

JOHN F. ANDREWS

*An*  
**AMERICAN  
NURSE**  
*in*  
**PARIS**



Novels of  
the Great War





*They say journalism is a man's job...*

Medical journalist Alice Simmons's quest to become a war correspondent careens headlong into a wall of sexism and deceit after her arrival in Paris in 1918. The suave officer in charge of the American Army press office refuses to let Alice leave Paris while her male counterparts scramble to the Front during the German spring offensive. One evening, his misogyny escalates to a drunken assault. Alice manages to fight back, but then her attacker begins a campaign of false accusations to cover his crime.

A nursing position in an American Red Cross military hospital is Alice's only hope to remain in France. It turns out to be the best scoop of her career. Wounded marines and soldiers from the Battle of Belleau Wood flood her ward. Their courage inspires her to seek justice for the crime committed against her. Their plight unlocks her compassion and capacity to love, both long-buried after a childhood tragedy.

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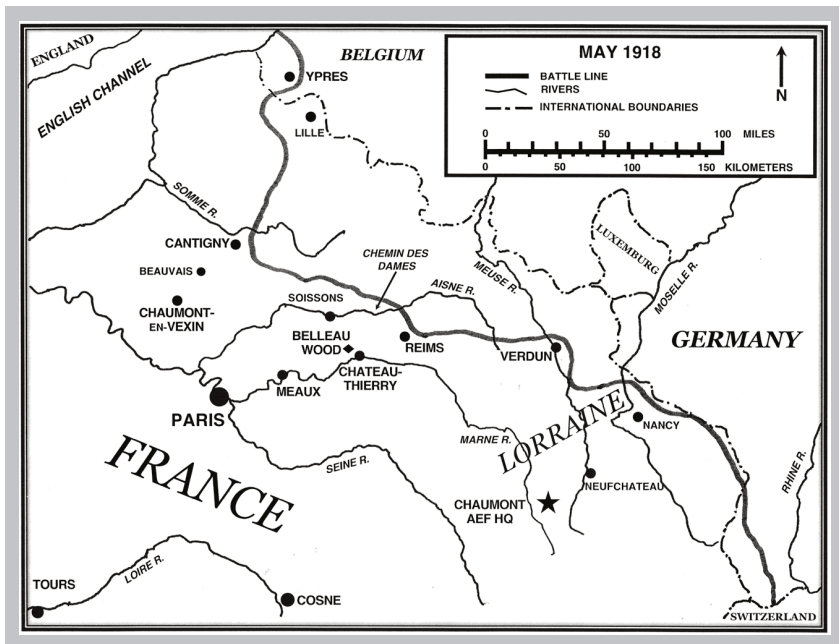
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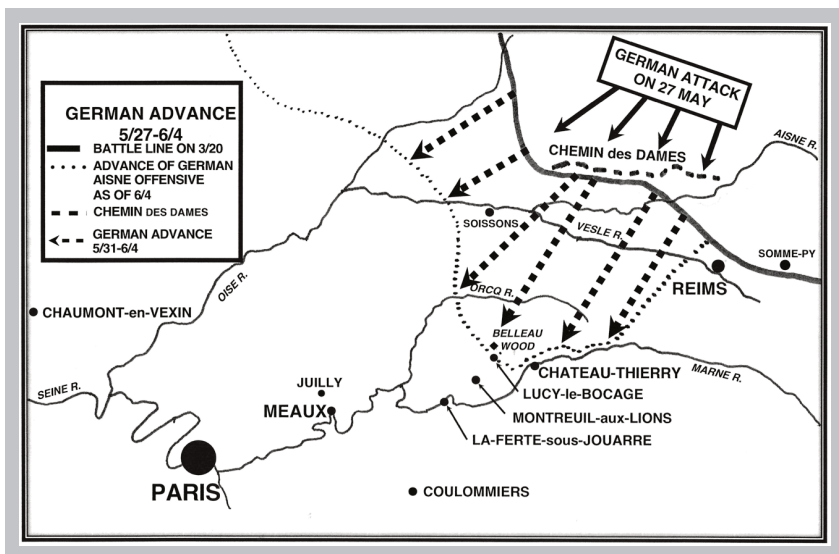
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# Map of France, May, 1918





# Map of the region of France where the novel takes place





# **An American Nurse in Paris**

**Novels of the Great War**



# Chapter One

## Alice Simmons

**Paris, France, Friday May 24, 1918**

**T**hey don't need to paint a target on me. I wear a skirt. The only one in the American press corps in France.

This straight-backed wooden chair has tormented me since my arrival at twelve thirty for my meeting at one. It's three thirty.

