncle Sam 1917–1919," 44.

The staff of Hospital E, housed in the Hotel de la Providence. During one week of battle in July 1918, Base Hospital 32 received more than one thousand patients directly from the battlefront within four days.
Benjamin Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32* (1922)

space indoors; two emergency surgical tents were set up outside alongside Hospital A, the surgical center. During the "Big Drive" (the Meuse-Argonne campaign) in September and October, Base 32 overflowed with over 2,000 patients of thirty-one different nationalities.[19] In later months, almost 200 German prisoners were hospitalized at the base as well. Essig remembered that "very young" German prisoners under her care had been told that American nurses would poison them. After witnessing her feeding one of their fellow soldiers whose face had been mostly "shot away," they expressed "gratitude and trust," Essig wrote in her diary.[20]

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[19] Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 90–91, 94–96. Histories of women nurses in World War I include many similar accounts of nursing during the most horrific battles. See, for example, accounts of Base Hospital 36 (with staff from Detroit) at Vittel in Gavin, *American Women in World War I*, 55.

[20] Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 105–106; Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 55. In June, Essig took care of twelve German prisoners. In October, seventy-four "enemy prisoners" were hospitalized. See Grace van Evera, "Histories of Nurses with Unit R Iowa Hospital 32 Contrexville,"

Writing after the late summer 1918 German offensive, Florence Martin stressed the importance of nurses to wounded American soldiers. They not only spoke English, they also reminded the young men of their mothers and sisters back home. Remembering their struggles to care for the soldiers, Melville and other "32" nurses must have also felt pride for being valued by male standards "of courage, risk taking, and heroism." At the end of October, the commanding officer of the Base 32 hospital center commended all personnel for their "highly gratifying results … during the recent emergency." "With the extreme shortage of personnel, inevitable during active offensive operations, and this personnel depleted through illness, over eight thousand one hundred patients were properly cared for at one time, and during a period of rapid evacuation of the sick and wounded out of this center," he wrote.[21]

For five days immediately following the November 11 Armistice, Melville took her only known leave from Hospital 32 to travel to Paris. Unfortunately, no records survive to describe her visit to a city where "everyone all but went mad" in celebration of the end of the war.[22]

At Christmas, Base 32 nurses threw parties for the village children and for their 336 remaining patients. They had a wonderful Christmas, according to Florence Martin, even though they were all anxious to be home. After their hospitals officially closed on January 7, 1919, the nurses spent uncertain weeks packing medical equipment and personal belongings for their return to the United States. On March 3, Melville arrived at Brest with forty other nurses for a ten-day crossing to Hoboken, New Jersey. On board were one thousand patients and soldiers of the 104th Field Artillery of the 28th Division, the first combat troops to return home from France.[23]

United States World War One Centennial Commission, online at http://worldwar1centennialorg/index.php/nurses-we-remember.

[21] "Mother Chief Topic of the Wounded U.S. Boys in France," *Indianapolis Star,* September 21, 1918, p. 14; Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 104, 129; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 101–102. Six nurses from Base 32 returned home from France because of illness. Chomel, *Red Cross Chapter at Work*, 242. In her diary, Maud Essig frequently wrote that Mary Houser of Decatur was often sick. Both Base 32 histories recount incidents of nurses sent to the front.

[22] Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 223. Between November 12 and 17, 1918, Melville is listed as "DS [Detached Service] Paris." Online at https://www.loc.gov/item/2017666568.

[23] "Christmas at Base Hospital N. 32 Told of in Letter," *Indianapolis Star,* February 6, 1919, p. 7; "Base 32 to Sail for Home Soon," *Indianapolis Star,* February 19, 1919, p. 16; Woolley, "A Hoosier Nurse in France," 65–66; Hitz, *A History of Base Hospital 32*, 183. In her diary, Maud Essig recorded far more personal accounts. For example, she described village children at their Christmas party, who sat "spell bound" and showed no emotion when receiving gifts. Essig, "My Trip Abroad with Uncle Sam," 51.

Back home, the reserved, accomplished nurse was praised for the "most enviable distinction" as Fort Wayne's first nurse to leave for France and "for her devotion to her country." Following recognition at a local reception to honor Red Cross doctors and nurses, Elizabeth Melville soon receded from Fort Wayne's public memory.[24]

