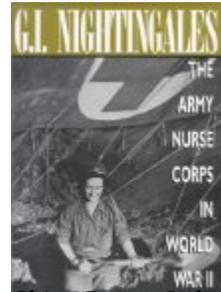


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Barbara Brooks Tomblin. *G.I. Nightingales: The Army Nurse Corps in World War II*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996. ix + 254 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-1951-9.

Reviewed by Katherine Burger Johnson (University of Louisville)  
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Barbara Tomblin has made a valuable addition to the study of twentieth-century American women by examining the role of United States' Army and Navy nurses during World War II. Using over ninety interviews with women who actually served during the war, over one hundred published pieces (many by the women themselves), records of the Office of the Surgeon General (Army) at the National Archives, and reports from the U.S. Department of the Army and the U.S. Army Medical Department, she has created a well-documented academic work based mainly on primary sources, which is written to appeal to the general reader interested in women's history. Tomblin organized her study of the nurses chronologically, taking each major campaign of the war and writing what could be considered a separate article on each. This style works because each campaign is virtually complete unto itself and Tomblin segues neatly from one campaign to the next.

Tomblin begins with a brief history of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps and the role of American nurses in other wars, as well as a description of the mobilization that took place prior to the involvement of the United States on December 7, 1941. Here the real history of the work of the medical staff begins. The first nurses actually sent to the front were those sent to the Central and Southwest Pacific. Tomblin covers those assigned throughout the Pacific theater, right up to, and including, the medical units which were sent to Japan after V-J Day in August 1945. Next, Tomblin covers the invasions of North Africa and Sicily, where nurses frequently went ashore immediately after the invading troops, often under fire. Following the invasion of Sicily came the campaign in Italy, which included the famous landings at Salerno and Anzio, and the movement of troops and hospital units into Rome. Next in the timeline comes all of the European

theater of operation, followed by the China-Burma-India theater. Tomblin concludes with sections on the nurses who were stationed at army posts and naval bases around the United States and in non-combat areas such as England and Iceland, and on demobilization and reactions of the women to the long awaited peace, when it finally arrived.

Tomblin writes not only a history of the nurses who served, but, in many ways, a history of the war itself, concentrating on the role of the medical staff, rather than that of the soldiers. She discusses why various military operations were undertaken, describing briefly the goals, the number of personnel involved, and the results. She then describes the why, what, when, where, and how of the medical backup for the various military activities. This is where one of the weaknesses in the book occurs. Occasionally, Tomblin seems to assume that the reader is better versed in World War II history than may actually be the fact. An additional sentence of explanation here and there, or more footnotes would have been welcome. The only other thing that bothered this reviewer was an occasional redundancy, where Tomblin would use a narrative and a quote with some of the same language. Careful editing would have eliminated this minor problem. All in all Tomblin's book gives a well-rounded picture of the women who volunteered to nurse the wounded and care for the sick during World War II. She covers the reasons women chose this grueling line of work, the working and living conditions of the medical staff, and the nurses' attitudes about their surroundings, the war itself, and their patients. There is much to be learned about the strength and dignity of American women. Barbara Tomblin has created a book which will aid in that learning process. This is a good source for those interested in World War II, general women's history, military history,

and the history of nursing.

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