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"Out Here at the Front": The World War I Letters of Nora Saltonstall

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Nora Saltonstall (1894-1919) was just twenty-three when she left behind her privileged, upper-class life in Boston for volunteer service in France during the Great War. Nora's mission began in 1917, and took her through waters prowled by German U-boats, to refugee, canteen, and dispensary work in Paris, and then, just before the decisive battles of 1918 got underway, to Mrs. Daly's autochir, a mobile surgical hospital on the Western Front, where she served as quartermaster, driver, auto mechanic, and nursing assistant. Now Nora's war correspondence - letters she wrote home to anxious family and friends from October 1917 to March 1919 - are published here for the first time. Written in a fresh, straightforward, and unpretentious voice, with an irreverent and charming sense of humor, Nora's engaging and richly detailed missives tell of securing food and medical supplies, assisting refugees, preparing wounded soldiers for surgery, and packing and moving the autochir under the threat of enemy fire. They also tell of the experiences of the many young men in Nora's circle, including her brother (and future U.S. senator) Leverett, who volunteered as ambulance drivers and soldiers, and of the momentous events during the last year of the war: the German spring offensive, the Allied counteroffensive, and the Armistice. Judith S. Graham's incisive introductory narrative and editorial notes, which include information drawn from prewar and postwar letters and diaries from 1911 to 1919, describe Nora's Boston Brahmin roots, educational background, social, cultural, and civic activities, and her participation in war relief work on the home front. She shows how Nora's social advantages and family history, as well as her adventurous spirit, steadfastness, and robust health, prepared her for meeting the challenges of service in the war zone. "Out Here at the Front" gives the reader an intimate view of a young woman's life in early twentieth-century Boston society and an Illuminating perspective on women workers behind the lines in wartime France.

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