

From the Archives:

KAΘ Members Served at Home and Abroad in Two World Wars

The War to End All Wars: World War I

World War I began in Europe in 1914 but gradually drew in nations from around the world. In response, 1917 KAΘ Grand Convention delegates meeting in Charlevoix, Michigan, established the War Service Fund to equip a base hospital nursing unit overseas. Donations quickly exceeded the \$3,800 needed and enabled us to also sponsor a Red Cross worker in France, paying all her expenses. Many Thetas served overseas as physicians, nurses, administrators, social workers and canteen workers. They cared for soldiers, refugees, orphans and stricken civilians and observed tremendous loss, for war casualties totaled more than 40,000,000.



1917 Grand Convention memento

We were involved in the war effort on the home front as well. The 1917 convention delegates knitted socks and folded bandages – even during business sessions. Members sponsored special projects in their communities. As one example, Toronto alumnae and Sigma Chapter donated \$4,000 to the Canadian Red Cross. And as told in *Sixty Years in Kappa Alpha Theta*, “Thetas who were trained nurses, dietitians, physicians, social service workers, etc., and who had not been drafted for overseas service, rose to high rank in hospitals, reconstruction bases, and army camps. Executive ability and [speaking skills] carried others into the limelight, where they served with distinction and honor.”



Chapter News . . . Psi Chapter Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine November 1917

... The annual alumnae banquet in June brought back many of the older girls, and we made most merry, except the war cast its shadow over our hearts unconsciously. Its influence was seen in rushing this fall, not only in Red Cross luncheons, war dinners, and the omnipresent knitting, but in the simplicity and informality of the parties. Psi has pledged herself to a thoughtful economy in dress, food, and entertainment. The Wisconsin fraternities have abandoned their formals for this year . . . On the whole, with the usual enthusiasm of a new university year ... we are looking forward to a busy season of larger service and deeper purpose. It seems to us a time when Kappa Alpha Theta must justify her existence by freedom from all pettiness, narrowness, and selfishness.

Marjorie Kinnan
Psi, 1915

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings won the 1939 Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *The Yearling*.



Ruth Townley
Mu, 1899

Excerpts from the letters of Ruth Townley, Red Cross canteen worker, which appeared in the Spring 1919 Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine

November 11, 1918 ... The boat sailed at 12:30. We all stayed on deck until we were out of the river, then waved farewell to liberty.

November 12, 1918 ... Last night's wireless brought news that Germany had signed the armistice. ... This afternoon the whole boat celebrated. A procession was formed headed by a drum corps, each nation in its own group. After marching twice around the deck each group sang its own national hymn.

December 6, 1918 Bourges, France ... Thanksgiving I rendered my first service. In the morning I packed baskets with matches and cigarettes. In the afternoon, I helped at the Casino. The Red Cross took over the Casino and Follies for a matinee for convalescent soldiers in hospitals near Paris. The boys came by truck and train. Some hobbled in; some were carried. At the door I gave cigarettes and matches and candy. The boys were so cheerful, except one lad who cried all the time – nerve shock. Some of them had not seen an American girl for months except their nurses.

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This canteen is on the [train] line of communication between front and seaport. This week I have worked as a sandwich girl. I have cuts tons of bread [for] at least seven hundred sandwiches an afternoon. Tomorrow night I take night shift [making coffee]. There are six boilers, holding about 90 gallons each. We use charcoal for fuel, so it takes two and a half hours for the water to boil. Any boy without money receives his food just the same. We always give back their francs if we see their pile is low – usually they have “beaucoup frankies.” Already I have looked at dozens of pictures of sweethearts, wives and babies and heard all about the home back in the U.S.

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Quoting from ‘*Sixty Years*’: “Most of the troop movements passed through Bourges. After three months service here Miss Townley was appointed directress of the canteen, one of the largest and most important in the war zone. With great ability Miss Townley performed her services and was mentioned with high appreciation by French authorities before she left France.”

(Townley image courtesy of Carol Zapolnik)



Katherine Towle, Omega, 1916, was one of the first officers appointed in 1943 for the newly formed U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve. She ultimately became the first Director of Women in the regular Marine Corps (1945) and the first woman Colonel in the Marine Corps (1948). Towle also served as Dean of Women at the University of California, Berkeley.



Thetas, like these members of BO, welcomed service men and women training on campus.

Adelaide Sinclair, Sigma, 1919, was KAΘ Grand President 1938-1942; Wartime Director, Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service; and Founding Delegate and Director, United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF).



World War II Affected All

Between the two World Wars, the number of college and alumnae chapters doubled. Therefore, Thetas' contributions at home and overseas during World War II were even more significant. Canadian chapters were the first to feel the impact in 1939. The United States became engaged in 1941. As brothers, fiancées, and husbands went to war, women also found ways of serving their country. Sigma Chapter provided one of Canada's leaders, and Theta was in her thoughts when Adelaide Sinclair accepted the role as Wartime Director of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service. In a press statement, Sinclair said the experience she had as president of an international fraternity helped prepare her to accept this call from her country.

Throughout the war, Thetas worked with the Red Cross at home and abroad. Members promoted the sales of War Bonds. Many served with the military and, sadly, six were killed in the line of duty. To honor each of these women, Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity created libraries on six Merchant Marine ships.

Chapters sponsored war orphans through the Foster Parents Plan. Members rolled bandages, knitted socks, and served as hostesses at servicemen's centers. Some voluntarily took shifts at nearby factories to fill in gaps left by men in the armed forces. Chapter houses were vacated so military recruits training on campus would have housing. Schedules were altered for year-round attendance, and fraternity leaders urged collegians to stay in school, graduate, and gain the skills needed in a changed world.

What Do You Think?

- ◆ During World Wars I and II, Thetas engaged in war work at home and abroad – with the YWCA, YMCA, and Red Cross. As canteen workers, doctors, nurses, administrators, social workers and drivers, they served soldiers and civilians. Many joined the armed services.
 - What issues were on the minds of collegians and alumnae?
 - How did women's roles change?
 - How do you think KAΘ membership prepared women for these new roles?
- ◆ KAΘ has a long tradition of service. During World Wars I and II, Thetas demonstrated their commitment to the world at large. Beginning in 2001, terrorist threats bring change once again.
 - How has your campus or community been affected?
 - How is your chapter responding?
 - What results do you anticipate?
 - How are you, individually and as a group, evolving in the process?

The photographs and artifacts reproduced in this piece are from the Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity Archives. The Archives preserves the organization's history in order to share the Fraternity's heritage with members and the community at large. A grant from the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation helps to fund these activities.

Sisters Lost While Serving Their Country During WWII

- * *Margaret Seip*, Alpha Psi, 1935
Women's Air Service Pilots, (WASP)
Flight training crash, August 30, 1943
- * *Lt. Eleanor Campbell Nate*, Beta Beta, 1925
Women's Army Corp (WAC),
Plane crash, December 28, 1943
- * *Jean B. Atkinson*, Sigma, 1933
Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF)
Plane crash November 23, 1944
- * *Lt. Katherine Applegate Dussaq*,
Alpha Sigma, 1923
Women's Air Service Pilots, (WASP)
Plane crash, November 26, 1944
- * *Lt. Marion Clark Phillips*, Beta Nu, 1932
Army Nurse Corps,
Plane crash, February 2, 1945
- * *Lt. (j.g.) Henrietta Hickman Morgan*,
Alpha Eta, 1935
Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency
Service, (WAVES)
Plane crash, April 27, 1945