

# WOMEN IN THE LATVIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1918 - 1920 IN HISTORICAL MEMORY: NURSES' EXAMPLE

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## Abstract:

*The research deals with a subject that has not been investigated previously, but is a significant topic in the historical memory of Latvian culture – participation and importance of nurses in the War of Independence of Latvia. Many nurses worked in the military units and war medicine institutions of the Latvian Army. They fulfilled their professional responsibilities with selflessness and often died in the line of duty. Unfortunately nurses' role in this military conflict is not clarified. The objective of this paper is to study the role of nurses during the War of Independence of 1918–1920 and the impact of the activity of nurses related to the military sphere on historical memory. Chronological confines include the period of time from November 18, 1918, when the democratic and independent state of Latvia was established, till August 11, 1920, when the Peace Treaty was signed between Latvia and Soviet Russia. To reach that purpose, we need to look at many aspects – study the change of women's role at the beginning of the 20th century, especially under the circumstances of World War I; consider the significance of the War of Independence in the region and investigate the contribution of nurses in the War of Independence, what professional responsibilities they fulfilled and what were the difficulties they encountered and, finally, how their commitment has been preserved in historical memory.*

**Rezumat:**

Această cercetare abordează un subiect care nu a mai fost investigat anterior, dar care este important pentru memoria istorică și culturală a Letoniei – importanța participării surorilor medicale la Războiul de Independență al Letoniei. Numeroase asistente medicale au lucrat în unitățile militare și în instituțiile sanitare militare ale Armatei letone. Acestea și-au dus la îndeplinire responsabilitățile profesionale cu altruism și deseori au murit la datorie. Din păcate, rolul asistentelor medicale în conflictul militar nu este clarificat. Obiectivul acestei lucrări este de a analiza importanța asistentelor medicale în Războiul de Independență din 1918-1920 precum și impactul asupra memoriei istorice creat de activitatea surorilor medicale din domeniul militar. Limitele cronologice sunt marcate de data de 18 noiembrie 1918, când statul democratic și independent Letonia a fost constituit, și 11 august 1920, când a fost semnat Tratatul de Pace dintre Letonia și Rusia sovietică. Mai multe aspecte vor fi urmărite pentru atingerea scopurilor propuse – va fi analizat rolul femeii la începutul secolului XX, în special în legătură cu desfășurarea Primului Război Mondial; se va avea în vedere importanța Războiului de Independență în regiune și va fi investigată contribuția asistentelor medicale în Războiul de Independență, care erau responsabilitățile lor profesionale și care au fost dificultățile întâlnite în exercitarea acestora, precum și modul în care ele sunt amintite în memoria istorică.

**Keywords:** nurses, Latvian Red Cross, Riga Military Hospital, the Latvian War of Independence

**Survey of sources and literature**

Particular attention should be paid to the published memoirs, because they influenced the general cultural memory of the nation. Memoirs are a subjective source of history, but their value should be appreciated due to their representation of human emotions and observations, which enriches the knowledge of the historical processes along with other sources of history. Even more, it should be valued in a positive manner that memories of several people have remained about certain events; in such way a general impression can be gained and the feelings, which may be radically different of the people involved in the specific situation, can be understood.

Memories of several nurses have been published after the War of Independence in the Latvian press regarding the period of the attack of the West Russian Volunteer Army of Pavel Bermont Avalov in Riga, in October

- November 1919. Memories used in the research can be divided into several groups. First of all, the published memories of nurses - Elza Grivane<sup>1</sup> (Elza Grīvāne, 1892-1935), Eba Kremane<sup>2</sup> (Eba Krēmane, 1875-1942) and Marta Celmina<sup>3</sup> (Marta Celmiņa, 1880-1937). During the War of independence, E. Grivane and M. Celmina worked in the Hospital of the Latvian Red Cross, and E. Kremane worked in the War Hospital of Latvia (later - Riga). All these three women were well acquainted with each other and they were prominent nurses and public persons who participated in the Latvian Red Cross Union of Nurses in Latvia (Latvijas Sarkanā Krusta ūžsirdīgo māsu Savienība), which was founded on July 29, 1922, located at Skolas street 1 in Riga, they were also associated with the magazine *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* (Nurse).<sup>4</sup>

