



American Nightingale: The Story of Frances Slanger, Forgotten Heroine of Normandy

Bob Welch

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Of the 350,000 American women in uniform during World War II, none instilled more hope in American GIs than Frances Slanger. In Army fatigues and helmet she splashed ashore with the first nurses to hit the Normandy beach in June 1944. Later, from a storm-whipped tent amid the thud of artillery shells, she wrote a letter to *Stars and Stripes* newspaper that would stir the souls of thousands of weary soldiers. Hundreds wrote heartfelt responses, praising Slanger and her fellow nurses and honoring her humility and patriotism. But Frances Slanger never got to read such praise. She was dead, killed the very next day when German troops shelled her field hospital, the first American nurse to die in Europe after the landing at Normandy. Frances Slanger was a Jewish fruit-peddler's daughter who survived a chilling childhood in World War I-torn Poland and immigrated to America at age seven. Inspired by memories of her bitter past and a Nazi-threatened future, she defied her parents' wishes by becoming a nurse and joining the military. A woman of great integrity and courage, she was also a passionate writer and keeper of chapbooks. This is the story of her too brief life.

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