Margaret Phillips Church in France

During the third week of April 1917, Margaret Church began the process of applying to the Red Cross Nursing Service with an interview with Elizabeth Melville. Because she had graduated from nursing school in Rochester, New York, she hoped to serve with Base Hospital 19, which was being formed by Rochester physicians. In September 1917, Jane Delano, chairman of the Bureau of Red Cross Nursing Service, notified Church that her application had been accepted and her paperwork forwarded to the Rochester hospital's chief nurse. In late November, however, her plans were scuttled when the U.S. Surgeon General banned all married women, even women who, like her, had no children, from service in military hospitals. After a flurry of telegrams and letters, Church accepted an assignment "in the strictly Red Cross work" in France. Delayed by severe winter storms, she boarded a train for New York on January 15, 1918. Nine days later, she took passage on a freighter bound for Bordeaux with 125 Red Cross doctors and nurses. At the dock to send them off was Jane Delano, who had braved below-zero temperatures to travel from Washington, D.C. Following an "uneventful crossing," Church reported to the American Red Cross headquarters in Paris on February 7. The next day she was assigned to the Children's Bureau to teach French nurses practical care of infants and children.[25]

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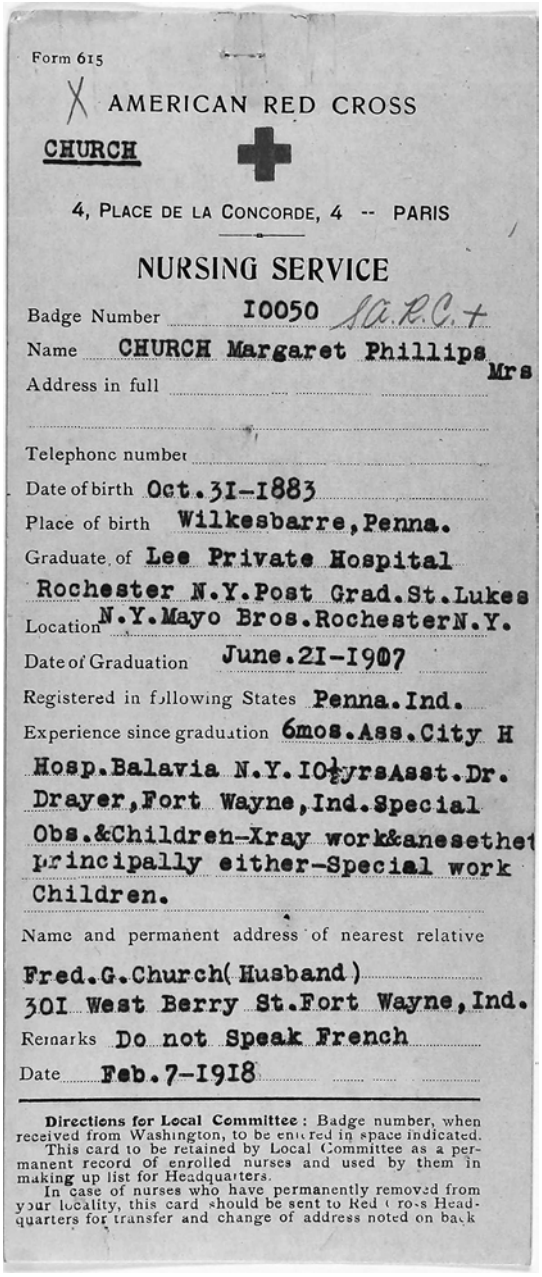
[24] "Heroic Army Nurse Reaches Home City," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* March 24, 1919, p.7; "Former Hope Hospital Alumni Dance," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 20, 1919, p. 12.

[25] Margaret Phillips Church, "Bureau of Nursing Service Application for Enrollment," April 26, 1917; Margaret Phillips Church [applicant], "Nursing Service Physical Examination," September 8, 1917; Director, Bureau of Nursing Service to Margaret Phillips Church, September 15, 1917; Jessica S. Heal, Rochester Homeopathic Hospital, to Mrs. Church, November 20, 1917; Director, Bureau of Nursing Service to Margaret P. Church, December 11, 1917, and January 2, 1918; Margaret P. Church to Clara Noyes, March 27, 1933; American Red Cross Nursing Service record card, Margaret Phillips Church; all from Records of Margaret Phillips Church, Historical Nurse Files, Records of the American National Red Cross, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, now online at Ancestry.com, U.S., American Red Cross Nurse Files, 1916–1959 (hereafter American Red Cross Nurse Files), https://seach.ancestryinstitution.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2365. "Mrs. Fred Church in France," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, February 27, 1918, p. 2.



Form 615

AMERICAN RED CROSS

CHURCH

4, PLACE DE LA CONCORDE, 4 -- PARIS

NURSING SERVICE

Badge Number 10050 A.R.C.+

Name CHURCH Margaret Phillips Mrs

Address in full

Telephone number

Date of birth Oct.31-1883

Place of birth Wilkesbarre,Penna.

Graduate of Lee Private Hospital Rochester N.Y.Post Grad.St.Lukes

Location N.Y.Mayo Bros.RochesterN.Y.

