

## Amateur Army

RAG, TAG AND BOBTAIL: *The Story of the Continental Army, 1775-1783.* By Lynn Montross. New York: Harper & Bros. 519 pp. \$5.

By CURTIS P. NETTELS

WHEN Mr. Montross wrote "The Reluctant Rebels," his recent book on the Continental Congress, he had the benefit of a concentrated body of first-rate material. The "Journals" of the Congress had been published, and there was also available the outstanding collection of the letters of its members, in eight volumes, edited by Edmund C. Burnett. In addition, Dr. Burnett had written his detailed, comprehensive one-volume work, "The Continental Congress," which summarizes the fruits of his long study of the contemporary records. It was possible for a popularizer to use the findings of Dr. Burnett in such a way as to produce a book of moderate length, for the general reader with an interest in history.

In undertaking a somewhat comparable book on the Continental Army, Mr. Montross assigned himself a much more difficult task. No authority has produced a great reference work on that subject similar to Dr. Burnett's elaborate study of the Congress. Two important collections reveal the workings of the Army in much the same manner that the inner story of the Congress is told in the "Journals" and in Burnett's "Letters." Of the Fitzpatrick edition of "The Writings of George Washington," twenty-three volumes are devoted to the subject of Mr. Montross's book. The other great collection, about two hundred massive volumes, consists of the unpublished papers of Washington in the Library of Congress. Mr. Montross has not used either of these indispensable bodies of material. Perhaps a work comparable to Burnett's "The Continental Congress" will be available after the sixth volume of Douglas S. Freeman's "George Washington" is published. It seems that Mr. Montross's book went to press before the third and fourth volumes of the Freeman biography had appeared.

The title of the book need not be taken literally. The subtitle leads one to look for a fairly inclusive account of the main features of the Army. The book is not exactly that. Most of it is

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Lynn Montross—"another item."

devoted to narratives of the leading campaigns and battles. Inserted therein are bits of information about the officers and the troops and the conditions of army life. The emphasis on military actions led to a broadening of the scope so as to embrace the British army, its problems, its movements, and its generals. Raids on the frontier are mentioned, though they involved civilians—not the Army. The German mercenaries receive some attention. Even British politics gets into the story.

The book does not present connected discussions of the most interesting questions about the Army. How was it affected by the primitive economy of the thirteen states, as regards production, transportation, and foreign trade? What were the large strategic considerations, and what factors determined them? How did the Army function in relation to Congress, the state governments, and the state militias? How was it supplied with the sinews of war? How competent were its leaders, and who were the most accomplished generals?

The index indicates that Washington is the most important figure in the book; yet there is no direct appraisal of his generalship or of his political as an administrator or as a political leader. Incidentally, the index contains forty-seven entries relating to Washington. Two of them are in error; and there are in the text seventy-eight references to the General that are not cited in the index.

As an account of the Continental Army, Mr. Montross's book is sorely inadequate. It simply adds another item to the long list of sketches of the military history of the Revolution.

## The Urge to Heal

CYCLONE IN CALICO. By Nina Brown Baker. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 278 pp. \$3.50.

By MARGUERITE CLARK

THE Civil War was not yet sixty days old when Mary Ann Bickerdyke first charged into the Union Army Camp at Cairo, Ill. The forty-four-year old widow, an uneducated farm woman who practised in Galesburg as a "botanic physician," had been authorized by the townfolk to carry \$500 worth of medical supplies to the Galesburg boys stationed there.

None of these or other Illinois troops had been wounded in battle. Yet at Cairo, Galesburg soldiers and those from all over the state were dying by the hundreds of dysentery, pneumonia, typhoid, and other diseases. In poorly-equipped hospital tents, they lay on filthy straw pallets; they were fed the regular Army rations of salt pork, hardtack, beans, and coffee. The only nurses were convalescent soldiers, most of them too feeble to aid their helpless brothers. The Army doctors were indifferent to the plight of the sick; their job was to care for the battle-wounded.

"No women in quarters" was the Army regulation. Undaunted, the strong-jawed Mrs. Bickerdyke assured the Galesburg citizens: "I'll go to Cairo and clean things up . . . them generals ain't going to stop me." Armed with a one-day pass, she invaded the miserable hospital tent. Before the sunset gun, she had bathed the patients in tubs made of old sugar casks, deloused them, put them in clean clothes between clean sheets on clean straw beds, and fed them fried chicken, lightbread, and blackberry jam brought from home.

So began the career of the first military nurse in the United States, the determined Illinois woman whose experiences are described with historical and medical accuracy, humor, and sympathy in Mrs. Baker's book. The second day in camp, Mother Bickerdyke discovered five other hospitals in the Cairo area, all dirtier than the first. One by one, she swept through them, "making herself a blessing to the patients and a nuisance to the Army surgeons."

