

In John F. Andrews's affecting historical novel *An American Nurse in Paris*, a journalist becomes a Red Cross army nurse.

Alice, who has a Parisian grandmother and is fluent in French, begins working with the American press corps in war-torn Paris. She is given non-“hazardous” assignments, though, and her insistence that she can be of more use is belittled and ignored. A meeting with an army press liaison is followed by her attempted rape, which has physical and psychological aftereffects. Accused of being a German spy, Alice begins working at an American Red Cross military hospital instead, deferring her pursuit of justice while chronicling her experiences with caring for injured doughboys.

The book's medical details are riveting. Men are brought to the hospital from the battlefield, and Alice and her fellow nurses interact with army surgeons in the efficient manner of a “well-rehearsed ballet.” Soldiers who are filthy from trench warfare are washed and deloused; bullet wounds are excised and drained; gangrenous limbs are assessed and sometimes amputated. Amid the relentless pace of these operations, Alice offers clinical and emotional support, trying to avoid becoming too attached to men who may not survive: “I don't want his spirit to go alone. Do spirits look back on the vessel they departed and those surrounding them? How can I know, other than when I die?”

The narrative alternates between Alice and her shrewd mentor, Ira, its developments handled in a sharp yet nuanced manner. Secondary characters vivify the background, including a kind, resourceful hospital janitor said to resemble Claude Monet. The terse patter between journalists and medical staff is engaging and convincing, though it includes occasional lapses into contemporary speech, as with an instance of incoherent verbiage that is described as “word salad.” Elsewhere, Alice's sexual assault is dismissed as a “she said, he said” matter.

Still, Alice is a compelling narrator whose observations flesh out the horrifying, numbing realities of war. Though forced to redirect her contributions, she utilizes her journalistic skills throughout, giving shape to the friendships, romances, and interactions she witnesses. Paris is developed in evocative terms as well: “Les Américains” are treated with gratitude for their help and sacrifices.

Part of a continuing series, the rousing historical novel *An American Nurse in Paris* focuses on a resilient woman who witnesses the anguish of World War I.

Reviewed by [Meg Nola](#)
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