My bladder is making me regret the extra cup of coffee I had for lunch.

I still my restless right leg. This waiting room is a cubbyhole—hot, humid, and redolent with fumes from the chinless, chain-smoking private sitting behind a metal desk. Germany will have nothing to fear if all the clerks type with one index finger like this fool.

*Snick...*

This is so typical of things since I arrived in Paris. Six male journalists have come and gone since I sat down in this accursed chair. One gave me the familiar smile usually reserved for fashion columnists—the only reporting job most of them think women are suited for. The others ignored me as they passed through. All of them went straight in.

Everything I've done since I arrived in Paris boils down to this one meeting. I was scheduled to meet Colonel McCabe. When I arrived, the

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one-finger-typing private told me McCabe is out of town. My meeting is now with Major Richard Martel, whom I've never met. They don't *invite* me to the routine briefings he gives the other reporters.

This won't make me give up. I've come too far to quit.

So, this is it—I'll be off to report on the war if this meeting goes well. If not, I might as well hop on the next ship and head back to the States.

Pure professionalism dictated my attire for the day—tan blouse under a dark brown jacket and a summer-weight woolen skirt. The hemline is longer than the mid-calf ones many of the women in Paris wear. I decided to not play an intimidation game with my height, so on went the tan flats. Hell, I'm taller than half the men here and eye to eye with most of the rest. No makeup, of course, and hair in a modest bun—tight ones make the angles of my face look too severe.

I push my glasses up. Damn things—been with me since I was a kid. The good thing is that they make my oddball eye color less obvious. I call them hazel, but there are bits of green and blue. It's as if my parents' genes couldn't make up their minds and compromised on . . . whatever color you want to call them. Today they're hazel. Tomorrow? Maybe greenish.

Someone with less self-respect would doll herself up with makeup, mascara, a little perfume here, and, perhaps, one button less. A touch of elegance? I'd only be kidding myself if I tried. In high school, the homecoming queen wished me a successful career as a librarian as I sat, reading, in a corner by myself during prom. That's who Alice Simmons is—who I am. I don't mind it. Much.

Truth is—it gets lonely. I can only count two close friends in this world. One is in an office a floor below me—Ira Cunningham. The other, his daughter Trudy, is on her way here to work as a nurse. I've got to see Ira after I'm done here. If I'm ever done. If Major Martel will even see me.

"Private?" I ask.

"Lady, you blind or what? Can'tcha see I'm workin'?" Count yaself lucky Major Martel'll see you at all." He slaps the carriage return with a ding.

The back door opens. A reporter I don't recognize emerges wearing

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an expression like he's just eaten an unpeeled lemon. The phone rings on the clerk's desk. He speaks quietly, with a sidelong glance toward me. "Yessir, she's still here." He hangs up. "Simon. Front and center. Major Martel'll see ya. Got two minutes. Make it snappy."

"It's Simmons. Miss Alice Simmons."

The clerk leads me down the hallway and knocks on a closed door.

"Come," says a resonant baritone. The clerk stands in the doorway, leaving just enough room for me to shimmy through sideways. The door clicks behind me. A dribble of sweat trickles down my right side.

Major Martel could have starred in the movies. The term "matinee idol" had been just a whisper before the war, but he fits. Mid-to-late thirties? Brilliantined black hair swept back, wisps of gray at the temples, brooding brows over coal-black eyes, with a pencil mustache above a chiseled chin. I'm not sure about his cologne, but it's not cheap. A partially smoked cigar rests in his cut crystal ashtray. A small silver bifold picture frame lies closed next to a Montblanc fountain pen set. My father has the same set.

Major Martel's eyes flash over me. The quick assessment of an experienced army officer or something else? I pull the lapels of my coat closer before thinking. He spreads his hands, palms up. "Alice, I'm so sorry to make you wait. This is a very busy afternoon. What can I do for you, sweetheart?" Martel's accent flows like Louisiana molasses.

