



Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen

Bob Greene

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen

Bob Greene

Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen Bob Greene

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.

Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen Details

Date : Published May 6th 2003 by William Morrow Paperbacks (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780060081973

Author : Bob Greene

Format : Paperback 264 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, War, World War II, History

 [Download Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Cante ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Can ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen Bob Greene

From Reader Review Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen for online ebook

Jason Kurtz says

"Once Upon a Town" is the true story of the North Platte Canteen. What is that? Well, on December 25, 1941, just 18 days after Pearl Harbor, the women of North Platte realized that many troop trains were stopping through their Nebraska town crossing over to the Pacific side of the U.S. They decided to meet the servicemen on the trains for Christmas, because it was supposed to be Nebraska boys. It turned out to be Kansas servicemen, but it didn't matter, they gave them all of their Christmas gifts and food anyway. They promptly decided that it was their responsibility to meet EVERY train at the depot, and for the next five years, at the rate of about 10-15 trains a day, they met and fed every serviceman that traveled through North Platte. Every one. Millions of soldiers. Many remember their brief 10-minute stop in North Platte to this day, and Bob Greene's book tells their story, and the story of those women who remember working in the Canteen.

This book touched me in so many ways, that I am still wondering how Bob Greene managed to write such a wonderful book. This isn't just a story about World War II. It's a story about America, and what it was like on the home front for so many American women, and frankly, what it means to be American in the first place.

In our muddy situation in Iraq, it was a breath of fresh air to listen to a different generation talk about the genuine responsibility they felt to the world, because they could do something to stop Hitler, and the Japanese advance, and they felt it was their obligation to do it. It is not enough in our day and age to say, "This is wrong, and we can stop it." Things get more complex, and it was wonderful to visit a time, even for a short while, when things were much more simple.

The servicemen would cry when they talked about the Canteen, and what it meant to them. That short 10 minute period in their lives could bring tears to their eyes sixty years later. It brought plenty to mine too. The pure goodness and graciousness of the people of the North Platte area, and the sacrifices they made to make sure that those servicemen knew they were appreciated, and that they went to war knowing what they were fighting for, made an impact on the soldiers that gave them courage in times of doubt. One man commented that when they were sitting in foxholes in the South Pacific, they would talk about the delicious food and warm feelings they had for North Platte. It sustained them in their darkest hours. I was so proud to be an American, and a Mid-Western American at that, for the past few weeks, while reading this book. It is not often, in our busy lives, that one gets a chance to stop and think about patriotism, this book gave me the opportunity, and I relished every minute.

Becky Loader says

You have to admire a town in Nebraska whose townfolk met every troupe train that went through it during WWII. The people were planning to meet the train with their own boys on it, but when that wasn't the case, they went ahead and provided the troupes with treats, coffee, and companionship. That started the tradition of meeting every train because they were ALL their boys.

Bob Greene is a newspaper reporter, and he has a very irritating style of writing. I wanted him to spend more time on the people and their recollections of the Canteen (those parts of the book are the best), but he kept insinuating himself into the story. Irritating.

I wish I could find another book on this subject.

Ann says

Although I didn't find this book particularly well written, it is a book I would suggest to every friend. I think that it is a book that reminds the reader who we - many of the world's citizenry - once were. It is a story of sacrifice, of patriotism, of loving kindness. It is also a story of the tremendous difference individuals can make in the life/lives of others. I have already recommended the book and have begun the process of sharing my copy with as many friends as I am able.

Kimber says

This is my new favorite book. It makes me want to do more for those around me and make my community what this one was during the war years. It is a delightful read. I really needed a book like this as the world around me seems to abound in conflict. What would it be like if we all just cared about each other?

Ron says

It was a monumental act of generosity that kept the North Platte Canteen in operation from 1941 to 1945, offering food, drink, and gratitude to the multitude of troop trains carrying young servicemen through Nebraska during WWII. Greene's book is a tribute to those who made it possible - a scrapbook of memories recalled by men and women who are now in their 70s, 80s and older.

Through scores of interviews, he is able to capture again the excitement, the emotions, and the utter innocence of that place and time. Just 10-20 minutes - as men burst from the trains, were welcomed with home cooking and smiles, and then dashed back onboard again - are remembered 60 years later by men who have never forgotten and often dissolve into tears as they try to explain what it meant to them, no more than boys then, far from home and family.

The book is written in a breezy Sunday supplement style, and social historians may desire a bit more objectivity. Oddly, Greene never explains how he located all the former servicemen he interviewed. And finally, it's not all feel good. Greene notes how time has changed North Platte, symbolized in the deserted downtown and the absent train depot, torn down long ago. "Dust in the wind," he muses sadly at the end. But like an old photograph, there is his book to preserve the memory that "once upon a town" it all really did happen.

Bonnie says

A feel-good read that a friend in Belgium sent me after her bookclub read it. Why didn't we know about it here??? The book centers around the small town of North Platte, Iowa, that accomplished an extraordinary feat. The people of this area met every troop train with food and drinks for the entire 6+ years of the WWII. Families saved their sugar rations so they could bake cakes for the soldiers, farmers wives saved their eggs and then took 10-12 dozen boiled eggs to share, beef was donated, cooked, ground up with pickles and mayonnaise and used as a spread for sandwiches. Did you know that there were troop trains that passed through that town every 20 minutes for 6+ years that carried every soldier that crossed the USA going to war and then coming home from war? My 92 year old uncle, Don Brimhall, was one of those soldiers. I sent the book for my aunt to read to him and even though his memory is dimming, he did recognize the story and nodded his head at the unbelievable kindnesses that are recounted in the book. The author went to the town and spent 4 months living in the area collecting remembrances of those who were still alive to recount this very special part of WWII history.

