



World War II

The Atlanta Chapter began preparations for World War II in 1939. Dr. Frank Boland, who served as a Major in the Emory Medical Unit during World War I, was Chapter Chairman. Along with Executive James H. Reeves and Assistant Executive Director Mrs. John S. McDonald, Dr. Boland led a series of rapid developments leading up to wartime.

The Home Service was staffed with paid professionals.

The First Aid and Accident Prevention Committee set up several highway emergency groups, and trained thousands in First Aid and lifesaving and swimming.

Students at several high schools received a 30-hour course in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick.

Production Services branches accepted orders for 8,750 surgical dressings in addition to normal production.

The first War Relief fund drive was initiated and resulted in almost \$50,000 in pledges from the Atlanta and DeKalb chapters.

One of the most important Red Cross divisions, with the largest volunteer base, was the Production Corps. Headquartered on Luckie Street, the Production Corps had three divisions: Sewing, Knitting, and Surgical Dressings. The mission of the Production Service was to produce anything that could contribute to the bodily comfort and need of servicemen, whether on active duty or hospitalized. Refugees from all over Europe received clothing and undergarments produced here. Another important division was the Motor Corps. The Motor Corps recruited and trained 100 young women as drivers. Motor Corps drivers were trained in driving, first aid, and motor mechanics.

A Civilian Defense Volunteer Office was formed to allow the Chapter to take responsibility for housing, feeding, clothing, and rehabilitation of families hit by bombing or sabotage. As the war continued into 1942, the Atlanta community focused on the Red Cross as the natural central point for private citizens' disaster training and preparedness. Large numbers of local residents volunteered their time and assisted in raising funds for the Red Cross relief efforts. 4,000 women were trained in Home Care of the Sick in 1942.

In May, 1942, the Atlanta Red Cross opened the first blood plasma bank in the South. The blood was collected in a carriage house at the rear of the Chapter grounds. Each afternoon, 60 units of blood were picked up here by the military and taken to Chamblee where it was processed into plasma for members of the armed forces. In March 1943 a large Blood Donor Center was opened at 291 Peachtree Street. Late in 1943 the Blood Donor Center received the Army and Navy "E" for outstanding performance in recruiting blood donors.

The Red Cross operated recreational programs for servicemen. The first was established at Conley Supply Depot, now Fort Gillem, near Joneboro. The center opened with a dance in April, 1942, and the Motor Corps chauffeured young women from Atlanta to the Depot and back. The center also contained reading material and lots of indoor games. All of this greatly lifted the soldiers' spirits.

The Canteen Corps was the third most rapidly growing division of the Chapter. In 1942 a new Mobile Canteen was donated by American Bakeries, Inc. The Canteen was kept busy feeding and entertaining soldiers bivouacked (camping) in the area. A spinoff from the Canteen Corps was the Nutrition Office, which provided nutrition courses to school children and expectant mothers. The Nutrition Office also trained a number of Dietitian Aides who served at Crawford Long, Emory University, Georgia Baptist, and Piedmont Hospitals.

In 1944 several more volunteer groups were formed to aid and comfort the servicemen stationed and hospitalized here. The Atlanta Camp and Hospital Committee was formed to collect gifts from the public and distribute them to servicemen. The Committee recruited entertainers who performed for free. Many gifts of candy, fruits, flowers, Christmas stockings and other items were donated by community groups for distribution by the Red Cross. The second new group, the Arts and Skills Corps, was created to provide occupational training to bedridden patients at Lawson General Hospital in Chamblee. A third group sponsored bus outings for the servicemen to luncheons at clubs, picnics, tours, ball games, and circuses. The Hero's Phone Fund gathered donations to pay for long distance phone calls so that the sick and wounded in Government hospitals could call home.

