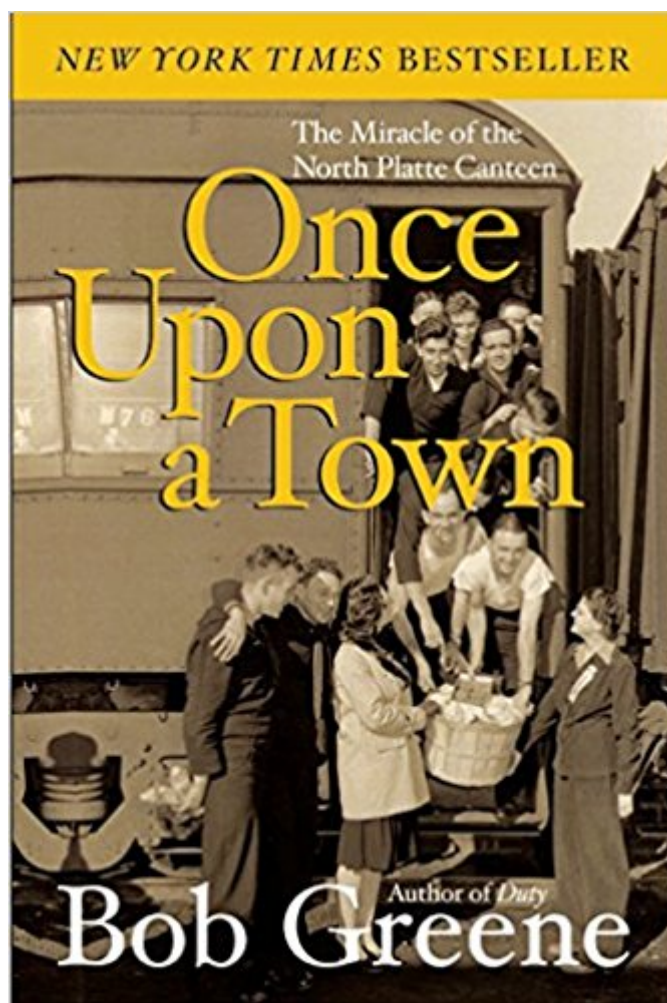


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Once Upon A Town: The Miracle Of The North Platte Canteen



Synopsis

In search of "the best America there ever was," bestselling author and award-winning journalist Bob Greene finds it in a small Nebraska town few people pass through today—a town where Greene discovers the echoes of the most touching love story imaginable: a love story between a country and its sons. During World War II, American soldiers from every city and walk of life rolled through North Platte, Nebraska, on troop trains en route to their ultimate destinations in Europe and the Pacific. The tiny town, wanting to offer the servicemen warmth and support, transformed its modest railroad depot into the North Platte Canteen. Every day of the year, every day of the war, the Canteen—staffed and funded entirely by local volunteers—was open from five a.m. until the last troop train of the day pulled away after midnight. Astonishingly, this remote plains community of only 12,000 people provided welcoming words, friendship, and baskets of food and treats to more than six million GIs by the time the war ended. In this poignant and heartwarming eyewitness history, based on interviews with North Platte residents and the soldiers who once passed through, Bob Greene tells a classic, lost-in-the-mists-of-time American story of a grateful country honoring its brave and dedicated sons.

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Customer Reviews

Millions of American soldiers, many of whom had never left their hometowns before, crossed the nation by rail during the years of World War II on their way to training camps and distant theaters of battle. In a little town in Nebraska, countless thousands of them met with extraordinary

hospitality--the "miracle" of veteran journalist Bob Greene's title. "The best America there ever was. Or at least, whatever might be left of it." So Greene writes of North Platte, now a quiet town along the interstate, its main street all but dead. It was a quiet town then, too, at the outbreak of the war, but still a hive of activity as its citizens gathered to provide, at their own expense, coffee, sandwiches, books, playing cards, and time to the scared young men who rolled through by the trainload, "telling them that their country cared about them." Greene's pages are full of the voices of those who were there, soldiers and townspeople alike, who took part in what amounted to small acts of heroism, given the shortages and rationing of the time. Greene, generous in his praise if rather disheartened by the modern world, against which he contrasts the past, turns in a remarkable account of the home front. It deserves the widest audience. ---Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Chicago Tribune columnist Greene (Duty) provides a moving, detailed remembrance of North Platte, Neb., and its residents' selfless contribution to the war effort during WWII. The town, located in the middle of the middle of the country, was situated on the rail line to western military bases. Ignited by a letter printed in a local newspaper, the town's residents organized a canteen for soldiers headed for the front lines, bringing food, cigarettes and magazines. Greene interviews locals, war veterans and former residents, offering a genuine but unsentimental glimpse of Americana. LaVon Fairley Kemper remembers one volunteer who learned that her son had been killed in combat, yet said, I can't help my son, but I can help someone else's son. For the soldiers, Greene writes, the canteen and the townspeople's welcome was indicative of the nation's sacrifice, a point driven home in several memorable anecdotes. The young soldiers saw the brief stop in North Platte as one last chance to be carefree, an opportunity to jitterbug and flirt with the fresh-faced teenaged girls for a safe, fleeting moment. Beyond the wartime recollections, Greene reflects on his travels in the region, skillfully chronicling its citizens, evolution and love for its past, using the intimate, engaging writing style familiar to readers of his syndicated column. Those intrigued with WWII lore will find this well-crafted book an entertaining snapshot of a simpler, kinder America. Greene's skill makes this homage not just a time capsule but a work that will strike a resonating chord in those seeking to remember the generosity and selflessness of many when faced with adversity and peril. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am grateful to have read this book. In 1925, my father Roger Allen Dungan was born in North

Plate. He moved to Denver w/ his single mother and older sister, joining the Navy upon graduating high school in 1943. Did he pass through North Platte as a sailor and experience the Canteen? Although in the later years of his life he spoke about growing up in North Platte-> he never mentioned knowing about the wartime Canteen. We buried dad this year (2017) in Fort Logan National Cemetery outside Denver; reading about the North Platte Canteen was a fitting addition to the obituary of a youngster growing up in 1920s North Platte.