Memories of nurses have several common features. For example they were published more than ten, and those of E. Kremane even 20 years after the described events. Due to this reason they are general and poetical, and the nurses remember the events with certain nostalgia. Memories of E. Grivane and E. Kremane were written in honour of the celebrations of foundation of the state and participants in the War of Independence, consequently with inclination to illustrate the state and the participants in the War from a good side.<sup>5</sup>

In the process of historical memory a great role was always played by the press. One of the most significant periodicals of that time was the already mentioned magazine *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa*. The magazine was published several times a year and its first issue was published in 1929, under the wing of Nurses' Union of the Latvian Red Cross. Its publishing continued till 1940, when Latvia was occupied by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Editors of the magazine were nurses M. Celmina and Justine Kuske (Justīne Kušķe), and it informed of activities of the Union, and of the events in the profession of nurses in Latvia and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

News on the activity of nurses in the War of Independence appeared also in other newspapers, but these were mostly papers related to

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<sup>1</sup> Elza Grīvāne. 'Atmiņas par Bermonta laiku.' *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* 4, (1934): 25-28.

<sup>2</sup> Eba Krēmanis. '20. gadi Rīgas kara slimnīcā.' *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* 3-4, (1939): 21.

<sup>3</sup> Marta Celmiņa. 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Žēlsirdīgā māsa* (1937): 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> 'Marta Celmiņa - mūsu ievērojamā sabiedriskā darbiniece.' *Zeltene* 21, (1930): 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> 'Marta Celmiņa - mūsu ievērojamā sabiedriskā darbiniece.' *Zeltene* 21, (1930): 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Olga Odiņa, and Inga Millere. 'Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts (1918-1940). Māsu profesijas reorganizācija.' *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 59-60.

the military sphere – *Latvijas Kareivis*<sup>7</sup>, *Latviešu Strēlnieks*<sup>8</sup> etc. For example, *Latvijas Kareivis*<sup>9</sup> republished memories of M. Celmina, which were published in the magazine *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* (*Nurse*), which confirms their vast resonance in society and interest about the role of women in war. After World War II, due to the political situation, the war press in Latvia did not write about nurses and their participation in the War of Independence, and the exile press usually mentioned them in jubilee greetings<sup>10</sup> or in obituary notices<sup>11</sup>.

The activities of nurses can be seen also in memories of soldiers. For example, valuable for the research of the subject were the memories on the War of Independence of Kristaps Zommers<sup>12</sup> (Cavalier of the Order of Lāčplesis), in which a situation is depicted when a nurse rendered help to the wounded soldiers. These memories were published several times in the exile periodicals.<sup>13</sup> Such memories help understand the circumstances in which the nurses had to work. It is essential that the soldiers of the Latvian Army came from different social strata and professions and also could verbally spread information about nurses, when telling about their experiences at war. Soldiers were representatives of different professions and came from different social strata, thus society in general knew about nurses. Unfortunately one cannot trace such stories, but memories of K. Zommers show that such stories existed and soldiers shared them.

It is important to mention that in the paper *Latvian Army in the 20s* published in 1940 (*Latvijas armija 20 gados*)<sup>14</sup>, which is one of the most extensive papers concerning war medicine in Latvia, nothing at all is said about impact of nurses during the War of Independence, their contribution is passed over in silence, thus underlining the role of men, especially of military physicians, which nobody questioned, of course. Nevertheless it

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<sup>7</sup> *Latvijas Kareivis* (1919–1940).

<sup>8</sup> *Latviešu Strēlnieks* (1916–1939).

<sup>9</sup> 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Latvijas Kareivis* 44, (1930): 3.

<sup>10</sup> 'No sievietes darbu un panākumu hronikas: 30 gadi slimnieku kopšanas darbā.' *Zeltene* 1, (1939): 19.

