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MATRON E.S. DAVIDSON.

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[959]

Egypt  
France  
Italy

Allen Davidson

110.  
34

CCS. Staff members from  
6 to 20 for Messines push.  
During the first 18 hours  
fighting at Messines 2800  
patients were admitted, and  
4 trains with 500 patients  
in each went out in 24 hours.  
Heavy bombing.

To 38<sup>th</sup> British Station, Hosp.  
Calais. R.A.M.C. Officers  
and Sisters.

To Italy in charge 60

English V.A.D. + and Sisters  
at Simon Hospital Corso Torino  
R.A.M.C. Medical Officers  
35 Amst. Sisters + 5 English  
V.A.D.

British adj. wrote that  
the sister work was  
absolutely excellent.

The Official War Historian of the Commonwealth Government (Dr. C. E. W. Bean), after his study of the collection of private war records preserved in the Australian War Memorial Library, wrote:—

"The private diaries in this collection furnish some of its most valuable historical records, but, like all private memoirs which were not compiled with any historical purpose, they should not be regarded as first-hand evidence except where it is certain that they are so. The diarist is almost always sincere in his desire to record accurately, but he is subject to no obligation or inducement to indicate whether he is recording his own observations or incidents told him by friends or heard at third or fourth hand at the mess-table. Thus, in some of the diaries in this collection, scenes described with vivid detail, and without any warning that they are told at second or third hand, have been found to be completely inaccurate in important details. A certain number also have been written up or revised long after the events, though doubtless usually from notes made at the time. In most cases the student must rely on his experience and on internal evidence to guide him in judging what is and what is not likely to be historically accurate."



TELEPHONE  
CENTRAL 4780.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS  
TO "THE SECRETARY."

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE.

MELBOURNE. 9th July 1926

No. ....

Dear Bean.,

The right woman is Matron G.E.Davis., R.R.C. of  
Private Hospital, 209, Dandenong Road, Windsor, <sup>Melbourne</sup> Victoria.  
who was in charge of all the nurses in India for the three  
years. She went out first with No.3.A.G.H. to Lemnos.  
She has R.R.C.1st Class; Kaiser i hind 1st Class and was  
Mentioned in despatches. Australian nurses were scattered  
over India - ran a Hospital at Bushire in Persia : and  
vessels to Mespotamia ,Persian Gulf but had no hospital there.  
The hospital at Bushire was inspected by Matron Davis who  
can give all particulars. She reckons she has not the  
pen of a ready writer and does not know a nurse who has  
but could supply all material and probably put whoever  
was responsible for writing on to original material.  
There will probably be letters published in Nursing Journals,  
and others available etc. and photos. I have told her you  
would probably be communicating with her.

Herewith the material we have,

Yours sincerely,

*C.S. Butler*

P.S.I hope you received Allens Book safely ?.

VIII



Diaries - Personal

Interview with ofation E. S. Davidson 2/4/19 Her experiences  
since leaving Australia

14/15



INTERVIEW WITH MATRON DAVIDSON, A.A.N.S.

Departure from Australia in 1914 on "Shropshire".

Work in Egypt at N.Z. Hospital Abbasia.

Work at Mena House and Mezireh Palace Hospitals during Gallipoli campaign.

Feb. to June 1916. Work at Sporting Club and Anzac Hostel Hospitals.

Arrival in England. Posted to Harefield and then to A.I.F. H.Q. till Feb. 1917.

Transferred to France to 2nd A.G.H. and then a C.C.S. Wounded admit during Messines push. Shelled from Lille.

July 1917. Transferred to 38th (British) Stationary Hospital at Calais. Conditions in mud. Raids by German planes.

Moved to Italian front. Opening up a hospital in Genoa. Smooth working - all Tommies taken in. After armistice 250 Austrians admitted. Good relations between nurses, patients and orderlies. Good work of V.A.D's.

Return to England Jan. 1919.



*2nd*

INTERVIEW WITH MATEON E. DAVIDSON ON 4.4.19.