Date of Graduation June.21-1907

Registered in following States Penna.Ind.

Experience since graduation 6mos.Ass.City H Hosp.Balavia N.Y. 10½yrsAsst.Dr. Drayer,Fort Wayne,Ind.Special Obs.&Children-Xray work&anesethet principally either-Special work Children.

Name and permanent address of nearest relative

Fred.G.Church(Husband) 301 West Berry St.Fort Wayne,Ind.

Remarks Do not Speak French

Date Feb.7-1918

Directions for Local Committee: Badge number, when received from Washington, to be entered in space indicated. This card to be retained by Local Committee as a permanent record of enrolled nurses and used by them in making up list for Headquarters.

In case of nurses who have permanently removed from your locality, this card should be sent to Red Cross Headquarters for transfer and change of address noted on back

American Red Cross record for Margaret Phillips Church, 1918. Church, a pediatric and obstetrics nurse, was assigned to the Red Cross Children's Bureau in France.

National Archives and Records Administration

As a pediatric and obstetrical nurse, an anesthetist, and an x-ray technician, thirty-two-year-old Margaret Church was a valued addition to the work of the Children's Bureau. Since moving to Fort Wayne in 1908, she had worked with Dr. L. Park Drayer, a prominent Fort Wayne pediatrician and obstetrician, as assistant and anesthetist. During summer 1913, she did post-graduate work at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City in what was considered an "exemplary" nursing program. Her leadership with the Fort Wayne Visiting Nurse League, and her position on the Indiana State Nurses Association board for the registration and examination of nurses, established her reputation as "a woman high in her profession."[26]

Since its organization in France in 1917, the Red Cross Children's Bureau had initiated many large-scale humanitarian programs based on the premise of its founder, Dr. William Palmer Lucas: "The conservation of child life is as much a part of this great conflict as the maintenance of armies. It is for the future freedom of the children of today and of tomorrow that our Allied armies struggle at present." With French physicians in military service, few trained professional nurses, and their society in ruins, infants and children suffered from high rates of disease and mortality. French women of childbearing age faced conditions both in the workplace and in crowded housing that threatened their own health and that of their children. Moreover, after two-and-a-half years of war, millions of refugees, many of whom were sick and orphaned children, desperately needed assistance.[27] Working with pediatricians and child welfare and public health nurses, Dr. Lucas devised a plan that included a hospital near Toul for children exposed to gas bombing; health clinics in areas where physicians were scarce; healthcare for thousands of children, women, and elderly people displaced by the German invasion in France; food programs for school-age children; and an educational bureau to reach the public with pamphlets and traveling exhibits. A final program, to which Margaret Church was assigned, trained French nurses as home visitors. By the time Church

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[26] Margaret Phillips Church [applicant], "American Red Cross Nursing Service Credentials from Training School," April 18, 1917; "Bureau of Nursing Service Application for Enrollment," April 26, 1917; all from American Red Cross Nurse Files. See also Patricia D'Antonio, *American Nursing: A History of Knowledge, Authority, and the Meaning of Work* (Baltimore, Md., 2010), 60, 63; *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* January 10, 1918, p. 20; "The Visiting Nurse League," *Fort Wayne Daily News,* October 31, 1916.

[27] William Palmer Lucas, *Work of the Children's Bureau, Department of Civil Affairs, American Red Cross, France,* reprint in *Journal of the American Medical Association,* 71 (August 1, 1918), p. 12, online at https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-101496359-bk; Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 756–59.

An American Red Cross nurse watches over a French brother and sister at the Home for Children near Toul, 1918. Nurse Margaret Phillips Church was assigned to work with the Red Cross Children's Bureau, which maintained a home for orphaned children (later a military hospital) near the city of Toul.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

reached Paris in February, the Children's Bureau operated four hospitals and twelve dispensaries. Under Elizabeth Ashe, the bureau's chief nurse, the first classes for training home health visitors in Paris were set to begin the third week of February.[28]

In local newspapers and in Red Cross archives and histories, Margaret Church emerges as a candid correspondent and a courageous professional nurse. Because her work often involved short assignments and because her letters were censored, most details of her work between the November

[28] Lucas, *Work of the Children's Bureau*; Elizabeth Ashe, *Intimate Letters from France During America's First Year of the War* (San Francisco, Cal., 1918), 54; Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 757–59, 765, 775–79. During 1917 and 1918, Evian-les-Bains on Lake Geneva became a main refugee medical and evacuation center for civilians from German occupied areas who were considered unfit to help German war efforts.

1918 Armistice and her return to Fort Wayne remain largely unknown. Still, available sources provide an account of a nurse fervently committed "to do her bit" in a brutal war.