<sup>11</sup> Justīne Kuše, 'Martas Celminas piemiņai'. *Zeltene*: 3, (1937): 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Kristaps Zommers. 'No Rīgas līdz Jelgavai 1919. g. (kādu atmiņu konspektīvs tēlojums)' in Mūsu dzīve. Rīga: 7. Siguldas pulka piemiņas Fonds, 16–18, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Kristaps Zommers. 'No Rīgas līdz Jelgavai 1919. g. (kādu atmiņu konspektīvs tēlojums)' in Mūsu dzīve. Rīga: 7. Siguldas pulka piemiņas Fonds, 16–18, 20.; Zommers, Kristaps. 'No Rīgas līdz Jelgavai 1919. g. (kādu atmiņu konspektīvs tēlojums)'. Lāčplesis (1968): 16–18, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo Rozensteins, ed., *Latvijas armija 20. gados* (Riga: Armijas štāba apmācības daļa, 1940).

would be necessary to also evaluate the contribution of women – nurses and the way it was preserved in historical memory, so this paper is a vivid witness of its time – although nurses were an essential support in care for the wounded, their significance even in the concerned period was not evaluated enough.

After World War II and up to the restoration of Independence of Latvia in 1990 the soviet power ruled in Latvia and, due to political reasons, there were no possibilities to perform ideological research on the history of Latvia. . After 1990 two significant research works have been issued - research by Olga Odiņas and Inga Millere *The Latvian Red Cross (1918-1940) and the reorganisation of nurses' profession (Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts (1918-1940) un māsu profesijas reorganizācija)*<sup>15</sup>, in which the authors speak about the foundation and activities of The Latvian Red Cross, and the training of nurses and popularization of their profession. Ēriks Jēkabsons has developed a study on the role of women, including nurses, in the War of Independence.<sup>16</sup> In these studies the subject of nurses in historical memory is not touched upon, since the issue requires a separate research. Still, these works are significant because they deal with the change of a woman's role in the result of the war.

### **Change of Women's role and the Latvian War of Independence**

World War I, revolutions, movements of refugees, terror and mutual wars changed Europe completely, as well as the former Russian Empire and Latvia as its constituent in the past. The main changes took place in the social sphere, and the role of a woman in the society changed beyond recognition, as women started to take the places of employment of men, the number of women in European and Russian universities increased and many women got involved in military processes.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike many other European countries, the military operations continued in Latvia after the World War I. The issue of medicine was particularly important during the war and in the post-war period, and it had direct or indirect effect on every resident of Latvia. Also, the role of women in medicine grew, and women participated as nurses and

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<sup>15</sup> Olga Odiņa and Inga Millere. 'Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts (1918–1940). Māsu profesijas reorganizācija.' *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*.

<sup>16</sup> Ēriks Jēkabsons, 'Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.' *Tēvijas Sargs* 2 (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Vita Zelče, V. Sprugaine. Marginālās jeb 1376. fonds. Riga: Latvijas Valsts arhīvu generāldirekcija, Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs, 2005. 22–24.

sanitarians, etc. The nurses, unlike sanitarians and others, were women educated in medicine in special tuition courses for nurses.

Already prior to establishment of the Aid Corps of Latvian Women on 22 September 1919, women became actively involved in the supplying for the Latvian Army, but this particular organisation was planned to become the support of women for state defence. The aid corps was involved in solving the issues of supply for soldiers, collection of donations, organisation of burial of the killed soldiers and other problems. The activities of women exceeded the boundaries determined by the aid corps, because many women became involved in the military sphere even more directly - military units service, reconnaissance activity, military medicine service, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Also, the Latvian Red Cross was established on October 1918, belonging to the international organisation of the Red Cross, and had a significant role of the nurses as many nurses were employed in the hospitals of the Red Cross. After the War of Independence, the School for Nurses of the Latvian Red Cross was established in 1921 to supplement the practice obtained by the nurses during the war with theoretical knowledge. It was also one of the steps to increase the staff with medical education, which was little due to the enduring period of war.<sup>19</sup>