*2nd*  
*6009/1*  
*6399/1*

I left Melbourne with the 1st Contingent on October 20th 1914 on the troopship "SHROPSHIRE" and landed in Egypt on December 5th 1914 and proceeded with it to Cairo and was detailed for duty at the New Zealand Hospital at Abbassia. Miss Conyers, the present Matron in Chief and Miss Finly were on the troopship "Shropshire". In this hospital, the O.C. was an R.A.M.C. with the Egyptian Army and the Matron was a Q.A. regular and we had New Zealand patients with a few New Zealand orderlies and a few 'gypos'. In four days time we were reinforced with 4 Queensland nurses. We were billeted at the Heliopolis House Hotel, a good 2 1/2 miles away and rode on a tram to and from the hospital. I had charge of the Acute Pneumonia ward and during the 4 1/2 months I was there, I had something like 60 cases of Pneumonia, and until the "Kyarra" came and we had reinforcements, I was alone in this ward with only orderlies.

At the end of March, I was transferred to Mena House (No. 2 A.G.H.) and was at this hospital when the first wounded arrived from Gallipoli (May 1915). At the end of May, Mena House closed and I went with the unit to Gezireh Palace. On the 6th August I returned to Mena as acting Matron with seven Sisters. It was then a convalescent depot but was increased to a General Hospital of 600 beds.

On 1st February 1916 I was transferred to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital (Sporting Club) Heliopolis, a large hospital of 500 beds and we had mostly semi-convalescents. We had one big dressing room, which, when in full working order, put through something like 1,000 dressings per day. The tennis-courts at this hospital were roofed over and screened round and when the number of beds in the hospital were increased, at the time of evacuation of Gallipoli, 500 beds were put into each Pavilion (2) and it was just one sea of beds. The hospital accommodation was then brought up to 1,700 but fortunately was not needed.

About the middle of March, I and my nursing staff were moved out of No. 3 Auxiliary Hospital and No. 2 A.G.H. took position temporarily. I then was sent to the Anzac Hotel in Cairo to see about equipping the beds and arranging for the bed linen and then arranged and put up 500 beds. About the middle of April I returned as Matron to the Sporting Club and found there an entirely new staff of nurses and stayed there until June 24th, when the Sporting Club was closed and on July 7th I and 45 nurses left Egypt for England. We were billeted at Herefield for a while and then I was posted as Secretary to the Matron-in-Chief in London and stayed with her until the middle of February 1917, when I was transferred to No. 2 A.G.H. again, this time in France. I stayed about 10 days and then went to a Casualty Clearing Station. This C.C.S. was composed of huts and tents and was the nearest C.C.S. to the firing line. The staff consisted of 6 nurses and there I took charge of a ward (huts) as well as administrative duties. The administrative duties were very slight as I only had these 6 nurses to take charge of. At the latter end of May, my staff was increased to 20 and preparations generally were made for the Messines push. During the first 18 hours that wounded were received from the Messines push, 2,800 were admitted to the hospital, and 4 trains with 500 patients on each went out in 24 hours. While I was at the C.C.S., we were constantly shelled and bombed. Once a shell came and exploded near



explode until it had embedded itself in the ground. We were being shelled from Lille and the cause of our getting these shells was, that an observation balloon was on top of us and the boches shelled this and the shells dropped on us, and these shells came uncomfortably close. One piece of shell weighing 58 lbs. came down on the Sisters' Quarters one evening.

On the 14th July, I was transferred to the 36th British Stationary Hospital at Calais where the medical personnel were B.A.M.C. except the Sisters, who were Australians. When I arrived, the camp was under canvas and the huts for the patients and the Sisters' quarters were being built. My staff was increased daily by twos and threes until it reached its full number, 35. While we were still under canvas, we had the honour of entertaining the Matron-in-Chief A.I.F. and the Matron-in-Chief B.E.F. Fortunately for them they came the night they did, as two nights after we were blown out. At one o'clock in the morning the first tent came down and then by morning 3 or 4 others were down and the remainder were in such a state that they could not be used. The Sisters' huts were the first huts to be completed at the hospital, the sisters always being considered next to the patients, patients first, nursing sisters next, and that was the general thing throughout the whole time I was with the 36th Stationary Hospital. Although the Sisters' huts were not quite completed, the O.C. instructed that we should move into them, which we did, going right through the mud which frequently came over the top of our gum boots. With care the patients' marquees were kept over them. When the moon began to get bright, the boche would come over every night and we had as many as ten nights in succession. At first we had no protection at all and the Sisters would make dug-outs for themselves by getting under their beds and putting all their trunks on top, but afterwards beautiful dug-outs were built. Just as they were completed, the unit was ordered to be ready to move in 48 hours. Evidently the luck was on our side, because very shortly after we left a bomb fell almost on the Sisters' dug-out and blew one end of it out. The whole unit was ready to move and as it was undecided where we were to go we were given leave from 4th November to 15th November 1917 and then were called suddenly back to France to proceed to Italy and we went down on a hospital train which took 60 English V.A.D.'s. and Sisters, and I being the only Matron was put in charge of the lot. The only casualty that occurred on the journey was the loss of one V.A.D. She disappeared. By a strange coincidence her name was 'Bolter'. As the staff on the train down received no instructions until 4 o'clock and we were to board the train at 6, they had made no preparations at all. After reporting at Boulogne from England a mistake was made as regards myself and the Matron-in-Chief's orders were that I should proceed by car to Abbeville, instead of which, I was sent by car to Calais and then had to report on the 11.6 train back to Abbeville. The trip on the train to Italy was interesting and we arrived at Genoa on Monday at 8 o'clock and were taken to the hospital, Corso Torino. The hospital was a large boys school and its owner was Christopholo Colombo. We were all accommodated in this hospital, the nurses, the personnel of the hospital, about 50 R.E.'s. who were doing repairs and alterations. At night it was almost impossible to walk about as the men were sleeping along the corridors. The day after we arrived we received our first equipment belonging to the Italian Medical Services, our own equipment had not arrived. The patients were English tommies