Beginning in January 1917, German aircraft conducted nightly bombing raids over Paris, killing and injuring hundreds of civilians, including women and children. Church's safety became a daily concern for her family and friends until a March 16 telegram reached her husband Fred: "Safe, Don't Worry." That evening's *Fort Wayne Sentinel* published part of a letter, also just received, that provided the first details of her life in Paris: "Believe me, we are scared to death of [the raids] . . . . There are aeroplanes hovering above us all the time." As American and French flyers tried to down the Germans planes, the "noise [was] terrific." Margaret wrote that she slept in an unheated building, wearing "pajamas, a bath robe, a pair of bed socks," then burying herself under "a steamer rug, a fur coat, and everything else I can find." Even so, the "damp chilly air" went "right into the marrow of your bones." She was deeply saddened by the French people, especially the women and babies and children who "have suffered most terribly." On an upbeat note, she added that "they are still game." Finally, she reported that "our American boys" were already in the trenches and, borrowing from a popular war song of the day, she wished them "Over the top the best of luck and give them hell."[29]

During these same weeks, Church was one of five American Red Cross nurses who helped train Parisian women in an intensive course in public health nursing, a concept that was then new in France. For six weeks, French physicians gave daily lectures on anatomy and physiology, pregnancy and infant and child development, contagious diseases, and charitable organizations for mothers and children. Emphasis was placed on prenatal and infant care, disease recognition, nutrition, hygiene, fresh air, and exercise. Expectant mothers were encouraged to use hospital care over a traditional midwife. Church's responsibility was to teach practical applications of nursing theories to students in clinics across the city and to accompany them on home visits. She found the French women "kind, gentle, and charming" as well as "interesting and willing."[30]

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[29] "Mrs. Church in Air Raid," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* March 16, 1918, p. 2. During the war, her husband Fred had a war job at a local factory. World War I draft card for Fred Church, author e-mail from John Beatty, Genealogy Librarian, Fort Wayne Allen County Public Library, December 6, 2017.

[30] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 803, 811–13, 815–16; Margaret Phillips Church to Clara Noyes, March 19, 1918, American Red Cross Nurse Files. When the Germans began

Church also bore responsibility for protecting refugee children from intensifying German attacks. In March, Germany's long-range railway gun bombed Paris from the north day and night. Sirens warned of attacks at twenty-minute intervals. "We run to the cellar stay there sometimes all night the pitiful part of it all is the infants and children get them out of their little beds carry them to the cellar keep them there until all is over," Church wrote hurriedly to Clara Noyes, director of the American Red Cross Department of Nursing in Washington. When the German offensive began on March 21, she was abruptly shifted to the frontlines of war.[31]

Along with other Children's Bureau nurses, Church was assigned to a "lending bureau" for anywhere from a single day to six weeks. Beginning in early April, she worked with refugees, as many as a thousand a day, mostly women and children. "We pray for dark nights," she wrote, "because as soon as the sun goes down or the moon comes up hell begins—the raids are dreadful." She did "everything from giving an anesthetic to painting screen frames, and from putting up babies' milk to making carrot soup." Church described herself as living in "the land of real work, with no comforts," where she didn't know what she would be doing from one day to the next. Back in Paris, she anticipated an obligatory nurses' tea given by Elizabeth Mills Reid, a founder of the American Red Cross and leading philanthropist. Referring to ever-present censorship, she closed by adding, "You can't guess what I can't write."[32]

At the end of April, Church wrote from Paris after three weeks in the war zone helping care for American soldiers in French hospitals. She recounted their gratitude for baths, clean pajamas, and bedding provided by the American Red Cross. Church described the unprecedented rewards she experienced as a war nurse: "War nursing, real war nursing, is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, but the most satisfactory thing . . . you learn that 'exhaustion kills fear.' We get eighteen hours duty when at the front . . . It's real experience, but you work like thunder. I slept on the

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their late March offensives, the thirty-two graduates of the *visiteuses d'enfants* training became "the principal nursing strength of the Children's Bureau" for civilian work.

[31] Margaret Phillips Church to Clara Noyes, March 19, 1918, American Red Cross Nurse Files. During these weeks, Church also registered thousands of children to facilitate reunification with their families after the war. "College Club Entertains Returned War Workers," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* October 11, 1919, p. 12.