Peggy

One of the biggest supporters of the Atlanta Chapter during wartime was author Margaret Mitchell, known as "Peggy" by her many friends in the Red Cross and elsewhere. Peggy served as a first aid instructor, worked on fund campaigns and was a member of the Speakers Bureau. One of her favorite projects was operating a recreation room for soldiers bivouacked at Piedmont Park in 1943. She was often seen in her becoming Red Cross uniform, helping soldiers mend clothing or just chatting, making them feel at home in a strange city. Ms. Mitchell, although famous for writing "Gone With the Wind," was always easygoing - just "Peggy" to all who knew her. Her death in 1949 was a great loss for the Red Cross.

Shift in Emphasis

After World War II, the Chapter, especially the Home Service, shifted its emphasis away from assistance of the active military and more toward the needs of servicemen trying to adjust to civilian life. Many of these men and their families needed family counseling, housing assistance and help with other problems that arise with the transition back to civilian life. The volunteers of the Canteen, Gray Lady, Motor, Nurses, and Staff Aide Corps all focused on aid to the sick and disabled. The Production Corps was very busy making extra items for hospitals, from pajamas to afghans and ditty bags.

A terrible polio epidemic broke out in September, 1949. Polio is a disease that causes damage to the spinal cord and partial paralysis. The Nursing Service recruited and trained nurses who served in Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina, where the polio epidemic was especially bad.

War Brides

The Red Cross made special efforts to assist the many war brides arriving in the country with a "Welcome to Georgia Campaign." These women came from England, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and other countries. Chapter volunteers met them as they arrived by train from New York to put them in touch with their husbands and other new relatives in the Atlanta area. The Red Cross gave a large party for the women, and provided them nutrition classes with a focus on foods well known in the South.

Winecoff Hotel Fire

As the Titanic was billed as "unsinkable", Atlanta's Winecoff Hotel was called "fireproof." Tragically, on December 7, 1946, 119 occupants of the Winecoff died in the worst hotel fire in U.S. history. At the time, many young people from all over the state were in the Winecoff for a Hi-Y gathering. Flames enveloped the hotel in minutes and many young people were trapped on the burning floors.

First Aid volunteers, Disaster volunteers, and staff members were on the scene almost immediately to assist the police and firemen. 25 volunteer nurses, 75 volunteer nurses aides and some 250 other volunteers were on hand for days doing what they could. An Emergency Aid station was opened in a drugstore just across Peachtree Street from the hotel. Many victims were brought there and given emergency medical attention by doctors and registered nurses.

In the hospitals where patients were taken, Nurses Aides, Gray Ladies and Staff Assistants assisted hospital staff and met with families who had arrived to see their loved ones. The Motor Service met families and carried them to hospitals or funeral homes. It was a most tragic event and our volunteers helped greatly in lessening the tension and grief among the distraught.

Hurricanes Audrey and Donna

Hurricane Audrey struck Cameron, Louisiana in the 1950's, devastating it and nearby communities. This was the first time that uniformed volunteers from the Atlanta Chapter assisted outside of its local jurisdiction, beginning a tradition of service that extends to the victims of Hurricanes Hugo and Andrew. Miss Frances Young, Miss Helen Miller, and Mrs. Will Neal of Marietta, newly trained in operation of the Mobile Canteen, served food to disaster workers and hurricane victims on the roads outside of Cameron. Later Miss Young and Miss Miller served at a mobile kitchen at Islamorada, Florida, serving 2,500 to 3,500 hot meals a day to victims of Hurricane Donna.

Korean War

As in World Wars I and II, the Red Cross was very busy providing for the needs of servicemen abroad. The Production Service was responsible for making one item fondly remembered by all servicemen of the time: the "ditty bag." The Red Cross filled the bags with articles donated by the civilian groups. Servicemen would hang their ditty bags near their bunks and store treasured possessions in them. The Atlanta Chapter was also responsible for making robes, pajamas, sponges, afghans, and many other articles for the servicemen.

The Red Cross opened a recreation room at the Army-Air Force Induction Center near Lawson Hospital. There were games, refreshments, and in 1953, a Christmas party for the soldiers. The Chapter also participated in "Christmas On the High Seas," a program started by the National Red Cross. Volunteers gathered gifts from the community, wrapped and packed them in boxes for delivery to men aboard ships on Christmas morning.