Women in the War Effort

By LENORE E. FLOWER

Women, from earliest times, when their husbands, sons or brothers went to war, had but one role to play—that of waiting. The entrance of Florence Nightingale of England and her few women into the Crimean War was made despite great opposition from her fellow countrymen and from many surgeons and hospital authorities. Opposition continued until it was seen that her methods of sanitation reduced deaths and brought measures of comfort to the wounded.

A few years later, Henri Dunant, a young Swiss businessman, had his life plan changed by his visit to Solferino, Italy, during the day of that battle. Organizing emergency aid for the thousands of men wounded, he developed a concern that caused him to write of his experiences and later to lecture on them. Eventually, he approached heads of states in Europe and his efforts resulted in the creation in 1863 of the Red Cross at a meeting in Geneva. Some United States representatives already in Europe, attended that meeting but not as members.

In 1863 both the Union and the Confederacy had women active in working for the men in service. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross of later years, was a clerk in a government office. A former school teacher in Massachusetts, she became interested in aiding erstwhile pupils who had enrolled in that state's regiments and who had arrived in Washington. She visited camps to write letters for wounded men, to read letters from home, to do nursing as needed. She finally left her position to go actively with a small body of helpers into every hospital or battlefield where she might aid.

One commander gave her a pass "to cross the bridge with her little group of workers" and her service continued with increasing tempo during the entire war.

Wounded Union or Confederate soldiers were treated alike by Clara Barton.

Women in New England became active in the U. S. Sanitary Commission (a non-governmental group) and the work of this organization spread throughout the Union. Meanwhile, similar organizations functioned in the South. No community was too small to provide some aid.

Carlisle women of 1861 brought out the precious sewing machines which had just recently come into general use. They sewed uniforms for soldiers, working with materials which were already cut to size.

Every home had large stores of linen sheets and bolster and pillow cases. Linen soft with wear was eagerly sought to be shredded into threads as one might pull threads for hemstitching. These threads were used by surgeons. The women treated the threads in a primitive but effective manner, by placing them in sturdy pillow cases and exposing them to the sun in Summer or to freezing in Winter. The cases were not opened until they reached the hospitals.

Some of these threads and bandages were shipped to Clara Barton but most were shipped to local depots of collection.

For personal loved ones, the women made little sewing kits called "housewives" and sent these and boxes of food to the soldiers in the field. Neighbors and friends without sons of their own in the war contributed to the food packages.

In June, 1863, when for four days Carlisle was an occupied town, many letters must have been written to sons in the service but none of these are on exhibit for the centennial observance. However, several letters in the files of the Cumberland

County Historical Society and Hamilton Library show that first hand information was reported by women in Carlisle.

The letters of two teen-age girls to their brother reflect some of the town's feeling about the invasion. The letters are from Margaret Murray, 17, and her sister, Mary, 16, to Harmar Denny Murray, who was living in Pittsburgh. The first from Margaret, under the date July 3, 1863, follows:

Dear Harmar:

I wrote to you Tuesday morning after the Rebs had nearly all left, but on account of there being no mail, either to or from Harrisburg, I could not send it until yesterday when I gave it to a gentleman to put in the Harrisburg P.O. We have not seen a newspaper for a week—the cars made their appearance at the edge of town today, the first time since yesterday (a) week; it was a freight train bringing commissary stores for the soldiers quarters here and also timber to build the bridge. They can't come farther than where the Gas works stood it having been burnt by the Rebs. We will have to do without gas for some time to come.

As we thought the Rebs had taken their final departure, my last letter was written in rather a hopeful strain, and we never dreamed that by evening the Rebel demons would attempt to shell the town, and that too without giving the usual warning. A number of regiments of N York, Philadelphia and others from the country arrived here on foot from Harrisburg to rest themselves and partake of refreshments provided by the citizens which were sent to the Market house for their use. They were on their way out the Baltimore Pike after the Rebs and did not expect to stop here longer than necessary.

A great many ladies and gentlemen were down at the Square looking at them and talking with them and Mary and I were among the number. We were having a very nice time, when the cry "the Rebs are coming" was raised. The Rebs were in sight just below the remains of the Gas House; they had come in the Trindle Road, and as we had not sent scouts out in that direction owing to the fact that they (the Rebs) were out toward Holly, and our scouts were in every direction but the one in which the Rebs came.

Such a stampede of women and children you never saw in your life. You cannot imagine the confusion that ensued. It was a disagreeable surprise. Officers called to their men who were scattered in all directions, some eating, some worn out with their long march fast asleep on the Square and pavements; soldiers loading their pieces, the gunners away from their cannon and no where to be seen, the excitement was intense.

Uncle Joe and Pappy helped to draw one of the guns out and place it in proper position. Mary and the rest of us ran up the 1st church (Presbyterian) Alley, as far as Senseman's stable and I proposed that we should go into Main (High) Street to see if it was really true that the Rebs were in sight, and our men drawn up in line of battle.

We got as far as Mr. Miles store, and were gazing down Main Street when a shell came whizzing over the town right above us; we all rushed into the house but as we were two squares from home I could not stay there. We got out the back way, tore up the alley like wild people then across Main Street then home. The shot and shell were coming thick and fast and we all retreated to the cellar for safety.

The sounds of the shells as they came over the house and exploded nearby was terrible. I cannot use a more significant expression than to say they had an infernal sound. I liked the booming of the cannon but the whizzing of those shells I hope never to hear again.

