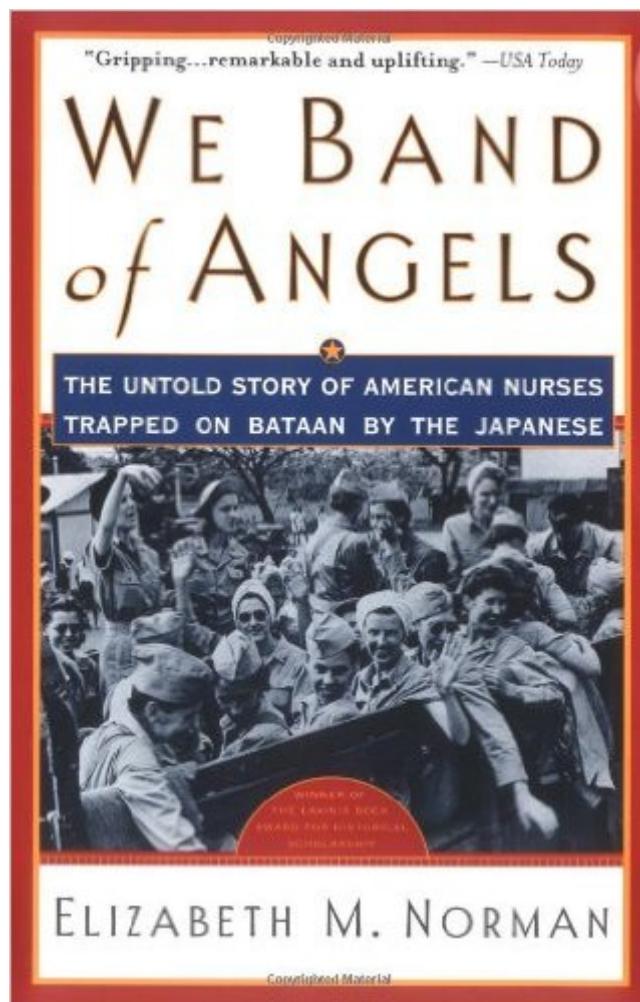


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# We Band Of Angels: The Untold Story Of American Nurses Trapped On Bataan By The Japanese



## Synopsis

Hailed by The New York Times Book Review as a "grippingly told" story of "power and relevance," here is the true, untold account of the first American women to prove their mettle under combat conditions. Later, during three years of brutal captivity at the hands of the Japanese, they also demonstrated their ability to survive. Filled with the thoughts and impressions of the women who lived it, "every page of this history is fascinating" (The Washington Post). *We Band of Angels* In the fall of 1941, the Philippines was a gardenia-scented paradise for the American Army and Navy nurses stationed there. War was a distant rumor, life a routine of easy shifts and evenings of dinner and dancing under the stars. On December 8 all that changed, as Japanese bombs rained on American bases in Luzon, and the women's paradise became a fiery hell. Caught in the raging battle, the nurses set up field hospitals in the jungles of Bataan and the tunnels of Corregidor, where they saw the most devastating injuries of war, and suffered the terrors of shells and shrapnel. But the worst was yet to come. As Bataan and Corregidor fell, a few nurses escaped, but most were herded into internment camps enduring three years of fear and starvation. Once liberated, they returned to an America that at first celebrated them, but later refused to honor their leaders with the medals they clearly deserved. Here, in letters, diaries, and firsthand accounts, is the story of what really happened during those dark days, woven together in a compelling saga of women in war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Just read a new book "We Band of Angels" and it is quite high on my recommended reading list for any of you interested in military women's stories. It is heartwarming and at the same time

heartbreaking. Told in a style that puts the reader directly into the lives of these valiant nurses - it takes you on a journey through the horrors of World War Two in the Pacific - as if you were there. The author draws you into the Malinta Tunnel underground hospital on Corregidor and describes the almost superhuman endurance of the military nurses working there to save their patients - and she does it with balanced style. She reveals their triumphs and their humor, along with the dreary and miserable conditions under which they worked. When the Japanese capture the nurses and send them to Santo Tomas internment camp you journey with them through their three years as prisoners and their ultimate liberation. The author, Dr Elizabeth Norman, has done a remarkable job - using interviews, diaries, letters, and a wealth of research - in telling this story that has been hidden by history. America seems to forget that women are veterans too - Dr Norman has helped remind them. Barbara A. Wilson, Capt. USAF (Ret)