An apology?

Sweetheart?

He doesn't motion me to sit. "I came to request a pass to permit me to report outside Paris. I've written all the stories I can find here. I'm a medical reporter. As far as I know, the only reporter with a medical background here. I trained as a nurse while getting my journalism degree and offer a unique perspective to the folks back home. And I speak fluent French. My problem is that the French won't let me in their Paris hospitals, and all of ours are outside the city. Now, I'm not asking to go anywhere near the fighting, just to the base hospitals, to report on the human side of the medical effort here."

Martel frowns and rubs his hands. No wedding band, but a large golden class ring adorns his right. "Our French *amis* will never approve a *laissez-passer* for a non-accredited reporter."

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“Sir, reporters who arrived after me have been going to those places without accreditation. I’ve served my time here in Paris, been responsible. All my articles comply with your censorship rules. The French have relaxed their earlier restrictions, according to the others.” I smile, straightening my shoulders an inch. For all the bad things I’ve heard about the man, he seems to be listening to me. The flattering glint in his eyes is astonishing. Men don’t look at me this way. It’s unsettling, and something else—alluring? He’s also the most handsome man I’ve ever met.

“Alice, I regret to inform you that there is simply no opportunity for you to work outside Paris. To go farther afield would be excessively hazardous for a gentle lady like yourself. Current circumstances and the French leave me no choice but to deny your request. Now, mind you, this isn’t from me—it comes from on high.” He gazes up toward the ceiling as if he gets his orders from God.

“Sir, if I may, I’d like to explain my proposal further—”

“As you can see . . . I’m a very busy man. But I’d like to hear more—under less formal circumstances . . .” The glint reappears.

My ears are on fire. Is he asking for a date? Is this a genuine offer, or just a come-on? Does he care about me, or is he just looking for *female companionship*? “I’m not sure I understand.”

“Well, it’s fairly simple, my dear. I’m usually free in the evenings around suppertime. Perhaps . . .” His gaze drifts down to my chest and lingers as though weighing my breasts.

I push the glasses up. “Major, I . . . I . . .” I’m dumbstruck. His eyes trickle down to the space between my legs, as though seeing through my skirt. I shift an inch to my left.

A frown gathers on Martel’s face, and his eyes cloud. “Alice, I’m sorry, but if there’s nothing else, I must get back to my other duties.”

“If only you’ll reconsider . . .”

“Consider this, Alice.” Martel stands and walks around me. I hear the door open. Martel stands beside the doorframe. He cups my left shoulder. “I’m much more . . . attentive . . . after work hours. Your cause may not be lost.” A friendly smile grows on his face. A warning rattles underneath my schoolgirl blush.

## Chapter Two

Alice Simmons

My heart hammers and blood hums through my limbs on the way to the ladies' room. I close the door and lean against the wall, breathless. He refused my request, but his idea of further discussion leaves me wondering. He was flattering, but a little . . . invasive. And he was so familiar, using my first name—not in a denigrating way, but a friendly one. My mentor and friend, Ira Cunningham, works under Martel and doesn't like him. He's always danced around the reasons for his opinion. Ira's office is the next stop after this. We have to talk.

Ira's office is room 223—I hope he hasn't left for the day. I pop my head in the door and smile at Ira's clerk, Stan.

"Major Cunningham's busy, Miss Simmons." Stan looks up from his typewriter at a small wooden desk next to a closed inner door. His smile is that of a friend.

"I can wait if he isn't going to be tied up too long . . ."

"Talking to a reporter. Take a load off."

The padded cloth seat is a welcome relief. Stan's a good egg. He must have taken the advanced army typing course—he uses both index fingers on his Royal. The anteroom is well ventilated through the transom above the door—with the aroma of the fresh coffee steaming in

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the brown mug next to Stan's typewriter. I pull out my notebook to look over the scribbles from my morning interview with an industrialist's wife. What sort of vanilla drivel will pass the censors tomorrow? *Paris, May 24, 1918. While the flower of French youth march toward the battlefield, their mothers, sisters, and sweethearts toil in smoky factories, stores, and government offices to keep the home fires burning. With chins raised and smiles on their faces . . .*

Thoughts of Martel keep intruding while I struggle to concentrate. No man has ever treated me with such deference, other than Ira. Courtesy was the last thing I expected, having never gotten it from the army before. But then, the way his eyes seemed to play with me, and his offer to meet . . . after work.

