

Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Biding Men's Wounds. By Laurie S. Stoff. Modern War Studies. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015. 384 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$34.95, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.49

Given the dearth of English-language scholarship on the history of Russian nursing, Laurie S. Stoff's book is a welcome addition to the field. The study is an important contribution that places gender and women center stage in centenary discussions of the First World War, during which time, as the book's subtitle indicates, Russian nurses did much more than bind men's wounds. Their experience of war often transgressed the traditional role of nurse, blurring gender distinctions and conceptions. Yet, as the most popular wartime activity for Russia women, with more than thirty thousand sisters of mercy by 1917, the role of Russia's nurses has, Stoff acknowledges, been grossly overlooked in the literature.

The book is about the complex and multifaceted wartime experience of Russian nurses on the Eastern Front, but also Russia's struggle for modernity. Thematically arranged into eight chapters, the reader is introduced to the personal and professional history of a Russian nurse at the beginning of each chapter—an effective structure that highlights the different backgrounds and experiences of Russian nurses. These short biographies provide insights into not just the lives of these nurses, but also, as each chapter explores, the origins of Russian nursing; the mobilization and organization of medical services during the war; class and social status; gender; psychological warfare; relations and perceptions of men and women at war; representations of nurses; and “sisters of comfort” and “sisters without mercy.”

Each chapter is rich in detail and thoughtful analysis, but the final two chapters stand out. The penultimate chapter, “Imagining Sisters,” explores representations of wartime nurses in Russian popular culture, and in doing so provides some fascinating visual images and interpretations that prompt a reassessment of the war as a “masculine” experience. The wartime periodical press's portrayal of a passive, compassionate nurse is a “one-dimensional” view challenged by Stoff, who demonstrates that visual and textual images of the sister of mercy, especially tropes of passive nurses, need more nuanced interpretation (210). As Stoff points out, there is also a marked contrast between the frequency of appearance and depiction of nurses in posters and women's journals; moreover, these images served a range of purposes.

Particularly striking are the images of sisters of mercy that bear religious overtones. Even though the wartime medical service was largely secularized, nursing was still quasi-religious. Stoff refers to the “angel of mercy,” a religious trope depicting the nurse as a figure of solace. But, as demonstrated in this chapter, representations of sisters of mercy varied considerably, from passive to active. We are reminded too of the “heroic” nurse, self-sacrificing and strong; Ksenia Bondarchenko, Stoff writes, was awarded a Saint George's Cross, fourth class, for her efforts on the front lines and was celebrated in the pages of *Niva*. In this chapter, Stoff emphatically captures the range of experiences and representations of Russian nurses, whether as heroes, victims, maternal figures, patriots, or angels, and the images serve to reinforce the ambiguous position of the nurse.

This ambiguity is examined further in the final chapter where Stoff considers the negative connotations of nursing, most identifiably associated with women who had less than altruistic motives for donning the nursing uniform. Rather than accepting the “good” or “true” versus “bad” or “false” nurse, Stoff takes issue with such oversimplified interpretations. Instead, she offers a counter narrative that analyzes accounts and rumors of the “opportunist” or “promiscuous” nurse that are based on an examination of their provenance, that is, from within the culture of Russian

nursing and the military. Basing her argument on an impressive array of evidence, Stoff asserts that criticisms of Russian nurses were gendered and the consequence of women posing a threat to the cultural norms and social structures of the time.

The study is rooted in a wide range of source material, including archives in Russia and the United States, contemporaneous periodicals, diaries, and memoirs. It engages with the work of nursing historians and current debates on the “myth of the war experience” in Russian and European history; as such it offers a lively, original account of how Russian nurses fit into wider discussions of wartime politics, culture, and society, but crucially Stoff assigns them agency. Given the topics covered—war, medicine, gender—this book will no doubt be of interest to a broad readership.

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The Red Army and the Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Soviet Military. By Peter Whitewood. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015. ii, 360 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figure. Tables. Maps. \$37.50, hard bound.

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“Is there no section of the Soviet organization free from traitors and wreckers? Or is Stalin suffering from a prolonged attack of jitters?” These were the top questions of the *New York Times* editorial board on June 12, 1937, the day that Mikhail N. Tukhachevskii and seven other high ranking Red Army commanders were shot. The confusion at the *Times* was widely shared. What did Stalin think he was doing when ordering the arrest and execution of his high command? What was the impact of the military purge upon the future performance of the Red Army? What role, if any, did the assault upon the military play in the course of the Great Terror itself?

Peter Whitewood’s book is a successful attempt to answer many of these questions. In the true fashion of a historian, Whitewood believes that context is crucial for developing reasonable explanations. He begins his story in the period of the Civil War, where the roots of the purge lay. Other historians have hearkened back to the Civil War period when discussing the military terror, but usually to show that the personal animosity between Tukhachevskii and Stalin had festered for decades before Stalin chose his moment to strike. Whitewood has other, more convincing reasons for returning to the Civil War. It was in this period, he argues, that the main issues that would come to the fore in 1937 first emerged. The tension between revolutionary enthusiasts and “military specialists” trained under the Old Regime flared up into open contest, with the political police sharing the enthusiasts’ undying suspicion of former officers and the army looking to avoid public controversy over the devouring of its leadership. This tension coincided both with the existential crisis occasioned by a narrowly-won military clash and with the justified fear of the open and clandestine intervention of foreign powers looking to smother the communist experiment in its cradle.

Whitewood does a very effective job not only of demonstrating the importance of this foundational constellation of fears and forces, but also of tracing the development of these relationships over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. In this account, the struggle to prevent treason was an ongoing affair. Even in peacetime, the political police continued their harassment of vulnerable military specialists and accused the army leadership of complacency, not just in regard to foreign espionage but also in regard to membership in the “opposition.”

In this light, the arrest of Tukhachevskii’s group on suspicion of leading a cabal both Trotskyist and fascist seems not incoherently paranoid, but almost