During the War of Independence, the political, military and social situation in Latvia was complicated. In autumn 1918, after the Armistice of Compiegne, in Latvia there were troops of the German army, and military action took place against the Bolsheviks in the same time, who were occupying almost the entire territory of Latvia at the beginning of 1919. The complicated situation is confirmed by the fact that in April and May 1919 there were three governments in Latvia – the temporary government of Latvia established in November 1918, the government of Soviet Latvia established in December 1918 and the pro-German government of Andrievs Niedra established in April 1919. Each government wanted to fulfil its own interests.<sup>20</sup>

The Latvian Army was founded on 10 July 1919, and another hard

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<sup>18</sup> Aiga Bērziņa, 'Latviešu Sieviešu palidzības korpusss Bermontiādes laikā, 1919. gada oktobris – decembris', Žurnāls Latvijas Arhīvi 3 (2013), 155–156.; Ēriks Jēkabsons, 'Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.' Tēvijas Sargs 2 (2012): 30–31.

<sup>19</sup> Olga Odīna and Inga Millere. 'Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts (1918–1940). Māsu profesijas reorganizācija.' Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis. 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> Inta Pētersone (atb. red.), Latvijas Brīvības cīņas 1918–1920: enciklopēdija (Riga: Preses Nams, 1999), 22.–23.

challenge was to be faced already in October, i.e., the attack of the West Russian Volunteer Army commanded by Pavel Bermont Avalov. The Latvian Army received help from the missions of the Allies, but still the battles for Riga were difficult. On 11 November the Latvian Army with the support of the Allies evicted the West Russian Volunteer Army from Riga and, until December, from the remaining territory of Latvia. After this victory all forces were moved to the front of Latgale to fight the Bolsheviks. This battle ended in favour of the Latvian Army, and Latvia and Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty on 11 August 1920.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to add that the medical board of military medicine of the Latvian Army was developed during the War of Independence. Prior to the establishment of the Medical Board of the Latvian Army on 19 July 1919, the Latvian Armed Forces had many flaws in provision of medical aid – well-organized medical aid was not provided, networks of war-time health-care institutions was not established and instructions were not elaborated. The army bodies and institutions were not sufficiently provided with sanitary means and inventory, no unified system was developed to fight venereal and epidemic diseases. After the establishment of the Latvian Army, the military medicine field was subordinated to the Medical Board of the Latvian Army supervised by the doctor - colonel (later - general) Peteris Sniķers (Pēteris Sniķers). The Board supervised and controlled all bodies and institutions in terms of medicine, provided sanitary means and equipment to them, took care of the health of the soldiers, and provided medical aid to soldiers and also prisoners.<sup>22</sup>

Several factors made the work of the Medical Board of the Latvian Army more complicated during the attack of West Russian Volunteer Army. The sanitary situation was not completely organized in all military bodies. In addition to the military action, the structure of the Medical Board and the military medicine institutions had to be organized to provide the necessary medical aid to the soldiers. During the entire duration of the War of Independence, the medical staff, sanitary means and

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<sup>21</sup> Valdis Bērziņš (atb. red.), 20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture II: Neatkarīga valsts 1918–1940 (Riga: Latvijas Universitātes Latvijas Vēstures Institūta apgāds, 2003). 140.–141.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Kara sanitārās pārvaldes desmit darba gadi.’ Latvijas Kareivis 159, (1929): 1.; Jēkabsons, Ēriks. ‘Ārsts ģen. Pēteris Sniķers un Latvijas kara medicīnas sākumi.’ Tēvijas Sargs 1 (2006): 26–27.; Hugo Rozensteins, ed., Latvijas armija 20. gados (Riga: Armijas štāba apmācības daļa, 1940, 267–273)

equipment were insufficient.<sup>23</sup>



*Fig. 1. Wounded students in Latvian Red Cross Hospital.*

First from left nurse Alise Rugena (Alise Ruģēna, 1897–1973).