I touch the locket Grand-Mère Elise gave me in my distress when I was ten. Nervous habit. "Remember, *mon lapin*—you are swift like the wind. And strong. Let this remind you," Grand-Mère had said. I smile. *Mon lapin*—"my rabbit"—her nickname for me. I was a fast runner, then.

The inner door opens, breaking my reverie. Ira Cunningham pokes his head out and starts to say something to Stan. A smile grows on his face. "Alice. Come in. There's someone I want you to meet." Ira has an uncanny way of making me feel expected.

He's been "Mr. Cunningham" to me since he came into my life when I was twelve, when he and his family moved into the house next to ours in Minneapolis. It seems awkward to call him Major. Now, at twenty-four, I'm privileged to use his first name when we're alone, though it feels a bit like calling my parents by their first names. He stands two inches taller than my five-ten, with short graying brown hair rimming his bald head and a tight mustache. He looks like the newspaper editor he was before the war—serious eyes, jowls that tighten under pressure, and a few pounds too many from all the time he spends at the desk he describes as his "command."

Ira motions me into his office with a flourish of his hand like a royal invitation. A middle-aged man in a brown two-piece suit with a fedora balanced on his knee sits in a guest chair. A battered leather portfolio leans against a chair leg. The man rises and stands eye-to-eye with me as he extends his right hand. "Howard Enright, *Detroit News*."

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"Alice is my protégé, Howard," Ira says. "*Wisconsin State Journal's* rising star. I like to think I taught her everything she knows, but I'm pretty sure she surpassed me a while ago."

"Been here long?" Howard asks.

"Five months." I take a seat.

"Must know your way around by now."

"I spent several summers here when I was a kid, and then a semester in college." At the time it had felt more like exile—a way to get me out of my parents' sight when my very presence seemed to repel them. Grandmother and Paris were my saviors.

"Getting much work?"

I huff and roll my eyes. "I've interviewed every matron who hasn't fled the city."

"While a war rages just out of earshot." Howard shakes his head.

He has a medium build with broadish shoulders, trim, not paunchy like Ira. I'm bursting to tell Ira about the meeting, but not in front of a stranger.

"Better shove off," Howard says. "Why don't you both join Emily and me at the New York Bar Saturday evening. Pete and Mary Sloan'll be there. Say, about nine?"

"I can't, sorry," Ira says. "Alice, if you ignore Howard and his bombastic friend, you'll find their wives delightful."

"If you say so. I'll be there," I say. Howard leaves, closing the door with a soft click on his way out.

Ira's chair squeals as he leans back. "Trudy'll arrive tomorrow or the next day."

"Where's she going to work?" I haven't seen my best friend in over six months.

"American Red Cross Military Hospital One in Neuilly-sur-Seine."

"Penny for your thoughts?" I know that look. Something's eating him.

"Feeling a little guilty, truth be told."

"Go on." I pull a handkerchief from my purse and polish my glasses.

"I got you into this."

"You didn't make me come here."

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He loosens his tie. "I played my part in convincing you to be a journalist instead of a nurse."

I twirl my glasses by one earpiece. "If I'd done that, I'd be with Trudy, working as a nurse, about to arrive." Ira's face is painted with worry. He's been more of a father than mine, more of a friend than my mother.

"If I knew you'd have to deal with Martel and our esteemed fellow journalists, I would have told you to join the Nurse Corps, like Trudy."

"If you were me, would you have listened when you were my age?"

Ira shrugs, then gives me a sheepish grin. "Hell, I was only five years older than you are now when the coppers came gunning for me. The first time." His mouth twitches.

"Sometimes you have to take on city hall, no matter the consequences."

"No." Ira's face pales, his mouth tight. "Consequences matter. If I learned anything in St. Paul, it was that." He pauses to take a deep breath. "Sometimes you have to take a different angle."

"How did that go?"