Melissa says

This is an amazing true-life account about one Mid Western town and its citizen's efforts to support military troops during the second world war. The account is largely based on memories recalled during personal interviews and by historical newspaper articles.

I found this book to be heartbreaking and and the story was truly touching. The writing did seem to wander a bit, but the author does a good job of weaving together multiple eyewitness accounts with other elements of the story.

While the main mission of the book is to provide a written history about a specific place and event, the author also tries to use the example of the North Platte Canteen to draw a parallel to today's time and place. He seems to find it ironic, and perhaps a bit sad, that nothing like the North Platte Canteen would ever exist today.

In full disclosure I must admit that I am quite familiar with North Platte, although I do not live there. I found it quite easy to visualize the landmarks described in the book.

Kim says

3.5 stars. This was a great true story of the North Platte Canteen.

Julie says

I picked up this book because the place name North Platte seemed familiar to me. Finally, it dawned that we had stayed there overnight on our epic road trip from Crystal Lake, Illinois to San Francisco, California, and back in 2011. We traveled in a loop going through a total of twelve States. According to my blog, we had visited Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska earlier that day in a sweltering 96°F! Anyway, I digress.

I truly thought this would be an interesting and heartwarming read about the warmth and generosity of human kindness, however, I didn't enjoy the author's style of writing. Instead of becoming immersed in the tale, I was always aware of the author's presence and his point of view.

In addition, it appeared all together too wordy, and reminded me of the 'busy work' we sometimes did at school that kept us 'busy' (and quiet!), and filled up the hours, but didn't really further our learning. It felt over-padded with extraneous information which distracted me from the central story. Sadly, I conclude, that the story itself is a great one, but it gets lost in this particular telling.

Melyni says

Amazing! This was something I was completely clueless of. I had no idea what soldiers went through in the US before being shipped off to Europe, the Pacific or else where during WW2.

I'm astounded by the sacrifice this community in Nebraska gave. It was a time when Americans were truly proud of their country and showed it through respect by giving their time resources and service to others.

And in a time with rationing and all together a lot less. Some farm houses didn't even have electricity yet.

Reading about the love these people showed and gave to "America's sons", is something I can't fathom in today's society. I found myself tearing up and even crying at times in several parts of this book.

It's an impressive patriotic part of US history.

A MUST read!

It would be fun to see it turned into a mini series movie or something like that.

Kristine says

What a heart warming book this is! This is the story of North Platte, Nebraska during World War II. Troop trains enroute to their ultimate destinations in Europe and the Pacific pass through this small community daily. Every day of the year, every day of the war, the people who live there ban together to form the North Platte Canteen where homemade food, entertainment, and recognition is given to soldiers during their brief stop. Staffed and funded entirely by volunteers, by the end of the war, these people have served over 6 million soldiers and have done so by donating their own rationed food supplies and by manning the Canteen from 5:00 A.M. to midnight for over four years, never missing a day.

This is written by Bob Greene, who is a reporter, and the book is written in the style of a reporter. It is full of letters, interviews, pictures, stories, and historical facts. As I read the book, I was very moved by the kindness and sacrifice of these people. Reading this book made me want to be a better person. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Melissa says

Page 105, epilogue

Julia says

America in all her glory....when people truly cared for each other.

Linda Hart says

The North Platte Canteen: who knew it ever existed? This is nice feel-good nonfiction about a remarkable group of ladies who brought their small community together for the servicemen in WWII. Somewhat repetitious but a true account that is uplifting and optimistic. Journalist Bob Greene tells an interesting story showing the extraordinary patriotism of the times. Favorite tongue-in-cheek quote: "The interstates were meant to be the national bypass-the way to avoid taking things slow, to avoid looking the old America in the eye. They were a federally funded averted glance."

Ann says

I wanted to buy this book when it first came out, but didn't. Glad I didn't pay \$22 for it. I found a copy at a book sale at the Cooperstown Library for 50 cents.

The book is about a really fantastic community effort that took place in WWII - a small town in Nebraska that decided to meet troop trains that stopped in its town for only ten minutes each. So, they set up the North Platte, Nebraska, "Canteen."

Along with a dozen other towns, some of them one hundred miles away, volunteers provided sandwiches, fried chicken, homemade cakes, hard boiled eggs, cookies, music, cards and letters, and words of encouragement to these mostly young kids who were on their way to war. They served 6 million soldiers over a five year period, providing them with the only bright spot in their trips.

What a tremendous story, right? However, there are two huge flaws in this book that made it a major disappointment to me. The first is that Bob Greene is more interested in blathering on and on with his own shallow observations about the character of North Platte (and by extension, small town America) and drawing rudimentary conclusions, using a maudlin, cloying, overly dramatic style, and repeating the same conclusions over and over again.

The second flaw is that he's lazy. The actual interviews, newspaper story quotes, and description of the Canteen organization, the background about WWII rationing, and the entire context of the Canteen takes up about only about one-fourth of the book and his "observations" take up the rest. I skimmed most of the book, concentrating on the actual Canteen content, and finished it in about an hour.

What makes me sad about this is that there will probably not be another book about the Canteen again, and the subject deserves far more serious investigation and true scholarship/reporting than Greene gave it. He just wasn't up to the task. To be honest, I felt as though he wrote this book to cash in on the WWII veterans who are quickly disappearing - that's how bad I thought it was.

Recommendation: try to find a used copy for 50 cents and skim it.