[32] Ashe, *Intimate Letters from France*, 77; "All France in Mourning," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* April 30, 1918; Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 823. Church was sent to a hospital in Beauvais, probably in March, to care for soldiers of the American Expeditionary Forces.

ground in all my clothes . . . I did everything from giving an anesthetic in roadside ambulance to building fires and from dressing wounds to hopping on the freight cars to feed refugees." When milk for babies ran out, she drove the "twin-two" Ford to the nearest canteen and came back with a case of milk. "Six of us fed one thousand people with hot chocolate and hard biscuits and milk to the babies. It took us nearly all night to do this. Then some of our boys came in and we fed them. When we had fed them all we realized that it was Easter Sunday." The next day she expected to go to a nearby aviation camp. "This begins my fourth month," Church concluded. As in earlier letters, she exhorted her friends to "pray for dark nights . . . I pray you to pray for dark nights."[33]

During the third week of May, Church wrote to thank a Fort Wayne friend for her recent letter, the first Church had received "for many days." She revealed the emotional exhaustion of those at the front: "The general frame of mind is at such a high pitch all of the time even great big fine husky men seem relieved by a flow of tears." She was with the 94th Aero Squadron near Toul reading x-rays, administering anesthesia, and meeting hospital trains. "I thought the refugees suffered, but the soldiers, it is better to be killed than wounded," she wrote. Nevertheless, Church assured her friend that she was "willing to put up with anything, suffer any discomfort to win this war, even though the mud floats up to your knees most of the time."[34]

In early June, Church wrote two letters to Mrs. L. F. Drayer, wife of her former Fort Wayne employer. In the first, she reported that her work had become even more intense following the German offensive launched the past week. At night, she dreamt she was reading x-ray plates "looking for bullets and pieces of shrapnel." As more American troops arrived in France every day, she hoped that the Allies' luck would soon turn, especially due to the French and American aviators at the base where she was stationed who were the "best means of winning the war." In closing, Church described the Decoration Day ceremony held at the nearby American military cemetery. French mothers had left pansies with a note of thanks upon

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[33] "War Nurse Sends Letter to Friends," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* May 7, 1918, p. 25. See Ashe, *Intimate Letters from France*, 88, 94–95, for a description of Red Cross nurses sent to the front at this time.

[34] "Tells of Horror of Hun Frightfulness," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* July 1, 1918, p. 2; "Mrs. Church Rites Today; WWI Nurse," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* August 30, 1969. Church's obituary refers to a letter "from the famed Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker" who "commended her for service with the 94th Aero Squadron outside Toul, France."

each soldier's grave because the American soldier's mother "was many miles away." "An American officer," she wrote, "read this note in English over each grave; then the three volleys and the bugles for the dead ... It was very, very sad!" In her June 9 letter, Church gave a poignant description of the city of Toul in deep mourning. Catholic churches had recently held a special twenty-four-hour-long "continuous service for prayers to end the war." After working for eighteen hours, Church and other nurses attended a night-time service crowded with women, children, and elderly men. She had been especially moved by a harpist from Paris who had lost two brothers in the war and had two others in German prison camps.[35]

Margaret Church's last published letter from France was dated Sunday, July 22, 1918. For over a month, Germans had been pounding Allied forces as they moved closer to Paris from the north. Beginning on July 15, French troops had blocked their advance across the Marne River, finally forcing them to retreat. "The German offensive has been paralyzed if not killed," she wrote. "The struggle over here continues with unparalleled ferocity and the latest news indicates counter attack is continuing to develop and that further progress was made yesterday." The Allies had taken more than 17,000 prisoners, Church continued. They "are now facing the situation with confidence. Their reserves are growing fast." Hoping for an early victory, she expressed optimism now that "the initiative has been wrested from the German's hands."[36]

In August, Church was assigned to the Children's Bureau dispensary in Blois, a city in the Loire Valley southwest of Paris that was crowded with hundreds of refugee children. Here she worked under Dr. Bertha B. Stuart of Portland, Oregon, serving as nurse, supervisor, and anesthetist. She saw that babies were regularly checked for weight and that their mothers were supervised and instructed in best care practices. On occasion, she worked with a trained "*enfant visiteuse*" to pay home visits.[37]

A letter excerpted in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* in late November 1918 indicated that Church had also worked in military hospitals since the March drive. As a result, she wrote, she lacked up-to-date information about adoption of French orphans—work that she had pursued in her early

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[35] "Pictures Life in Stricken France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* June 27, 1918, p. 12; "Tells of Services in France," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* July 4, 1918, p. 1.

[36] David Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London, 2004), 421–23; "Mrs. M. P. Church Writes," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* August 9, 1918, p. 2.

[37] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 797–98.

