

Special Article

A Brief History of Military Nursing in Greece

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e-mail: ioannistsirvoulis@yahoo.gr**Abstract****Background:** Apart from doctors, military nurses assist heavily in health care and shoulder a large part of the rehabilitation of health losses during armed conflicts bearing the dual and demanding role of a health professional and a soldier following orders.**Aim:** It was to present a brief history of military nursing in Greece**Methodology:** Archives of Greek Army, Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) and the School of Nursing Sisters were searched, along with relevant publications.**Results:** Initially, military nursing was supported in Europe by the volunteers of the Red Cross. In Greece, the Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) was founded in 1877 and 20 years later, the institution of the nurse was introduced to the Hellenic Armed Forces. In 1911, the School of Nursing Sisters of the HRC was founded, which was upgraded during the Balkan Wars. The needs that arose with the outbreak of the Second World War, led to the rapid training of Volunteer Nurse Sisters, for the military needs, under the auspices of the royal family of the time. The "School of Nursing Sisters of the Army" was the first Nursing School for Women Officers. It was founded in 1946. During the five years 1950-1955 Nursing officers took part in the Greek expeditionary force in Korea. Nowadays, the course in SNO is four years long and male students are also enrolled. The academic training takes place in the Nursing Department of the University of Athens and the graduates are divided into the three branches of the Armed Forces.**Conclusion:** Military nursing history in Greece is a glorious story of caring and servicing the national ideals under inauspicious circumstances and a promising trajectory for the future.**Key words:** military nursing, Greece, history**Introduction**

In addition to military doctors who help to promote the health and safety of soldiers, the military nursing staff assist heavily in health care and shoulder a large part of the rehabilitation of health losses during armed conflicts. However, the war constitutes a situation that cannot keep up with the concept of health at any level (physical, spiritual, psychological and economic). While all health care professionals, regardless of whether they are civilian or military personnel, have a duty to provide medical care to patients and act according to the rules of medical ethics, military nurses face a dual role conflict, namely that of soldiers who owe

obedience to military orders from superiors and that of nurses which directs them to follow professional codes of practice (Griffiths, & Jasper, 2008, Kelly, 2010)

The primary mission of military nurses is to maintain the morale of combat soldiers, to ensure that they are able to fight and carry out operational planning. Civilian nurses do not consider their patients as a fighting force, but as individuals in need of treatment and respect for their dignity. Military nursing prioritizes the achievement of the military objective, even if the individualized medical needs of soldiers must be set aside in order to serve the collective interest of the army and to provide those health services that will maintain

cohesion and readiness of the war machine (Anderson et al., 2013, Kelly, 2010).

The history of military nursing in Greece is full of glorious pages of servicing under inauspicious conditions, at the side of soldiers, servicing both nursing and the national ideals. After the liberation of the country practical nurses hospitalized patients in the first hospitals. They were usually women of low educational level, who used to practice the nursing occupation to make their living (Lanara, 1978, Roussos, 1991). The first official effort for trained nurses that were in fact men, was made by the Directorate of Health Services of the Greek Army, which created the first, "School of Nursing" by a decree "About the recommendation of school for Nurses" on August 18, 1861(KD,1861). On the year before, i.e 1860, Florence Nightingale had established the School of Nursing of at Saint Thomas Hospital in London (Messolora,1967). In the great Military and Naval Encyclopedia, the following is mentioned: "The school was founded on the 18th of August of 1861, aiming to educate experienced nurses for peace and campaign Services. The soldiers that had successfully attended the school were given the specialty of nurse and were used as such; this specialty was also noted on their army certificate" (Anonymous, 1929). The selection of well-educated soldiers - nurses among the finest of the enlistment indicates the great interest of the army in the health field. Of note, the very few soldiers who knew reading and writing, were considered well educated in the 19th century (Kourkouta et al., 2012, Vladimir,1997). Later on, new Schools for Nurses were founded as the need for educated nursing staff in Greece was rising. The School of Nursing Sisters of the "Evangelismos" hospital was founded in 1875 and the first Greek "School of Certified Nurses" of the "Saint Sophia" Children's Hospital was established in 1897 (Kourkouta et al.2012, Tsoucalas et al.,2011).

The Military Officers Schools for Nurses in Athens was founded in 1946. The Director of this school was Cleopatra Avagianou, a graduate of HRC school (Diamandis, 2004, Sapountzi-Krepia, 2002). The aim of this review was to present a brief history of military nursing in Greece.

Methodology: Archives of Hellenic Armed Forces, Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) and the School of Nursing Sisters were searched, along with relevant publications (books and articles). All research was conducted under the permission of the Hellenic Armed Forces.

Results

Professional Military Nursing foundations in Greece. A glance at the past....

Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole were pioneers in military nursing. Many of our current clinical practices – such as isolation of patients with antibiotic-resistant infection, avoidance of cross-contamination, routine cleaning of all hospital areas, aseptic food preparation, ward ventilation, disposal of human and medical waste and the need for a therapeutic nurse-patient relationship, trace their roots to the successful practices established by Nightingale in Skoutari, Istanbul (Kelly, 2012). Initially, military nursing was supported in the states of Europe by the volunteers of the Red Cross, founded in 1864 by Henry Dunant. In 1877, the Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) was founded and 20 years later, the institution of the nurse was introduced to the Hellenic Armed Forces (Ziogou, et al., 2013).

In 1911, the School of Nursing Sisters of the HRC was founded, which was upgraded during the Balkan Wars. With the beginning of the Balkan Wars, a humanitarian movement to support the wounded fighters had started. Many women, mainly from wealthy families, rushed to dress in the uniform of the volunteer sister nurse to take care of the wounded. Examples include Princess Alice who organized the nursing units in the campaigns, Aspasia Ralli, daughter of Prime Minister Kyriakoulis Mavromichalis, who distinguished herself for her fighting skills in the Battle of Driscos as well as Anna Papadopoulou, sister of Pavlos Mela who is the first to be named a Soldier's Mother and who continuously and selflessly offered her services as a nurse helping in a series of military conflicts that catalyzed the country. From the Balkan wars (1912-1913) to the North-Continental Struggle (1914) and from the First World War (1914-1918) to the entire Asia Minor campaign (1919-1922) (Pantazides, 1987). The example of these

women was followed by many other Greek women, writing a story full of love for the Motherland and for fellow human beings (Pantazides, 1987).

However, while the war had temporarily stopped, the idea of volunteering in this field had not disappeared. The image of the volunteer sister continued to fascinate the Greek women of the interwar period. Therefore, a number of groups of volunteers of the Hellenic Red Cross began to be formed. Such a group was founded in Ioannina in 1939, led by Sister Kalliopi Lyka, who remained by the side of the wounded soldiers offering them care. She described the tragic conditions in the Hospitals and Mountain Surgeries under which the medical and nursing staff were forced to offer their services, with frostbites and amputations being a daily occurrence (Pantazides, 1987).

The needs that arose with the outbreak of the Second World War, led to the rapid training of Volunteer Nurse Sisters, for the military needs. All efforts to create the Volunteer corps were under the auspices of the royal family, with Queen Olga and the princesses depicted as nurses in period posters. The princesses established field hospitals and were photographed working in them.

A shining example of a volunteer is Athina Mesoloras who later contributed decisively to the establishment of the military nursing school (Ziogou et al., 2013). Ten, graduate and volunteer, Red Cross nurses offered the highest sacrifice of their life during the epic war of 1940-41 (Papamikrouli, 1991).

The School of Nursing Sisters of the Army" (Σχολή Αδελφών Νοσοκόμων του Στρατού in Greek) was founded in 1946, when the end of the Second World War highlighted the need to staff the Armed Forces with

permanent military nurses. It was the first Nursing School for Women Officers. Since then, the School would have been renamed several times, as shown in table 1. Only women were admitted to the School after examination by a committee consisting of the Chief Nurse of the Health Service Directorate of the Hellenic Army General Staff (HAGS) and 5 Senior Medical Officers, based on the new British Training System that had been adopted and applied in the Army. "The purpose of establishing the School was to train the necessary number of Sister Nurses for the Nursing Service in Military Hospitals and to fill the vacant positions in the Corps of Sister Nurses of the Army..." The duration of studies was three years. The theoretical training was carried out by Health Officers, by private individuals as well as by graduate Nursing Sisters of the Hellenic Red Cross and "Evangelismos" Hospital. The first 21 female students entered the "Military Training School for Nursing Sisters" on 14.11.46. This date is also the day of celebration of the establishment of the school. The internship took place in civil and military hospitals. The first building that housed the newly founded School was one of the Petraki Monastery that functioned as an annex of the 401 General Athens Military Hospital. A staff of English Officers of Queen Alexandra's Corps, who served in the English Military Mission, provided significant assistance both in the establishment of the Corps and in the newly established School. After the departure of the English Nurses, at the beginning of 1949, the Directorate of the School was taken over by Lt. Col. Cleopatra Avagianou, a graduate of the HRC. She did a core work for the consolidation and stabilization of the institution of Military Nursing as well as for the establishment of Officer Nurses (<https://san.army.gr/istoriki-anadromi/>).