I, too, read Elizabeth Norman's book, *We Band of Angels, The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese*, over the Memorial Day weekend. She did a masterful job in her research and writing to retell this unique story about this group of America's military nurses and their dedication to duty. This story is unique in American military history, in that in no other instance in our history has this number of military women, been taken captive, held as POWs for almost three years, and all survive. However, it is not unique in its demonstration of military nurses' dedication to honor and duty. The facts in the book speak loudly to many of today's societal debates, but to Norman's credit, she chose not to get into what many of us euphemistically term "pissing battles of bias". She tells the story of this historical event and its impact on the women who experienced it. She let the story stand on its own merits for anyone who reads it. Am I biased in undertaking this review of her book? To an extent, yes. I am a retired Army Nurse Corps officer, who worked with, or served under some of the women about whom Norman has written, and who we both tremendously admire. I have also had opportunity to know perhaps more about the blueprint of her story than most of the public-at-large. She has done a masterful job. Had she not, I would not have given her the time of day. Norman's research and interviews led her to more details about this historical event than many of us were aware and has interwoven them into the story in a manner that cleared up some of its mysteries. She told us enough about the lives and motivations of many of these women prior to their entering the military, and their lives following this experience, to let us determine for ourselves the extent to which this experience was a seminal and defining life experience for them, individually as well as collectively. Elizabeth Norman is more than a historian, bringing an objective eye to the reporting of facts or experience. She is an expert nurse and researcher, who knows that

historical research is not merely the story of people and events, nor does it lend itself to clinical trials or experimental studies, but rather to the analysis of phenomenon with a view toward objectively explaining events, where explanation is possible and faithful to the occurrence. Personally, I do not believe anyone other than a dedicated, committed, expert nurse, who also was a historian, could have written this book with the same degree of accuracy, detail and justice deserved by those nurses who lived it. To nurses, and particularly military nurses, this book reminds and rekindles within us that pride the remaining surviving Army and Navy nurses of the Philippines, Bataan, Corregidor, Santo Tomas, and Los Banos must feel in this retelling of "their" story. But this book is not just for nurses, it is for all who have fought for this country, and to those who waited hopefully for their family members' safe return. Many of America's warriors are alive and well because of military nurses like those of whom this story is about. Those casualties who made it back to our hospitals but still did not survive their injury, not only had an expert nurse at their bedside, but a surrogate mother or sister who did not have to be concerned that their caring or their own grief would subvert their expertise. Neither could their feelings be realistically viewed as a sign of weakness. Their strength and their courage was demonstrated by their desire and willingness to be there and the long hours of work they endured. My only wish is that before all of those many nurses who served in World War II are gone, or the memories become too faded, some of the other defining stories of World War II's military nurses, such as those who served and died on the Anzio beachhead, can be pieced together in a narrative as riveting and as faithful to the experience as Norman's in *We Band of Angels*. Ira P. Gunn, MLN, CRNA, FAAN, LTC, US Army, Retired

This is a fantastic book that tells the heroism of our troops abandoned in the Phillipines and how they held out for 5 months under austere conditions. All this is told through the eyes of the 80-90 Army and Navy nurses who worked under battlefield conditions to minister to the sick and wounded. There were no front and rear areas on Bataan and Corregidor and these nurses performed supurllative feats with all manner of bombs dropping around them constantly, snipers, friendly fire and the ever present threat of capture and mis-treatment from the Japanese Army. This needs to be made into a "Saving Private Ryan" quality movie to further celebrate their outstanding accomplishments and to tell a story that our government may not want told.

I couldn't put this book down. What a great story, and I am so glad someone wrote it. Well researched, and written. It's especially meaningful to me as my brother was killed on February 3rd, 1945 while liberating Santo Tomas POW Camp. He was part of the 1st Cav Division "flying column",

that were ordered to "go around the Nips", "Free the internees and Santo Tomas." As a young kid at the time I was proud of what he did, I'm even prouder now. This book brings home the point that his death served a higher purpose. I'd like to thank the author for personalizing this for me. Some of our men died to take a "hill", "objective", all worthwhile objectives, but in this case it was human.

"Greater love hath no man.....

Wherever war strikes there are women who sacrificially rise to the needs of the moment to help others survive. The nurses in We Band of Angels are exemplary. Based in the idyllic Philippines, they found themselves very quickly in the throes of hardship. From evacuation to jungle survival, field hospital trauma and starvation, things went from bad to worse. Finally the harsh reality of prison camp under unsympathetic captors. This is their story of survival. I like this book because it describes part of American history mostly neglected in history books. If you like this book I also recommend In the Shadow of the Rising Sun, an even more harrowing true story telling it from an American POW's view.

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