American Red Cross Dispensary, Grenelle Mission, Paris, 1917. The Red Cross Children's Bureau maintained dispensaries for French mothers and children, as well as hospitals and homes for injured and orphaned children, and conducted training for home health care volunteers.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

months in France—that a Fort Wayne woman had recently requested. The previous winter, Church had also served as the official godmother of a small orphan girl adopted by American soldiers. Along with excerpts from Church's letter, the *Sentinel* published a copy of a photograph Church had sent of her holding the child. As American troops fought during the massive six-week Meuse-Argonne offensive from late September to November 11, Church most likely divided her time between the Blois dispensary and military hospitals.[38]

Church's association with the Blois Red Cross dispensary ended in late winter when French physicians resumed management. With hospitals crowded with soldiers injured in the massive battles at Argonne, St. Mihiel, and Verdun, with influenza patients, and with freed prisoners of war,

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[38] "Adopt French Orphan," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 26, 1918, p. 15; "Many Fort Wayne People 'Adopt' French Orphans," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 20, 1918, p. 9; "Big Drive Is on Today," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 25, 1918, p. 14; Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 987. Fort Wayne citizens supported the Fatherless Children of France organization that raised funds to help French children and their widowed mothers.

Church most likely continued to care for American soldiers. At Christmas time, she packaged Red Cross gifts for the 310th Signal Battalion that was then with American occupation forces in Germany.[39] According to Red Cross records, she worked for the Paris headquarters of the Children's Bureau until April 1919. Thereafter, she worked at the American Red Cross Information Desk and for the Office Manager. Following her official discharge on July 31, she boarded a ship in Genoa, Italy, to return to the United States. Since she had arrived in France, she had received only one week of vacation.[40]

Margaret Church's Fort Wayne homecoming on September 8 was a mixture of joy and reserve, reported by local media with some misinformation. According to a local newspaper, she was delighted to be back with her "many intimate friends" who met her at the train station. Although obviously proud of her Red Cross uniform with three gold chevron stripes indicating eighteen months of service, "she steadfastly refused to discuss her own exploits." Instead, she praised American soldiers as "the finest in the world." Their medical care had been "highly satisfactory." Newspaper articles described her war service as spent "with various field hospital units at the front" and "as chief nurse at various base hospitals." No mention was made of her work for the American Red Cross Children's Bureau. No details were given of her positions with base hospitals. A month later, at a gala for women war workers sponsored by the College Club, Church was introduced as the "Mother's Friend" or "Churchie." The toastmistress shared information that had been left out of Church's wartime correspondence. As part of her work with the Red Cross Children's Bureau, Church had "classified thousands" of refugee children to help families find them after the war. Church's remarks were very brief, "much to the disappointment of the audience." She closed by saying, "It should be the proudest moment

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[39] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 797, 987, 1081–82; "About Home Folks," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* March 25, 1919, p. 2. Fort Wayne soldier Lt. Bertrand Hawkins of the 310th Signal Corps had written his parents that Church had supervised the Christmas gifts sent to the entire corps. Hawkins also reported news about Dr. L. Park Drayer, now a major in Germany and a "celebrated surgeon."

[40] American Red Cross Nursing Service Record Badge Number 10050 for Church, Margaret Phillips; A. Fitzgerald, Chief Nurse, A.R.C. Commission to Europe, to Florence Johnson, Director, Department of Nursing, American Red Cross, July 31, 1919; American Red Cross Nurse Files. See also "Fort Wayne Red Cross Worker Tells of Heroism in the Hospitals," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* March 9, 1919, p. 41. Winnifred Callahan, a Fort Wayne teacher who served as a Red Cross worker in the large hospital center at Ghevres, wrote home in early January 1919 that Church was then in nearby Blois.

Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, Paris. Both Elizabeth Melville and Margaret Phillips Church resumed their nursing careers after the war.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

in every mother's life to have a son who took part in this great world war, for they were absolutely supreme."[41]

Despite lingering questions, much remains certain about Church's experiences in France. She had participated in a massive program of medical and humanitarian relief that had reached hundreds of thousands of French children and left lasting effects long after the official closure of the Children's Bureau in May 1919. Among its major accomplishments were four permanent children's hospitals and "at least twenty-eight permanent institutions" including dispensaries equipped for future use. What must have given Church special pride were the training schools for French nurses

[41] "Mrs. Church Again in the U.S.," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* August 27, 1919, p. 12; "Mrs. F.G. Church Returns Today from War Service," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* September 8, 1919, p. 14; "Mrs. Church Brings Home Superb Tribute," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* September 9, 1919, p. 1; "College Club Entertains Returned War Workers," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* October 11, 1919, p. 12.

that resulted from the first classes she had taught in the early winter of 1918, the continuing emphasis on child welfare and public health, and her registration of child refugees. Moreover, by serving in military hospitals and behind battle lines over months of war, she had done far more than "her bit" for soldiers.[42]

