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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Some Advice to Nurses



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SOME ADVICE TO NURSES

In time of war, a Nurse's first duty is to give her services to her country and to observe its regulations. If you do not know your legal obligations, find out what they are, as it is essential you should know.

Your country has signed certain international agreements known as the *Geneva Conventions*. As a member either of the Medical Personnel of the Armed Forces, or of a Red Cross Unit assisting them, these Conventions give you certain rights ; they also impose on you the duty of respecting their clauses and seeing that they are applied.

The *emblem* which you bear, whether Red Cross, Red Crescent, or Red Lion and Sun, gives you the right in time of war to the respect and protection of civil and military authorities of all belligerents ; but this protection implies certain obligations.

Whatever your rank and duties, no one has the right to make difficulties for you, for having spontaneously nursed the wounded and sick—whatever their nationality. All the wounded and sick, both friend and foe, must be looked after with the same care, and only reasons of medical urgency justify giving priority in any particular case.

The emblem you wear on your left arm—an armlet bearing the stamp of the military command—must be accompanied by an *identity card*. This card must be countersigned by the military authority under whose command you will be placed in time

of war, even if you are enrolled in a Red Cross Unit. Never leave for any destination without taking your identity card, with photograph, signature and all necessary visas ; you must never be without it when you are in the fighting zone. Should you be taken prisoner, this card will certify you as a member of the medical personnel, entitled to protection by the enemy command. In no circumstances whatever may a Red Cross nurse be deprived of her identity card, her badges and the right to wear her armlet.

The Red Cross *emblem* of large size is used, in time of war only, to denote hospitals, personnel and equipment protected by the Conventions ; it may not be displayed on any premises without the permission of the military command.

If you work in a Red Cross hospital, remember that wounded and sick com-

batants must be *disarmed* on arrival, if this has not already been done. Able-bodied and armed combatants must not enter ; it is the Nurse's duty to refuse them access to an establishment under Red Cross protection, no matter to which side they belong.

Red Cross *hospitals*, which the enemy is bound to respect, may not be used for military purposes, nor serve as cover for acts harmful to the enemy—for instance, spying, observation of movements of troops, aircraft or shipping, for the information of the military command, cannot be tolerated.

No *arms* or *munitions* may be stored in hospitals, infirmaries, ships, trucks, motor-ambulances or premises which are under the protection of the Red Cross emblem.

Disregard of these regulations may compromise the security of the wounded and

sick, as the enemy is then no longer obliged to respect such hospitals, vehicles or premises. The Geneva Convention does not, however, prohibit a Nurse carrying arms exclusively for her own defence and that of the wounded and sick in her charge.

Should the hospital or medical unit to which you belong be *captured* by the enemy, remember that a Nurse, like all Medical Personnel, must carry on until the enemy military command has taken steps to give the wounded and sick the care they require. You may possibly be kept back for a certain period for such work, should the number of prisoners of war and their state of health so require. If so, you must continue your nursing duties, but you may not be obliged to perform any non-professional work.

You will not be a "prisoner of war", although subject to camp or hospital

discipline, but you will enjoy all the privileges granted to prisoners of war by the Geneva Conventions, with certain additional advantages and facilities. Further, when your professional services are no longer essential, you will be sent home as soon as a route is open and military considerations allow. You will then have the right to take all your belongings, valuables and personal property.

Serving the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, or the Red Lion and Sun, you must remain calm and dignified in all circumstances. You have a mission which is noble but which carries heavy responsibilities, requiring not only thorough professional knowledge, but also the strict execution of your duties and the full sum of your devotion. By giving to others you will find a richer meaning in your work.

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We have tried to give above, simply and concisely, the elements of what all Nurses, Voluntary Aids and Medical Personnel in the service of Armed Forces in war-time should know. We strongly advise, in addition, study of the Geneva Conventions of July 27, 1929, for the Relief of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field (which is still in force) as well as the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949—the First Convention (Wounded and Sick on Land) in particular. The 1949 Conventions have been signed by sixty-one States and come into force for each State six months after it ratifies.

Reference may also be made to the “Analysis ” of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, published by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, for the use of the Red Cross Societies.

Lucie Odier, R. N.
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