"O'Connor's still St. Paul's police chief." Ira stands. "And my family and I are alive."

That was unfair of me. Ira had rooted out the corruption surrounding the St. Paul chief of police. He had reported on the bribes Chief O'Connor took to look the other way when wanted criminals holed up in St. Paul. Ira nearly died for the effort more than once. His courage had changed nothing. But he had been courageous, nevertheless.

"How'd things go with Martel?"

I slip my glasses on and stand. "Let's talk over a drink. I need the sage advice you usually only offer after I ply you with scotch. Maybe two."

## ALSO BY JOHN F. ANDREWS

### ***DOGS DON'T CRY - NOVELS OF THE GREAT WAR***

**A dog's devotion, courage, and intelligence stand between two French teens and despair. Love and determination sustain the threesome as they flee the tidal wave of war. A story of hardship, peril, resilience, and hope.**

Abby is the Durand family dog, a companion for fifteen-year-old Marcel and his sister, Geneviève. Marcel is plagued by doubts about his courage as he approaches military age. Geneviève has severe pneumonia and is convinced she will soon die. Evacuation is ordered as the German army barrels toward their home village. The doctor tending to Geneviève warns their mother that the rigors of evacuation will kill the young girl on the eve of her thirteenth birthday. Their mother waits until the last moment to leave their home in search of shelter.

A disastrous escape leaves them orphaned and alone.

Marcel and Geneviève must find a distant relative, Cousin Henri, who lives near Paris. However, they have never met him, are not sure of his last name, and don't know his address. Abby is the key—Henri is her former owner, though she begs to differ on the “owner” concept. If anyone can find him, she can. The teens confront their worst fears while seeking refuge amid the chaos of war, armed only with their faith in Abby.

### ***OUR DESPERATE HOUR - NOVELS OF THE GREAT WAR***

**A father's search for his estranged son plunges US Army Major Ab Johnson into the pivotal First World War Battle of Belleau Wood. The fate of Paris and the outcome of the war balance on a knife's edge. This is a story of honor, courage, commitment, a father's love for his son, and the bonds of combat.**

Ab Johnson has one last chance to reconcile with his son, Jack, a marine second lieutenant who is heading into the worst conflict in human history. Second lieutenants don't last long in the killing fields of France. Ab volunteered to

rejoin the army and come to France for a liaison job far from the fighting, only to be transferred to the Paris Medical Group. His quest leads him from the backrooms of Paris, through command posts, and to the front lines during the Battle of Belleau Wood. He confronts French petulance and American inexperience as he struggles to help organize an army medical system swamped with casualties during his desperate search.

Ab's story intertwines with three others: an arrogant surgeon who sees war as opportunity; a navy corpsman searching for his place in the world; and a marine private full of fighting spirit and patriotism. They confront their destinies in a grueling fight filled with chaos and heart-stopping fear. Each joined the war effort for his own reasons—now all they hope for is to survive.

### ***A DOG'S GIFT - NOVELS OF THE GREAT WAR***

#### **What would happen if a corrupt judge sent two teenage WWI French orphans and their dog to the wrong home?**

Thirteen-year-old Geneviève Durand and her fifteen-year-old brother, Marcel, fled a war zone with their dog, Abby, in June 1918. They find refuge with distant cousins in Paris who apply for temporary guardianship of the teens for the upcoming school year. A judge with a grudge against the cousins shatters their plan when he awards custody to an estranged aunt and her husband.

Geneviève, Marcel, and Abby struggle to survive in a war-damaged house with dysfunctional guardians in a village the French army declared unfit for human habitation. Will Abby's ability to help people through grief and loss be enough to restore hope as the Christmas season of 1918 approaches?

## ABOUT JOHN F. ANDREWS

John F. Andrews is the award-winning author of the *Novels of the Great War Series*, including *Our Desperate Hour*, *An American Nurse in Paris*, and *Dogs Don't Cry*. He writes from the perspective of a service family member and critical care physician to craft unique stories based on real events. His characters struggle shoulder-to-shoulder with some of the real heroes of WWI as well as showing the plight of civilians caught in one of the most horrible conflicts in human history. His novels are stories of struggle, survival, hope, resilience, and love.