Here again the Sisters were the first to be considered. They were the first people to be billeted. We stayed in one of the principal streets, we had our own kitchen and mess rooms and our own English servants - it was a mile and a quarter from the hospital and transport was provided, and with few exceptions, the Sisters never had to walk to and from the hospital. It was the Imperial Hotel which was beautifully furnished, and a portion of it had been commandeered by the Government. We finally got settled at the hospital, after we had got the Italian equipment out and our own in, which was quite a work of art. We got up 520 beds and after we had been there three months, we really thought we had the best hospital in Genoa, under the management of our excellent C.C., who was an R.A.M.C. regular of 20 years services and the whole thing went just like clockwork. On two occasions I was asked to send Australian Nurses to the forward B.C.C.S.'s. and whilst there one was awarded the A.R.F.C. All the patients were English boys, either wounded or sick, sometimes we were busy, sometimes not. We had a very bad time of the Influenza in January and again towards the end of the year, in November. After the Armistice was signed, we took in about 250 Austrians. They were very good boys and gave us no trouble. As one marked thing, practically the whole time we were at Genoa, a year and 2 months, not once did I have a complaint from the Sisters about the patients and only on one or two occasions was there any trouble between the Sisters and the Orderlies. The whole of the personnel tried to do their very best to help each other. The staff in their spare time had a great deal to interest them in the way of climbing mountains, walks, visiting the various places of interest around the town, which is a wonderful place. After the Armistice was signed, leave was given for the Sisters who wished to visit Rome and all the principal towns of Italy, about 25 availed themselves of this great privilege. Apart from the 35 Australian Sisters, I had 5 English V.A.D.'s. sent by Miss McCarthy and I have nothing but good to say of them. About a fortnight after the Armistice was signed, when the work was lessening, the Sisters gave the Officers a dinner and then the Officers gave the Sisters a dinner. They were both most enjoyable. On the 23rd December, our last patients were sent away and we felt as if we were a ship without a rudder. They were most excellent patients, so appreciative of everything that was done for them and they thought there was no one like the Australian Sisters. When the boys passed from the Convalescent Camp, past the hospital, they always used to cheer us. On the 3rd January 1919, the D.M.S. and A.D.M.S. Italy gave a large dance to all the nurses in the No. 11 General Hospital, which was then empty, there were about 500 guests present. On the 15th January, the first half of the unit left Genoa and on the 16th the second half left and we joined at Le Havre and crossed the channel together. I was sent straight from Waterloo Station to Southall as Matron and my staff to No. 3 A.A.H., Dartford. No. 2 A.A.H. Southall is a hospital for Australian soldiers, but a great number have now been sent home and the others expect to go shortly.

The Sisters' work was absolutely excellent at all times. As our Adjutant writing to me after we had left said, he thought he knew a lot about Nurses but he never found a staff so excellent at work and jovial at play as the Australian Sisters at 38th Stationary.

