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Madelon "Glory" Battle Hancock, Heroine Of World War I

By: **Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

Abstract

2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the United States' entry in World War I (WWI). Few know that Madelon "Glory" Battle Hancock of Asheville, North Carolina, was the most decorated nurse who served with the Allied Forces in WWI. As a British Red Cross nurse, she joined the first detachment of British soldiers deployed to the Belgium battlefield in August, 1914, and remained with the troops until the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

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Madelon “Glory” Battle Hancock – Heroine of World War I

By NCNA Member Phoebe Pollitt, RN; Nursing History Council Member

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Few know that Madelon “Glory” Battle Hancock of Asheville, North Carolina, was the most decorated nurse who served with the Allied Forces in WW I. As a British Red Cross nurse, she joined the first detachment of British soldiers deployed to the Belgium battlefront in August, 1914, and remained with the troops until the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

Born in Pensacola, Florida, in 1881, Madelon “Glory” Battle Hancock grew up in Asheville. Her father, Dr. S. Westray Battle, was a highly regarded physician known primarily for his work with tuberculosis.

After graduating from the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing in New York City in 1905, she married Mortimer Hancock, a British Army officer.

In the British Army she was known as “Glory Hancock” for her enthusiastic support of the Allied cause. Her British Hospital Unit went to Antwerp, in Belgium, on Aug. 13, 1914, only a few

received 12 decorations: five from Great Britain, five from Belgium and two from France.

The trauma and separation caused by the war took its toll on the Hancock marriage. Soon after the war, Madelon and Mortimer Hancock divorced. Madelon Hancock returned to Asheville for a much-needed period of rest and recuperation.

In 1920, she returned to Europe, this time to France, to care for children orphaned by the war.

She began using the title Countess von Hellencourt, an honor bestowed on her by the King Albert I of Belgium for her heroism as a Red Cross nurse during the war. Hancock died in 1930 in Nice, France, after a series of operations, with her step-mother by her side.

Madelon “Glory” Battle Hancock von Hellencourt’s passing was noted in newspapers around the world. While she lived much of her life away from the Tar Heel State, we should honor the courage and dedication of this heroic North Carolina nurse. ■



Portrait of Madelon ‘Glory’ Battle Hancock in Uniform, Image 746-4, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

“Ingenuity and resourcefulness have to supply substitutes in time of war. . .”

— Anna Maxwell, *American Journal of Nursing*

days after the war was declared. Hancock served at that and other dressing stations (field hospitals) at the front lines for four years, until the end of the war. She was never beyond the sound of gunfire and frequently within the zone of fire. She was gassed, yet survived without serious injury.

In early 1918, Anna Maxwell, Superintendent of Nurses at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City toured the battlefields of WWI and wrote a report for the *American Journal of Nursing*. She found Hancock acting as Head Nurse at a base hospital in Flanders managing a “Large ward filled with the wounded suffering from gas gangrene, with few facilities for treatment – no hot water bags, no rubber sheets, etc. Ingenuity and resourcefulness have to supply substitutes in time of war ...”

For her service to the wounded and sick and for her conspicuous bravery under fire on numerous occasions, she

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