Clearly written about the authors sojourn into the past to discover and explain the events that occurred in North Platte during WWII. North Platte, Nebraska, was a whistle stop along the Union Pacific railroad during WWII to obtain additional coal and water for the massive steam locomotives. These troop trains were carrying the men in the military from various bases throughout the US to their ports of embarkation during the war and bringing the veterans home after the war. You weren't normally allowed off the trains while in transit; however, for a very short 10 or 15 minutes they were allowed to disembark at the North Platte Canteen. What the service personnel experienced there was never forgotten by them or to those who served them to this very day. First hand interviews with aging participants brings this historic event to life. Anyone interested in what when in this country during WWII needs to read this book. The attitudes of the volunteers involved, their unselfish giving to others and their dedication to man the canteen could never be duplicated today. The only short coming is there are no photographs of this historical event to highlight the story. However, if there is only one book you must read about the home front during WWII, this is it!

Although my father fought in WWII, he spoke very little about his experiences. So it was wonderful to learn about a part of that era that touched so many people's lives. I really liked the effort the author made to find service folks who had experienced the warm generosity of this small Nebraska town and the volunteers who were associated with setting up and running the canteen. It's an easy read, often funny, always poignant, and informative, that stays with you long after you're finished. I only wish that the railroad company had the wits to preserve the station. They still have a huge freight yard operation in North Platte so they could have if they wanted to. I'm sure the station would be a strong candidate to be named a National Historic Site. Opportunity missed.

What an amazing bit of Americana! This story should be included in all accounts of America's participation in World War II. It demonstrates the patriotism and love of Americans in that era - families sharing their food rations and their time to show their appreciation of America's soldiers and

sailors. Who would believe that soldiers on battlefields in Italy and the Pacific would meet and reminisce with others about the sandwiches and pie served to them at a ten-minute train stop in mid-Nebraska? And I loved the fact that they could take their porcelain coffee mugs with them on the train and turn them in at the next station to be returned to North Platte. You will finish reading this book with a warm glow in your heart.

I heard about this town several years ago, I forget where. Then I heard about this book and decided I needed to read it. so I ordered it and read it. I did not rush through the book, but took my time reading to enjoy it. Here it is. On one hot midwestern July day, Journalist and Author, Bob Greene, rented a car and drove across Nebraska to find this little out of the way town. He checked into a motel, had meals at restaurants, walked around the town to get the feel of North Platte. His main reason was to meet and interview people who were volunteers at the canteen during World War II. Several thousand people volunteered, six million troops passed through. All were made welcome, made to feel special. These were young men, mostly in their late teens, now in their seventies and eighties. A few were young ladies. Mr. Greene wanted to talk to the town volunteers during that period., So many are now gone. Volunteers are in their sixties, seventies, eighties. The young men, going to war were for the most part, in their late teens. Many had never been so far from home. Mr. Greene went to different parts of the country to talk to these old men. Many had tears in their eyes when they talked of the goodness of these midwesterners, how these people made them feel at home. Many of the young men said that the ladies and girls reminded them of their mothers, sisters, cousins. Too many of these young military men would never go home again. North Platte, at one time, was the hub of passenger trains in that part of western Nebraska. During the Second World War, troop trains went through. Now there is only a railroad yard, biggest in the world, freight trains only. The station which contained the canteen has been torn down. Only a memory. All this began when a troop train filled with military, supposedly Nebraska troops, stopped at North Platte. However, these were Kansas troops. The canteen was filled with tables full of food. Then the canteen began to honor troops from all over the United States. Citizens from neighboring towns were recruited to help, churches volunteered their parishoners. So much was rationed, gas, food, so much of everything. Cars would drive to North Platte from as much as one hundred miles, filled with produce, sandwiches, baked goods in spite of rationing. One lady, making angel food cake, eggs were somewhat scarce, found an outlet, turkey eggs, larger, made more. When the troops arrived, they were met with baskets of sandwiches, fruit, candy, magazines were provided. Chicken, baked goods, cookies, cupcakes of all kinds, hot coffee, cold milk, soda were provided. There was a piano

where whoever could play played dance music, inviting those who liked to dance could. Young girls made popcorn balls, young girls names and addresses were placed in the balls in case any of the young men wanted pen pals. Mr. Greene interviewed two sisters, now widows, who wrote to young soldiers. The young men had never met the sisters, but went to North Platte to meet who they were writing to. Marriage. The young troops told their buddies about the wonderful people. All looked forward to coming to North Platte and looked forward to returning. Counters and tables filled with food for the short time, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes these lonesome young boys were in town. Mothers and daughters came together. Mothers brought younger children. All were put to work. One young girl, now a much older woman watched the news about fighting overseas and worried about all the young men she had met. A wonderful time, but in a way very sad. This book was chosen by One Book, One Nebraska as the book of 2014.

An amazing story of dedicated ladies making sure the troops had at least one memorable stop along their way to war. The effort they maintained to greet every train, every day, for four years is an incredible story of devotion and honor for our servicemen. A must read of how life was in a small town in the middle of the country.

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