Source: Pauls Stradiņš Museum for History of Medicine, MVM 53345 1/2

### Activity of the nurses

Many nurses had acquired the professional experience during the World War I, others were students of medicine or had attended courses of the Red Cross. Many of these nurses involved in the War of Independence were located in different medical institutions that admitted wounded and ill soldiers, for instance, in the hospitals of the Latvian Red Cross, War Hospital of Latvia (later – Riga), ambulances of divisions and garrisons, regiment ambulances, first aid stations of subordinate units, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Ambulance Train, and elsewhere. On 16 December 1919 the largest military medicine institution of Latvia, the War Hospital of Latvia, had 294 employees, 29 of which were the nurses. Besides the nurses, there were also other female employees in the hospital – the doctor Elizabete Krigere (Elizabete Krīgere) (deceased later due to typhus contracted when

<sup>23</sup> Look at: Gīle, Inna Latvijas armijas Sanitārās pārvaldes izveidošana un darbība 1919. gada jūlijā – 1920. gada augustā: bachelor thesis (Riga: University of Latvia, 2012. 20-25.)

performing work duties), kitchen workers, etc.<sup>24</sup>

In most cases the nurses were young women from different social classes and of different nationalities; first they were Latvians, but there were also Russians, Germans, Jewesses, Estonians, etc.<sup>25</sup> Also, women from different social classes, even aristocrats, became nurses. For example, at Ludza garrison ambulance (former ambulance of the *Landeswehr*), there were nurses of noble origin working as well – Helene von Knorre, Elizabeth von Hirschheydt, Ingeborg von Rannenkampf, Inga von Minkvic and the baronesses Gertrud von Engelhardt and Hilda von Hahn.<sup>26</sup>

Today, the courage of the regular soldiers is emphasized when discussing the War of Independence, and the contribution of the nurses has not been appreciated enough. Society and scientists talk little about the experience of the nurses in the intense conditions of battle, when the medical institutions were overcrowded by wounded soldiers needing immediate provision of medical aid.

Marta Celmina, the wife of Hugo Celmins (Hugo Celmiņš), famous Latvian statesman and participant of the War of Independence, was one of the women whose life became transformed by World War I.<sup>27</sup> She completed the tuition courses of a nurses in 1914 and began working in the military medicine field, and she has worked also as a nurse in the United Ambulance of Latvian Riflemen battalions.<sup>28</sup> During the war, M. Celmiņa was an active participant in the Latvian Red Cross organisation and participated in its establishment, and she also was the founder of the Latvian Movement of Nurses in Latvia.<sup>29</sup>

Nurses M. Celmina, E. Kremane and E. Grivane were among the founders and leaders of this organisation. The Union of Nurses cooperated also with international organisations of Red Cross and organisations of

<sup>24</sup> Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas valsts vēstures arhīvs (Latvian State Historical Archives, LSHA), 3413-1-405, 236.; 3413-1-2, 42; 3413-1-68, 176.; 1472-1-108, 82.; Ēriks Jēkabsons, ‘Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.’ Tēvijas Sargs 2 (2012): 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Ēriks Jēkabsons, ‘Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.’ Tēvijas Sargs 2 (2012): 30-31.

<sup>26</sup> LSHA, 4763-1-3, 1.; 4763-1-1, 151.; Ēriks Jēkabsons, ‘Sievietes un bruņotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.’ Tēvijas Sargs 2 (2012): 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Jaunais ministru prezidents Hugo Celmiņš.’ Valdības Vēstnesis 290, (1924): 10.; „Hugo Celmiņš”, <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/ministrija/arlietu-dienesta-vesture/latvijas-republikas-arlietu-ministri-un-latvijas-diplomatiska-dienesta-vaditaji-kops-1918-gada/hugo-celmins> accessed at 20.07.2015.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Marta Celmiņa – mūsu ievērojamā sabiedriskā darbiniece.’ Zeltene 21, (1930): 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Berlinē mirusi Marta Celmiņa.’ Jaunākās Ziņas 7, (1937): 16.

nurses, which undoubtedly confirms the significance of this organisation in a larger scope not only within Latvia. This is confirmed also by the fact that four nurses – M. Celmina, E. Grivane, Justine Kuske (1892–1977) and Elza Nulle-Sieceniece (1895-1977) along with other awards, were awarded with the highest award for nurses in the world – the Florence Nightingale Medal.<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 2. Marta Celmiņa (1880–1937)  
(1892–1935)