The firing commenced about 7½ o'clock and lasted until 11; there was a short cecession about 11

and we thought it best to go out of town as a great many were leaving and our houses were just in the range of the guns (besides we did not know but the town would be completely shelled before morning). We took a few valuables with us and went up to Mr. Orrs where we met a great many citizens who had left town; we stayed all night and the next day, went to the Meeting House Springs and then came home this morning. A few shots were fired after we left town and the enemy retreated after burning the Barracks and Gas house.

Several houses in town were damaged by shells, but not to a very great extent. I think the attack was the most inhuman and barbarous I ever heard of—attempting to destroy a town with the women and children in it. Fitzhugh Lee was the Commander of the Rebs; it just shows what they would do if they had the opportunity. We have a great many soldiers in town and many more are expected—they are coming as fast as they can. Henderson's warehouse is used by them for a depot for provisions.

The College (West) is used for a hospital where the wounded were taken after the engagement. We had not more than 15 or 20 wounded and none killed. There were 42 Rebel prisoners brought into town this evening captured by Capt. Boyd's Cavalry near Shippensburg, they will be taken to Harrisburg. It is late and I will close for tonight.

(The letter was resumed under date Saturday morning July 4.)

I hear the fife and drum this morning and understand 8-10 thousand men have just passed out the Baltimore Pike to guard the Gap. Everything tells us we are in the midst of the war—that this state Pennsylvania is the battleground now. We were afraid you might be anxious about us and come home, but mother says stay where you are; we are perfectly safe and if Carlisle should again be attacked we can leave this town . . . It is now 9 o'clock and the news from Adams County is very cheering; there has been heavy fighting the last two days near Gettysburg and Cashtown; the Army of the Potomac has been driving them back towards Bendersville; it is said the Rebels are slaughtered terribly—the Division that stopped in Carlisle is among those who suffered most. Write soon, Maggy

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Mary wrote her brother on July 23 and in part continued the story:

The draft has not yet come off here and the young men are feeling very anxious here as to who will be the lucky ones. Monday I believe is the day appointed for Draft. I am glad we have no anxiety on that score, Carlisle is beginning to wear its old appearance again. The College Yard looks beautiful, the late heavy rains having washed away all traces of the rebels. The grass has grown so rank and luxuriant that we can scarcely tell where the rebel camp fires were; no other damage having been done not even a tree cut down.

The College is now used as a Hospital for our sick and wounded. The stores are all opened again the storekeeper s having brought back their goods. The warehouses are doing business and altogether the town wears a lively appearance. Mr. Henderson's warehouse is still used as a depot for commissary stores.

Poor Nonemaker lost a little by his southern friends. They stole his two iron half bushels which he feels very much provoked about—make nice camp kettles I suspect? . . . Pappa, Mother and myself walked out to the Barracks to see the ruins. It is really a desolate place. The old magazine was not destroyed, neither was Sanno's house and the old stable and two or three houses (the bakery I suppose) situated at the western part of the Garrison grounds, but the other buildings have all been destroyed.

The bare and naked walls alone are standing; monuments of rebel barbarism but our flag is again waving from the flagstaff and looks more beautiful than ever.

The regulars are all back and are encamped in tents on the open green around the flag staff.

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The Murray sisters were typical of the valley's long-time settlers, descendants of the Parker family which came into Pennsborough Township as licensees before Indian titles were extinguished. They were cousins of the Denny family that first lived in Carlisle and then in Pittsburgh.

The other letter preserved by the Historical Society was written by a woman not of Carlisle birth but who had come early to the town from her native Wilmington, Del., with her physician husband, Theodore Myers, who died at age 36.

Mrs. Myers was a graduate of Moravian Seminary. A musician, she studied art at the Philadelphia Academy under John Sartain. She had an excellent knowledge of German although born in a Scotch-Irish household. She translated several books from the German.

Mrs. Myers lived at 127 West High Street. Besides doing translations, Mrs. Myers supported herself by giving music lessons and by painting. Some of her books and unsold paintings are in the Hamilton Library.

Her response to the bombing was a very personal one. Her letter refers to a painting she had done of Gen. Smith and was addressed in the only reference she could find to the general's wife. She supposed Mrs. Smith was in New York but she was actually in Vermont. The letter was returned to the sender. Its text follows:

Mrs. General Smith

Dear Madam:—

When the ladies of Carlisle resolved on presenting a memorial to Gen. Smith for his gallant defense of our town on the night of July 1st, I although a great invalid wished also to do my part and in my own way. I left my home where I have lived for thirty years—twenty five as a widow—with everything in it to the mercy of the rebels, never expecting to see it again. But it was saved although somewhat injured. On my return my first feeling was that of gratitude, for I am assured that under Providence, I am indebted to the exertions of Gen. Smith and his brave soldiers—I wish I could do something for each of them—that I still have a home.

Will you therefore accept the accompanying picture which is my own work, as a pledge of my appreciation of his important service to Carlisle. I offer it not on account of its worth as a painting or ivorytype, for you may have many better, but because of the spirit in which it is offered. For 'A grateful mind

By owing owes not, but still pays at once
Indebted and discharged'

-The frame is not the kind I wished or intended, but it is the best that could be procured in time to send the picture as it was feared you might leave New York and in such case that delay might cause the loss of the box.

Very Respectfully yours
Sarah A. Myers

Mrs. General Smith 9 Street, New York.

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Much more vitally concerned were the wives of men North or South, their mothers or their sisters, whose reactions can not be gauged by letters and whose courage must in every sense have matched that of their sons or husbands on the field of battle.