Enraged at her interference, one prominent surgeon complained to the commandant that a "cyclone in calico" had turned his hospital upside down.

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## Words from the Seekers

To him, and to other army officials who tried to oust her, Mrs. Bickerdyke had one reply: "I'm here to stay as long as the men need me. If anybody goes from here, it will be you. I'm going straight to General Grant." Later, Grant did appoint her matron of the new Cairo military hospital, but with no medical authority. In Washington, the Army Nurses Corps was being organized by Dorothea Linde Dix, but Mary Ann Bickerdyke had no time for formal nursing training. When her fame spread to the United States Sanitary Commission (forerunner of the Red Cross), she was made a field agent of that organization. But even the simple red tape of the Commission irked the busy nurse. "Orders again!" she sniffed during a visit to the Chicago office. "You'd think this was the Army. I get enough of that foolishness down South."

When the real fighting began, Mrs. Bickerdyke moved along with the Western armies. Riding in a light wagon, or mounted on her horse, Whitey, she set up hospitals, fed the boys before they went into battle, and worked in front-line dressing stations. When a colonel complained to General Sherman about her high-handed manner, Sherman replied: "You've picked the one person around here who outranks me. If you want to lodge a complaint against her, you'll have to talk to President Lincoln."

A medical authority at Fort Pickering tried to dispose of the indomitable woman by putting her in charge of the camp pesthouse. There for the first time, Mother Bickerdyke could practise "botanic medicine." Discarding calomel and laudanum, she dosed the men with black root and goldenseal, sassafrass tea and beet juice. She fed them fresh milk and vegetables, saw that they had fresh air, hot baths, and exercise. In those days there was no cure for smallpox; yet a surprisingly large number of patients recovered. With little scientific knowledge about vitamins and antiseptics, an illiterate woman practitioner used these methods a generation before they were known to general medicine.

Mrs. Bickerdyke came out of the Civil War at forty-nine. Successively, she managed a Home for the Friendless in Illinois, set up a hostel for discharged soldiers in Kansas, did social work in New York City, and fought for veterans' pensions in California. When she died in 1901 at the age of eighty-four, a statue was erected in the Galesburg square, showing Mother Bickerdyke kneeling beside a wounded soldier, holding a cup of water to his lips.

*LIVING PIONEERS: The Epic of the West by Those Who Lived It. Edited by Harold Preece. Cleveland: World Publishing Co. 317 pp. \$3.75.*

BY WALTER PRESCOTT WEBB

**T**HIS book is composed of fifteen narratives by fifteen people who have related their most thrilling experiences to the editor, Harold Preece. It is obvious that Mr. Preece has interpolated to give the stories dramatic effect and a form more literary than would be possible in a literal recording. Even so the separate contributions are of uneven merit as might be expected in such a compilation. The stories are grouped into four categories which indicate scope and subject matter. Though the categories are given fanciful titles, a little study will show that they deal with peace officers, cattle driving and herding, agricultural efforts in a new and inhospitable country, and Indians in a bellicose mood. The West treated is the region between the Mississippi and the Pacific coast, but the accent is on Texas, Oklahoma, and Arizona. Among the narrators are twelve men and three women, and significantly all women are placed in the "Patches and Plowshares" or farm section.

My first reaction to the book was not favorable because the author has omitted those features which

would have made it more useful to historians and history students, such as a biographical sketch of each of the narrators, a more careful pinning down of places and dates, an index, and some illustrations. These omissions detract from the authenticity which is always valuable in any work of historical intent.

A closer examination of the sketches reveals real merit. For example, the first story concerns Ira Aten, the Texas Ranger who became famous when he was sent to Navarro County to stop fence-cutting in 1888. It was my good fortune to find in the Adjutant General's office in Austin the original letters Ira Aten wrote to Captain L. P. Sieker setting forth his experiences among the fence-cutters, and giving the details of his plan to plant dynamite bombs under the fences so that when the cutters went to work they would be blown up by the bombs. Captain Sieker immediately ordered Aten to desist, and with reluctance he did so. Of course it is known to all historians that official reports are often given special treatment to conceal some of the facts. However that may be, the story as told in the book, while agreeing with the official reports up to a certain point, goes farther and gives some rather lurid details of how the Ranger went back to Navarro under orders of the governor and set off all his planted bombs, some in the face of the cutters. If Ira Aten did this in 1888 there is no evidence of it in his official reports or in the contemporary newspapers.

Edith Wheeler's "My Chore Was

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—Bettmann Archive.

The Oklahoma land rush—"vivid, graphic, dramatic."