After the War

Following a short appointment as Huntington County public health nurse during an outbreak of typhoid fever, Elizabeth Melville studied public health nursing at Western Reserve University in Ohio. In June 1920, she was appointed Henry County's first public health nurse. During her long career, she initiated health inspections and dental care for school children and extra services for crippled children. She promoted fresh air cottages for tuberculosis patients and made home nursing visits. Working with women volunteers in New Castle, she supported a children's clinic, a clothing bank, and a milk program for needy schoolchildren. During these many years, she was also active in professional nursing associations. The single known occasion when she shared memories of her wartime nursing occurred soon after the war when Base 32 co-workers were compiling an official history. Not surprisingly, Melville offered few words. "War horrible and unnecessary," she had stated. Her months of providing excellent medical care during the most horrific wartime conditions were replaced by a love of public service to the children and adults of Henry County.[43]

Returning to Fort Wayne, Margaret Church served as a nursing instructor for the new St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing and continued her pre-war work with the Indiana State Board of Nurses. What seemed to be particularly suited for her interests were annual babies' contests to promote the best-known theories for their care. Organized events, similar to those sponsored by the American Red Cross in France, were held in the Wolf & Dessauer department store auditorium. Together with pediatricians and other nurses, Church weighed and measured the babies and gave advice to parents as needed. Over the years, however, she struggled to find a position

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[42] Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing*, 824–25; Dumenil, *Second Line of Defense*, 114–15.

[43] "Typhoid Prevalent," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 5, 1919; Elizabeth Edstene, "Elizabeth Melville Was Public Nurse, Servant," *New Castle Courier-Times,* September 10, 2017; "Typhoid Prevalent," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* November 5, 1919, p. 6; "New Castle Short Notes," *Muncie Star Press,* June 11, 1920, p. 4; "World War 1 Vets, Base Hospital 32," online at http://www.wwvets.com/BaseHospital32.html.

that was a good fit. She was passed over for the job as Allen County Public Health Nurse. For a short period, she served as a part-time probation officer. With more young women coming out of nursing schools competing for few available positions during the Depression years, she volunteered her services to former patients.[44]

When the renowned sociologist Edward T. Devine came to the city in September 1922 to lecture, Church shared with a local reporter that she had known Devine in France as the director of the American Red Cross Bureau of Refugees and Relief during the Spring 1918 drive on the Somme. She noted that "It was his business to feed the thousands of French refugees who were fleeing before the advance of the German forces." Enduring tremendous obstacles, Dr. Devine had kept "homeless children and aged people from actually starving." Church's memories of World War I were of the epic struggles she had experienced to save a devastated country.[45]

A study of Red Cross nurses Elizabeth Melville and Margaret Church offers glimpses of the lives and work of tens of thousands of American nurses who served in France during the last year-and-a-half of World War I. Shedding gender roles that defined nurses as battlefield angels and mother protectors, they proved themselves to be independent professional women. Many were hopeful that the United States was at the threshold of bold changes that would allow them more complete citizenship.

Melville and Church, in common with other war nurses, volunteered to use their professional training to serve their country. They were eager for bold adventures and unencumbered by personal responsibilities. Like many other nurses in France, they faced life-threatening experiences, extreme shortages of staff and supplies, and overwhelming medical emergencies. They endured the helplessness of being unable to maintain their professional standards. In a male hierarchy, their authority was frequently challenged.[46]

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[44] "Sisters at St. Joseph's Hospital Express Gratitude for Co-Operation," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* January 23, 1921, p. 17; "Large Number of Babies in Contest," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* May 5, 1921, p. 20; "Everybody is Interested in Baby Welfare Week at Wolf & Dessauer's Which Opens Tuesday Afternoon," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* May 21, 1922; Margaret P. Church to Clara Noyes, March 27, 1933, American Red Cross Nurse Files; Dumenil, *Second Line of Defense*, 73–74. During 1918, as the Red Cross Children's Bureau promoted programs for French babies and children, the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense focused on similar welfare measures in the United States.

[45] "Local Woman Served under Dr. Levine," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette,* September 8, 1922, p. 8.

[46] Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 106.