C.P.  
E5094

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On 1st February 1916 I was transferred to the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital (Sporting Club) Heliopolis, a large hospital of 500 beds and we had mostly semi-convalescents. We had one big dressing room, which, when in full working order, put through something like 1,000 dressings per day. The tennis-courts at this hospital were roofed over and screened round and when the number of beds in the hospital were increased, at the time of evacuation of Gallipoli, 500 beds were put into each Pavilion (2) and it was just one sea of beds. The hospital accommodation was then brought up to 1,700 but fortunately was not needed.

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On the 14th July, I was transferred to the 38th British Stationary Hospital at Calais where the medical personnel were R.A.M.C., except the Sisters, who were Australians. When I arrived, the camp was under canvas and the huts for the patients and the Sisters' quarters were being built. My staff was increased daily by twos and threes until it reached its full number, 35. While we were still under canvas, we had the honour of entertaining the Matron-in-Chief A.I.F. and the Matron-in-Chief B.E.F. Fortunately for them they came the night they did, as two nights after we were blown out. At one o'clock in the morning the first tent came down and then by morning 3 or 4 others were down and the remainder were in such a state that they could not be used. The Sisters' huts were the first huts to be completed at the hospital, the sisters always being considered next to the patients, patients first, nursing sisters next, and that was the general thing throughout the whole time I was with the 38th Stationary Hospital. Although the Sisters' huts were not quite completed, the O.C. instructed that we should move into them, which we did, going right through the mud which frequently came over the top of our gum boots. With care the patients' marquees were kept over them. When the moon began to get bright, the boches would come over every night and we had as many as ten nights in succession. At first we had no protection at all and the Sisters would make dug-outs for themselves by getting under their beds and putting all their trunks on top, but afterwards beautiful dug-outs were built. Just as they were completed, the unit was ordered to be ready to move in 48 hours. Evidently the luck was on our side, because very shortly after we left a bomb fell almost on the Sisters' dug-out and blew one end of it out. The whole unit was ready to move and as it was undecided where we were to go we were given leave from 4th November to 15th November 1917 and then were called suddenly back to France to proceed to Italy and we went down on a hospital train which took 60 English V.A.D.'s. and Sisters, and I being the only Matron was put in charge of the lot. The only casualty that occurred on the journey was the loss of one V.A.D. She disappeared. By a strange coincidence her name was 'Bolter'. As the staff on the train down received no instructions until 4 o'clock and we were to board the train at 6, they had made no preparations at all. After reporting at Boulogne from England a mistake was made as regards myself and the Matron-in-Chief's orders were that I should proceed by car to Abbeville, instead of which, I was sent by car to Calais and then had to report on the 11.6 train back to Abbeville. The trip on the train to Italy was interesting and we arrived at Genoa on Monday at 8 o'clock and were taken to the hospital, Corso Torino. The hospital was a large boys school and its owner was Christopholo Colombo. We were all accommodated in this hospital, the nurses, the personnel of the hospital, about 50 R.E.'s. who were doing repairs and alterations. At night it was almost impossible to walk about as the men were sleeping along the corridors. The day after we arrived we received our first equipment belonging to the Italian Medical Services, our own equipment had not arrived. The patients were English tommies



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Spain before 34 20

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explode until it had embedded itself in the ground. We were being shelled from Lille and the cause of our getting these shells was, that an observation balloon was on top of us and the boches shelled this and the shells dropped on us, and these shells came uncomfortably close. One piece of shell weighing 58 lbs. came down on the Sisters' Quarters one evening.