Source: Zeltene, No 3, 01.02.1937. P 4



Fig. 3. Elza Grīvāne

Source: Latvijas Jaunatne, No 115,  
01.09.1935. P 39

Participant in the War of Independence, Marta Celmina mentioned that the society knew too little about the war experience of the Latvian woman – the nurse. When she worked in the Hospital of Latvian Red Cross, M. Celmina wrote in her memories that nurses were those who stood by the beds of the wounded, took care of them and saw and felt their sufferings, nurses closed the eyes of the dead, when they left this world for eternity. M. Celmina considered that not only the heroic soldiers should be

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<sup>30</sup> „Vēsture”, <http://www.rcmc.lv/par-mums/vesture/> accessed at 15.07.2015.

honoured, but also the women – mothers of Latvian heroes, who had brought up these heroes.<sup>31</sup>

Valuable for the research of M. Celmina's memories was the article of the nurse J. Kuske, dedicated to the memory of M. Celmina. The nurse J. Kuske in the article dedicated to the memory of M. Celmina in the magazine *Zeltene*, describes her colleague as a strong, brave and kind woman, who devoted all her efforts to the care for patients. The article contains the biography of M. Celmiņa and some of her ideas, for example that a medical institution cannot be only an institution where the physical health of patients is cured, but it should also be a place where mental health in general is cared for.<sup>32</sup>

M. Celmina explains also, why so little is known about the work of nurses. According to her it is because nurses are quiet and do not speak about their feelings, considering this to be a positive quality which is characteristic of nurses. But, at the same time she felt sorry that because of that the information on the tragic destinies of nations' heroines would be gone. M. Celmina points out that nurses solidified their relationships especially in war circumstances, taking care of the wounded and the sick during the World War I and the War of Independence. Later, it would be a special joy for nurses to meet ex-colleagues and patients they had taken care of.<sup>33</sup>

In one of articles of 1939 J. Kuske underlines the unity of „old warriors” – nurses of the War of Independence. She states that these nurses are utterly different – more united and more organised than those who did not participate in the war, because they have not experienced hard times, which was the main uniting aspect for them.<sup>34</sup> Still, quite soon after that there were military operations on the territory of Latvia and the „new” nurses could understand what their colleagues had been talking about.

Memories of nurses - participants in the War of Independence -, and their popularity in society in 1920-1930, confirms that this war was a hard psychological blow to everybody and it united people after the war as

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<sup>31</sup> 'Marta Celmiņa – mūsu ievērojamā sabiedriskā darbiniece.' *Zeltene* 21, (1930): 4.; 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Latvijas Kareivis* 44, (1930): 3.; Celimņa, Marta. 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Žēlsirdīgā māsa* (1937): 1-4.

<sup>32</sup> Justīne Kušķe, 'Martas Celmiņas piemiņai'. *Zeltene* 3, (1937): 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> 'Marta Celmiņš.' *Latviešu Strēlnieks* 16, (1937): 27.; Celimņa, Marta. 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Žēlsirdīgā māsa* (1937): 1-4.

<sup>34</sup> Justīne Kušķe, 'Pārkāpjot vienpadsmitā gada slieksni.' *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* 3-4, (1939): 51.

well- common memories and experienced hardships, all this has left their impact on the collective memory of the society of Latvia.

Beyond doubt, Marta Celmiņa is one of the most remarkable and publicly well-known nurse in Latvia. Quite recently, in 2013, the novel "Marta, mana Andromeda"<sup>35</sup> (*Marta, my Andromeda*) of the Latvian writer Inguna Bauere was published, and it was devoted to Marta Celmiņa and her selfless work as a nurse. The novel became very popular in Latvia, and the society compared it to a *monument* for women, work and love.<sup>36</sup> This work increased the interest of the society in the significance of nurses in the history of Latvia.

