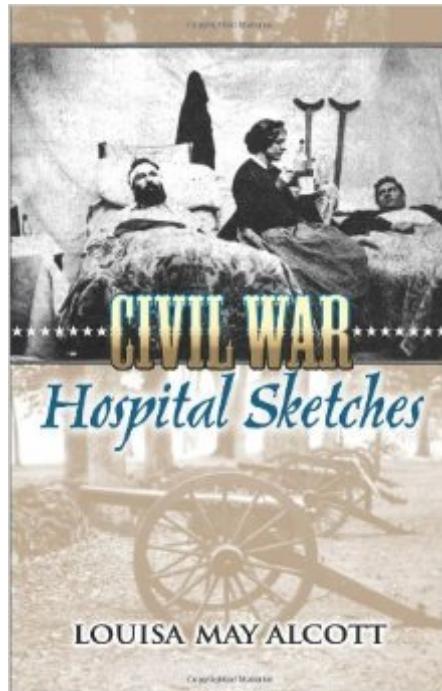


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# Civil War Hospital Sketches



## Synopsis

Before her wider fame as the author of *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott achieved recognition for her accounts of her work as a volunteer nurse in an army hospital. Written during the winter of 1862-63, her lively dispatches appeared in the newspaper *Commonwealth*, where they were eagerly read by soldiers' friends and families. Then, as now, these chronicles revealed the desperate realities of battlefield medicine as well as the tentative first steps of women in military service. Writing under a pseudonym, Alcott recounted the vicissitudes of her two-day journey from her home in Concord, Massachusetts, to Washington, D.C. A fiery baptism in the practice of nursing awaited her at Washington Hospital, where she arrived immediately after the slaughter of the Army of the Potomac at the battle of Fredericksburg. Alcott's rapidly paced prose graphically depicts the facts of hospital life, deftly balancing pathos with gentle humor. A vivid and truthful portrait of an often overlooked aspect of the Civil War, this book remains among the most illuminating reports of the era's medical practices as well as a moving testimonial to the war's human cost.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (17 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

As part of my Civil War reading, I am trying to mix it up between fiction (contemporary and historical), non-fiction, memoir, war and social issues. For my last book of 2012, I read Louisa May Alcott's collection of newspapers articles she wrote about her time as a Civil War nurse in Washington, D.C. in December 1862 and January 1863. LMA only served as a nurse for three weeks, but this brief service changed her life profoundly. Of this time, she said that she was rarely ill

before it and never truly well afterwards. She had contracted typhus at the hospital and was treated with a compound containing mercury, which wreaked havoc on her body and most probably shortened her life. On the other hand, her time as a nurse on her own in a city far from her Concord home during the war broadened her vision and deepened her perspective. In typical Victorian lady fashion, LMA assumes the guise of Tribulation Periwinkle who then provides a first-person account of LMA's own experiences--deciding to join the nursing core, traveling alone by train to Washington, living in a boarding house, working in a hospital (she tended the wounded from the battle of Fredericksburg, Dec. 11-15, 1862). The latter encompasses so much--the men themselves, some old but most heart-breakingly young--she held their hands as they died, read them letters from home, and wrote their final goodbyes, comforted their loved ones--she dressed wounds, assisted surgeons, fed and cleaned and comforted, and then finally fell ill herself. At first the persona of Trib grated a bit--basically Jo March on steroids.

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