On the 14th July, I was transferred to the 38th British Stationary Hospital at Calais where the medical personnel were R.A.M.C., except the Sisters, who were Australians. When I arrived, the camp was under canvas and the huts for the patients and the Sisters' quarters were being built. My staff was increased daily by twos and threes until it reached its full number, 35. While we were still under canvas, we had the honour of entertaining the Matron-in-Chief A.I.F. and the Matron-in-Chief B.E.F. Fortunately for them they came the night they did, as two nights after we were blown out. At one o'clock in the morning the first tent came down and then by morning 3 or 4 others were down and the remainder were in such a state that they could not be used. The Sisters' huts were the first huts to be completed at the hospital, the sisters always being considered next to the patients, patients first, nursing sisters next, and that was the general thing throughout the whole time I was with the 38th Stationary Hospital. Although the Sisters' huts were not quite completed, the C.O. instructed that we should move into them, which we did, going right through the mud which frequently came over the top of our gum boots. With care the patients' marquees were kept over them. When the moon began to get bright, the boche would come over every night and we had as many as ten nights in succession. At first we had no protection at all and the Sisters would make dug-outs for themselves by getting under their beds and putting all their trunks on top, but afterwards beautiful dug-outs were built. Just as they were completed, the unit was ordered to be ready to move in 48 hours. Evidently the luck was on our side, because very shortly after we left a bomb fell almost on the Sisters' dug-out and blew one end of it out. The whole unit was ready to move and as it was undecided where we were to go we were given leave from 4th November to 15th November 1917 and then were called suddenly back to France to proceed to Italy and we went down on a hospital train which took 60 English V.A.D's. and Sisters, and I being the only Matron was put in charge of the lot. The only casualty that occurred on the journey was the loss of one V.A.D. She disappeared. By a strange coincidence her name was 'Bolter'. As the staff on the train down received no instructions until 4 o'clock and we were to board the train at 6, they had made no preparations at all. After reporting at Boulogne from England a mistake was made as regards myself and the Matron-in-Chief's orders were that I should proceed by car to Abbeville, instead of which, I was sent by car to Calais and then had to report on the 11.6 train back to Abbeville. The trip on the train to Italy was interesting and we arrived at Genoa on Monday at 8 o'clock and were taken to the hospital, Corso Torino. The hospital was a large boys school and its owner was Christopholo Colombo. We were all accommodated in this hospital, the nurses, the personnel of the hospital, about 50 R.E.'s. who were doing repairs and alterations. At night it was almost impossible to walk about as the men were sleeping along the corridors. The day after we arrived we received our first equipment belonging to the Italian Medical Services, our own equipment had not arrived. The patients were English tommies



Here again the Sisters were the first to be considered. They were the first people to be billeted. We stayed in one of the principal streets, we had our own kitchen and mess rooms and our own English servants - it was a mile and a quarter from the hospital and transport was provided, and with few exceptions, the Sisters never had to walk to and from the hospital. It was the Imperial Hotel which was beautifully furnished, and a portion of it had been commandeered by the Government. We finally got settled at the hospital, after we had got the Italian equipment out and our own in, which was quite a work of art. We got up 520 beds and after we had been there three months, we really thought we had the best hospital in Genoa, under the management of our excellent O.C., who was an R.A.M.C. regular of 20 years services and the whole thing went just like clockwork.

On two occasions I was asked to send Australian Nurses to the forward B.O.C.S's. and whilst there one was awarded the A.R.R.C. All the patients were English boys, either wounded or sick, sometimes we were busy, sometimes not. We had a very bad time of the Influenza in January and again towards the end of the year, in November.

After the Armistice was signed, we took in about 250 Austrians. They were very good boys and gave us no trouble. As one marked thing, practically the whole time we were at Genoa, a year and 2 months, not once did I have a complaint from the Sisters about the patients and only on one or two occasions was there any trouble between the Sisters and the Orderlies. The whole of the personnel tried to do their very best to help each other.

The staff in their spare time had a great deal to interest them in the way of climbing mountains, walks, visiting the various places of interest around the town, which is a wonderful place. After the Armistice was signed, leave was given for the Sisters who wished to visit Rome and all the principal towns of Italy, about 25 availed themselves of this great privilege. Apart from the 35 Australian Sisters, I had 5 English V.A.D's. sent by Miss McCarthy and I have nothing but good to say of them.

About a fortnight after the Armistice was signed, when the work was lessening, the Sisters gave the Officers a dinner and then the Officers gave the Sisters a dinner. They were both most enjoyable.

On the 23rd December, our last patients were sent away and we felt as if we were a ship without a rudder. They were most excellent patients, so appreciative of everything that was done for them and they thought there was none like the Australian Sisters. When the boys passed from the Convalescent Camp, past the hospital, they always used to cheer us.

On the 3rd January 1919, the D.M.S. and A.D.M.S. Italy gave a large dance to all the nurses in the No. 11 General Hospital, which was then empty, there were about 500 guests present.

On the 15th January, the first half of the unit left Genoa and on the 16th the second half left and we joined at Le Hayre and crossed the channel together. I was sent straight from Waterloo Station to Southall as Matron and my staff to No. 3 A.A.H., Dartford. No. 2 A.A.H. Southall is a hospital for Australian soldiers, but a great number have now been sent home and the others expect to go shortly.

The Sisters' work was absolutely excellent at all times. As our Adjutant writing to me after we had left said, he thought he knew a lot about Nurses but he never found a staff so excellent at work and jovial at play as the Australian Sisters at 38th Stationary.





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