In this connection it is important to mention the novel "Dvēselu putenis" (*Snowstorm of souls*) by Aleksandrs Grins (Aleksandrs Grīns, 1895-1941)<sup>37</sup>. Although the novel is mostly about World War I, it is significant that the author has chosen real persons as his characters' prototypes. For example, there is a story of a courageous military physician holder of Lāčplēša Military Order Aleksandrs Mezciems (Aleksandrs Mežciems), and also about the cordial and helpful nurse Elza Nulle Sieciniece. This novel is based on real events and its author has participated in them. Nowadays the book has been included in the school programmes of literature course and thus makes its impact on the historical memory of nurses in the society of modern Latvia.

The memoirs of Elza Grivane, a nurse and later dentist and vice-chair of the Union of Nurses of the Latvian Red Cross, tell about the situation at a hospital of the Latvian Red Cross in Riga. She wrote about the depressing situation at the medical institution, where the injuries of the soldiers admitted to the hospital were severe and the entire medical staff was overloaded, because many patients had deadly injuries that had to be operated immediately. The nurses were not only physically overloaded, but also emotionally affected by the regular cases of death. For instance, E. Grivane has particularly impressively described the depressing feelings she had at the hospital when young and severely injured boys at the age of 13 and 14 were brought in. One of them died at once while on the stretcher, and many of the others had deadly injuries in the stomach after having

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<sup>35</sup> Inguna Bauere, *Marta, mana Andromeda* (Riga: Jumava apgāds, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Laura Celmiņa, Piemineklis sievietei, darbam un mīlestībai. Inguna Bauere „Marta, mana Andromenda”, <http://www.ubisunt.lu.lv/zinas/t/22275/> accessed at 08.05.2015.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksandrs Grīns, 'Dvēselu putenis'. Riga: Jumava (2012).

crossed the bridges.<sup>38</sup> M. Celmina in her memoirs speaks about very similar situations.<sup>39</sup>

Eba Krēmane, a nurse and the later editor of the magazine *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa*, who from 1919 was working at the War Hospital of Latvia, remembered the experience from the attack of the Army at Bermont. She tells about the emotional pressure at the medical institution – the hospital was full of groans of pain, and the visitors looking for their relatives missing in action against the Army of Bermont kept worsening the sorrow.<sup>40</sup> She was an experienced nurse, who during the World War I fell ill with typhoid while taking care of epidemic patients. After her recovery she did not abandon her work as a nurse but continued to take care of the patients.<sup>41</sup>

The nurses were brave and risked with their lives frequently to save the wounded. For instance, in October 1919, Helena Grauda, one of the nurses at Latgale Division Ambulance, got poisoned by military gasses. This woman had started working as a nurse at the age of 17 when she helped nursing the wounded and the ill of the Army of the Russian Empire. She, as well as other nurses, has also received several awards – the Commemorative Sign of the Latvian War of Independence, the Commemorative Medal of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the War of Independence of the Republic of Latvia, and the Honorary Sign of the 1<sup>st</sup> Degree of the Order of the Three Stars.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Elza Grīvāne, 'Atmiņas par Bermonta laiku.' *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* 4, (1934): 25–28.; 'Latviešu sievietes dzīve.' *Latviete* 6, (1935): 118–119.; Odiņa, Olga and Inga Millere. 'Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts (1918–1940). Māsu profesijas reorganizācija.' *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 54, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Celimņa, Marta. 'Brīvības cīņu atmiņas.' *Žēlsirdīgā māsa* (1937): 1–4.

<sup>40</sup> Eba Krēmane, '20. gadi Rīgas kara slimnīcā.' *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa* 3–4, (1939): 21.

<sup>41</sup> 'No Sievietes darbu un panākumu hronikas: 30 gadi slimnieku kopšanas darbā.' *Zeltene* 1, (1932): 19.

<sup>42</sup> 'Milvoku Hronika.' *Laiks* 53, (1969): 7.; 'Helēna Grauda mūžībā.' *Laiks* 18, (1990): 7.; 'Slimnīcas māsas stāsts.' *Daugavas Vanagu mēnešraksts* 5, (1988): 25.; 'Māsa Helēna jubilāre.' *Amerika Latvijā* 3, (1989): 16.