Table 1. SNO renaming (from its foundation until nowadays)

Year	Name
1946	School of Nursing Sisters of the Army
1953	"Queen Frederica" School of Nursing Sisters
1971	School of Military Officers Nursing Sisters (SONS)
1989	School of Nursing Officers (SNO)

In 1950, the first Nursing Officers (N/O) graduates of the School were assigned teaching duties, while most of them staffed the Military Hospitals of Athens and the province. In the same year, it is housed in a building of the Arsakeio High School. Various relocations followed until 1992, when it acquired its own building facilities at the Saketta A' Camp in Byron. On January 27, 1951, the Council of Ministers appointed Queen Frederica as head of the N/O Corps of the National Armed Forces with the compulsory law 1662, "On the regulation of matters concerning the N/O Corps of the National Armed Forces". With the Legislative Decree (LD) 2976/54, marriage was allowed for Nurse Officer Sisters after five years have passed since their graduation from the School and after approval by the Ministry of Health, only childbearing was not allowed until 1970. Also, by the same LD, the General Director bears the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, while the rank of Brigadier General is awarded to the Honorary Head of the Corps, the Queen (<https://san.army.gr/istoriki-anadromi/>).

During the five years 1950-1955 N/O officers took part in the Greek expeditionary force in Korea. In that expedition, Greece supplied an infantry battalion and an air transport squadron (service personnel: 4,992 persons) to the United Nations (<https://korean-warlegacy.org/un-participation-map/>). The Officers served in advanced surgeries of the Korean Front, a particularly difficult mission due to the adverse climatic conditions of the country. Their contribution and their services were recognized by the Allies, which contributed to writing one of the brightest pages in the history of the Corps. They were awarded the Bronze Star for their services to the United Nations struggle (<https://san.army.gr/istoriki-anadromi/>).

The allocation of N/O to the three branches of the Armed Forces was defined by a decree in 1984. In 1990, the first male students were admitted. In 1996, with Law 2439/96, the rank of Brigadier General was awarded to Nurse Officers, while in 2000, by order of the General Staff of the National Defense, a sword was granted to the Students of the School and new Officers were awarded a Branch sword to which they are distributed. Nowadays, the

course in SNO is four years long, male students are also enrolled, the academic training takes place in the Nursing Department of the University of Athens (since September 2005) (<http://www.emilyo.eu/sites/default/files/>), the graduates are divided into the three branches of the Armed Forces, they are sworn in and are called Second Lieutenants, Second Lieutenants leaders and bearers. They progress to the rank of Brigadier General. The distinctive 169 emblem of the School depicts the goddess Athena, who is the goddess of health, while the ancient saying of the emblem " «Επ' ωφελείη καμνόντων» " (to benefit the sufferers), is a quote from the Hippocratic Oath (<https://san.army.gr/istoriki-anadromi/>)

Discussion

Military nurses' mission is heavily demanding and it was early understood that nursing should be practiced by qualified health personnel. Indeed, Until the time of Florence Nightingale (1820 – 1910), the practice of nursing under a regime of hostilities, and much more at or near the battlefield, was officially performed by men or by priests. The involvement of appropriately trained female nurses happened during the Crimean War of 1854-1856. During the First World War, the use of military nurses was expanded to meet the army medical needs and their effectiveness was such that in the Second World War they were the cornerstone of the provision of health services at the front. Unlike their predecessors, who were civilian nurses drafted to serve their country during wartime, modern military nurses are career nurses who have chosen to practice the health care function serving national ideals (Rushton, 2011). Henceforth, military nurses combine two qualities, that of a health professional and that of a soldier, and must serve the principles of both (Kelly, 2010).

Military nurses, in war operations, often act with inadequate means of medical aid. They try to adapt their clinical skills to the circumstances, even in temporary structures or mobile facilities. It has to be recognized that providing care by nurses in a war zone under great stress (sleep deprivation, fatigue, stress, lack of social support), carries a greater

risk of developing post-traumatic stress (PTSD) than doctors, due to longer contact with the patients (Gibbons et al., 2012, Hagerty et al., 2011).

Contemporary military nurses are professional officers of the armed forces. They realize their important role, the difficulties and try to adapt their services to the unprecedented conditions created by war. They understand that caring behaviors may be affected by the constraints imposed by the military mission (area of operations, limited available means, deployment space, movements, large number of patients) and in essence turn into fighters fighting for their national ideals (Griffiths, & Jasper, 2008, Kelly, 2010). There is also urgent need to adopt to a changing transcultural environment, especially at the borders of the European Union (Malliarou et al., 2017). A necessary condition for the effectiveness of the health team's work is the provision of care in the context of mutual support, companionship and teamwork. The glorious pages of military nursing history in Greece are a story of caring and servicing the national ideals under inauspicious circumstances, promising an equally brilliant future.

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