Melville and Church also found tremendous satisfaction in their work. "War nursing, real war nursing, is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, but the most satisfactory thing," Church wrote back home. Like so many other nurses, she gained confidence in being able to meet the emergencies she faced. During the early weeks at Contrexéville, Melville expressed pride in managing Red Cross supplies for the five Base 32 hospitals. Nevertheless, both women paid a heavy, often hidden price for their once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Like other professional nurses, Melville and Church had been conditioned to keep their emotions to themselves. Their "real war nursing," largely sanitized on the home front during the war, became better known only after the war when there was less pressure to create a positive picture of the conflict.[47] Historian Susan Zeiger notes that nurses faced "combat situations" which included exposure to contagious diseases, bombing, and poisonous gas. In their "real war," they struggled, often in vain, to ease the wrenching suffering caused by poisonous gas wounds, infections from shrapnel, days of delayed medical treatment, and chronic and severe nursing shortages.[48]

Elizabeth Melville and Margaret Church were hardly alone in bearing a profound abhorrence of war. More than 50,000 American servicemen had died in combat; more than 200,000 were disabled, traumatized, and/or seriously wounded. With five million young men at war, main street America had been profoundly altered for almost two years. Reminders of the war's human costs appeared in daily newspaper reports of soldiers' deaths. With the Armistice, national goals for entering the war seemed blurred and lost. Like other war veterans, Melville and Church must have felt that only those who had been "over there" could possibly understand the war's unfathomable costs.[49]

In common with other Red Cross war nurses, Melville and Church had come to their wartime service with outstanding professional qualifications. They had trained in rigorous three-year hospital-based nursing programs and taken post-graduate training. Both were highly praised for their war service. They were defined by their profession, competence, and purpose.

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[47] See also excerpts from Maud Essig's diary in Johnson, *Called to Serve*, 55–56; Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 127, 129.

[48] Dumenil, *Second Line of Defense*, 136–37.

[49] Merion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917–1918* (New York, 1997), 5, 7.

Nevertheless, they were largely invisible in local newspapers during their service and afterward gradually slipped away from public memory.

After the war, the meaning of nurses' war service was hard to measure. National leaders worked for military rank for nurses as a means to give them more authority and lessen workplace harassment such as that which many war nurses had experienced. Despite wide support, however, leaders were able to win only "relative rank" for military service, officer status in the Army Nurse Corps without corresponding salary and authority. Removed from national debates, Melville and Church tried to find meaning in their postwar careers. Melville would become best remembered for her many years as a dedicated and deeply caring public health nurse. Church maintained pride in her wartime service and her reputation as a "mother's friend." Not surprisingly, neither joined groups of nurse veterans.[50]

American nurses who helped win the war finally won the long struggle for suffrage with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. "Women have been the 'partners' of men in this war," President Woodrow Wilson declared. "Justice demanded enfranchisement of women." In 1922, Red Cross nurses published a record of their wartime accomplishments in an ambitious, official history. Future generations could never doubt their achievements. Nursing positions expanded in public health; enrollment in nursing schools and administrative and teaching opportunities grew. Yet many elements of American society no longer welcomed modern women as they had in 1917 and 1918 when nurses were desperately needed. In the workplace, male authorities often reassigned women to previous roles as volunteers and to subservient status. According to historian Kimberly Jensen, "women's patriotic duty in the postwar world was to marry men, reinstate the roles of Protector and Protected, and embrace the role of the consumer housewife." Women were not supposed to be ambitious or exhibit leadership. While the American Red Cross continued humanitarian work in Europe, its broad national support diminished. Red Cross nurses found that in a changed world, their experiences in France became less relevant. It would be up to later generations of historians to further uncover their trailblazing contributions as professional nurses in the Great War.[51]

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[50] Kimberly Jensen, *Mobiizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana, Ill., 2008), 135, 139; "Twenty-Six Nurses Join Fort Wayne Legion Post," *Fort Wayne Sentinel,* June 9, 1920, p. 15.

[51] Zeiger, *In Uncle Sam's Service*, 145–47, 163; Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva*, xiii, 143, 154, 158; Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 142–43,183.

FORT WAYNE RED CROSS CHAPTER NURSES: OVERSEAS SERVICE [52]

Eda Bartling
Mabel M. Bechtoldt
Agnes Blumenkranz (Naval Nursing)
Elsa Borman
*Grace E. Buell
Margaret Phillips Church
Sevilla Denninger
Bernice Dunten
Alma Finke
Roxy S. Fife
Ida Fleming
Mabel M. Glock
Inez A. Gross
Emma Guenther
Esther R. Hanser
Louise M. Heinrich
Laura Hinderer
Lilian A. Jenkins
Jessie Koontz
Laura Kreigh
Josephine Krick
Ella A. Jones
Nora Johansen
Mildred E. Lambert
Ida Marie Lichtsinn
Louise M. Mohr
Frances Nicol
Mabel Pittman
Eva Belle Reid
Fern Alice Reidenbaugh
Leota J. Schilling
Elsa Sperry
Mame Stegner
Ada M. Zeller
Ellen Zirkle
Martha Zolman
** Elizabeth Melville

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[52] Taylor, *War Record of the Fort Wayne Chapter of the American Red Cross, 94, 95.*
[*] Died in service
[**] Elizabeth Melville appears on this list even though she served with Indianapolis Base Hospital 32.