Fig. 4. Helēna Grauda (1899–1990)

Source: Brīvā Latvija: Apvienotā Londonas Avīze un Latvija, Nr. 20,  
28.05.1990. P 8

It was not the only such case, for example, the memoirs of the soldier Kristaps Zommers tells about some event in October 1919 in Riga, on the bridge over Daugava, where some nurse put temporary bandages on wounded soldiers in the battlefield and under the flying bullets, risking their lives. Kristaps Zommers remembered the scene with deep emotions and admiration.<sup>43</sup> In such manner the nurses provided also the psychological support and motivated the soldiers for the fight.

In the summer of 1920, the military governance took a decision under which all nurses of the Red Cross were considered mobilized in the Latvian Army, and from that moment they actually were in the active military service. In this period the medical employees-prisoners were released from the service, but the releasing of the nurses began in the autumn, because the military medical service of the Latvian Army transitioned to peace-time.<sup>44</sup> Nurses continued using their knowledge in civil medical institutions.

<sup>43</sup> Zommers, Kristaps. 'No Rīgas līdz Jelgavai 1919. g. (kādu atmiņu konspektīvs tēlojums)' in Mūsu dzīve. Rīga: 7. Siguldas pulka piemiņas Fonds, 16–18, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ēriks Jēkabsons, 'Sievietes un brunotie spēki Latvijas Neatkarības kara laikā 1918 – 1920.' Tēvijas Sargs 2 (2012): 30–31.; LSHA, 3413-1-2, 70-79.

The nurse Daina Upesleja in 1988 in the Latvian exile press published the article *The nurse of Kurzemes fortress, white hands for the wounded* ("Kurzemes cietokšņa māsa, Baltās rokas Ziemassvētku ievainotajiem"), which was dedicated to activities of nurses in World War II. D. Upesleja is also the author of the paper "*Along the overgrown paths. Latvian nurses in the last world war*" ("Pa aizaugušām takām. Latviešu žēlsirdīgās māsas pēdējā pasaules karā").<sup>45</sup> The author points out that the activities of nurses during this military conflict have been totally forgotten and there arises an impression that the heroes mostly suffered alone and had been left to the mercy of fate. This paper updates the subject of significance of nurses in the military conflicts of the 20th century.

## Conclusion

World War I changed the role of women, since due to the war it was necessary to replace the men labour force and parallel women slowly entered the military sphere as nurses, scouts, etc. The War of Independence in the history of Latvia is a topical issue nowadays, since during this war the Latvian state was established. Inter-disciplinary research is needed to find out what was the impact of the War of Independence on various sectors and historical memory of the citizens of Latvia, because it influenced the public opinion of nowadays as well.

This research is based mostly on the published memories and their analyses, since exactly this group of sources mostly influenced the society and, after World War II up to the present, they have sustained the historical memory on the activities of nurses. In the modern society of Latvia historical memory on nurses is formed by memories not only of the War of Independence, but also from World War I, since a lot of nurses participated in both military conflicts and worked in medical institutions of the Latvian military.

These nurses have made a particular influence on the memory of the society of the 1920s and 1930s, because the work and merits of the nurses were discussed in press and the wounded soldiers informed others about the nurses. The most important periodical which informed on the activities of the nurses was the magazine *Žēlsirdīgā Māsa*, because its editors and employees had participated in the War of Independence and shared

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<sup>45</sup> Daina Upesleja, 'Pa aizaugušām takām. Latviešu žēlsirdīgās māsas pēdējā pasaules karā.' Brīvā Latvija: Apvienotā Londonas Avīze un Latvija 108, (1988): 2.

their memories in the publication. Fiction has also left its impact, therefore the activities of nurses were often romanticised.

Latvians going into exile after the World War II continued telling about the nurses, and therefore the memories about them during the War of Independence are stronger in this part of society compared to the society in proper Latvia, where the memories of the nurses and the War of Independence have generally remained in the historical memory at the level of the late 1930s.

The contribution of the nurses in the War of Independence has been “forgotten” mostly because during the Soviet period, i.e., after the World War II and until restoration of independence of Latvia in 1990, the Soviet authority ruled in Latvia and there was no opportunity to carry out studies of the War of Independence due to political reasons.

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