

Chapter Twenty-four

The Final Word

Epilogue

Within the relatively short span of three decades, the Army and the Army Medical Department underwent a reformation. So too did the Army Nurse Corps. From the nadir of the immediate post–Vietnam War era to the bright hopes of the new millennium, the Army Nurse Corps renewed itself by expanding its roles and functioning at higher levels. The Army Nurse Corps improved professional performance and credibility by requiring a baccalaureate degree for all active component officers and by augmenting their skills and acumen in many spheres. The Army Nurse Corps upgraded its levels of fitness and readiness. It became a master in the art and science of enhancing quality, expanding access, and reducing costs. As numbers diminished and the workload remained the same or even increased, Army nurses honed talents of proficiency and efficiency. The U.S. Army Reserve and the Army National Guard surpassed themselves as all components worked together to overcome old limitations and to embrace the concept of an “Army of One.” Finally, Army nurses crossed over old boundaries that had defined Army nursing and moved into unprecedented realms and roles in staff and command assignments. There were some problems, but these were minor in light of the vast array of worthwhile endeavors and positive accomplishments.

On 2 February 2001, the Army Nurse Corps marked its centennial. Army nurses, their friends, and supporters participated in celebrations all around the globe. But the roots of the heritage of the Army Nurse Corps originated long before the celebration of its first centennial. Today’s Army nurses trace their lineage back several centuries, embracing the men and women who provided nursing care during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, the wives and laundresses who cared for the Frontier Army in America’s West, the contract nurses of the Spanish–American War, and the members of the Army Nurse Corps (female) of World War I. Also incorporated in the family tree are the Army nurses of World War II who progressed from relative rank to commissioned rank. The Army Nurse Corps heritage also



Major Debra R. Cox, the Army Nurse Corps historian, was one of a number of active and retired Army Nurse Corps officers who organized the Army Nurse Corps 100th anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C., in 2001.

Photo courtesy of Lieutenant Colonel Debra R. Cox, Bethesda, MD.



Three decades of seasoned leadership gather around Brigadier General William T. Bester at the Army Nurse Corps 100th anniversary celebration on 2 February 2001 in Washington, D.C. From left to right are Major General Nancy R. Adams, Brigadier Generals Lillian Dunlap, Hazel W. Johnson, Bester, Anna Mae V. Hays, Connie L. Slewitzke, and Clara L. Adams-Ender.

Photo courtesy of Lieutenant Colonel Debra R. Cox, Bethesda, MD.



Colonel Betty J. Antilla (right), U.S. Army retired, was another collaborator in planning the week-long festivities convened to honor the Army Nurse Corps 100th anniversary. On the left is Major Debora R. Cox.

Photo courtesy of Lieutenant Colonel Debora R. Cox, Bethesda, MD.

counts the contributions of those who served in the Korean War as well as the male and female Army Nurse Corps officers who served in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, the Balkans, and Haiti. Equally important on the homefront, it includes the Army Nurse Corps officers and civil service nurses based in the continental United States and other zones remote from the battlefield who had the herculean task of follow-on and long-term care of the sick and the wounded, as well as retirees and family members.

Predictably and invariably, even newer threats appeared. On 11 September

2001, terrorists commandeered four commercial airliners to strike at the heart of America—the Twin Towers of New York City, the Pentagon, and the nation's Capitol. Valiant passengers and crew foiled the latter attempt causing the last aircraft to crash into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom followed. Once again, Army Nurse Corps officers answered their country's clarion call to duty and delivered the unique care they alone could administer to American soldiers in combat.

Given its storied history of achievements, patriotism, and selfless dedication, the Army Nurse Corps expects to carry on its unbroken line of professional service and shall adapt its knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of the future. Although its ranks will inevitably age, retire, and fade away, the Corps shall rise like a phoenix and renew itself with each passing generation marching in review.