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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."

Duties Done

When the Great War was declared in August 1914 a Expeditionary Force from Australia was accepted by the Imperial authorities, very little time was lost in deciding that the members of the Australian Army Nursing Service should sail with troops.

This service had been organised after the Boer War & the members attended a certain number of lectures per annum at the Victoria Barracks & received an honorarium of £1. yearly.

Evolution of the uniform.

The uniform which each member supplied herself consisted of grey serge dress with chocolate bars on cuffs to denote rank, a long cape of same material with scarlet collar for outdoor wear & a small scarlet cashmere shoulder cape for indoor wear. This latter, when many Australian Army sisters helped to staff the English medical units, never failed to rouse the ire of the permanent English Army Sisters.

In that service, only Matrons wore the entire red cape, those of less exalted rank had grey capes with a scarlet border.

A uniform small bonnet of chocolate velvet with grey silk fall at the back was also worn & proved about as unsuitable as it is possible to have been.

The well known white muslin hemstitched square placed diagonally upon the head was worn indoors.

Upon accepting active service a heavy grey sleeveless coat with cape & scarlet collar, a grey gingham dress with white apron & belt stiff collar & cuffs worn inside the dress collar & cuffs were added with orders to wear black stockings & shoes.

The indoor uniform remained the same with the exception of the rank being shown by two or one strip on each shoulder strap of the scarlet cape for Sisters & staff nurse respectively, instead of the two chocolate stripes.

2. on the cuffs of a sister. It was undoubtedly, a very attractive scheme in grey, scarlet & white. The climate of Egypt proved the unsuitability of stiff collars & cuffs & muslin ones were substituted with sleeves to the elbow. It also demonstrated the absurdity of the bonnet & danger of eye-strain. Khaki helmets were allowed & one felt ready to hunt elephants. The heavy capes on the coats were altered to sleeves & the scarlet collars were restricted to Matrons. Later Panama hats with chocolate sweats & veil were worn instead of the helmets & sisters were allowed to go out with the little red capes instead of the long grey ones.

Meanwhile in Australia a more suitable outdoor uniform was evolved consisting of Norfolk coat with chocolate straps on shoulder with the rank in stars & a plain grey skirt of grey serge. A grey felt hat with chocolate sash was substituted for the bonnet. This was worn in France early in 1917.

Soft white collars were allowed on the grey serge blouse beneath the coat or for coolness sake a grey front with high collar. The parade dress was of skirt & blouse minus the coat, with cape & cap. No silk was allowed on active service.

Early in 1916 the badge of the unit was placed on the left side of the hat in a chocolate diamond. As a matter of fact Australian Sisters did not wear outdoor uniform in Egypt till September 1915.

They sisters were on active service.

The status of the nursing profession had been so raised by the class of educated women fixed by the enthusiasm of Florence Nightingale & the Australian nursing standard was so high that there was very little doubt, if hospitals were sent, so would nurses staff them.

The fact that opportunities unfolded & developed as the stress of war progressed & that the nursing

Staffs of all the Medical units in the Imperial Army rose to & were competent to accept & overcome the difficulties, the problems & the responsibilities of the Service in the War, is a matter of common knowledge, accepted with gratitude by medical men & Soldiers alike.

the purpose
they served

Not only was their skilled Service untiring unquaking inspiring & helpful; not only did nurses learn to take the place of the anaesthetists when the call for medical men & more medical men became urgent in 1917 & 1918 but their sympathy & gentleness were ever at the service of their patients they supplied with splendid generosity a link with home that proved beneficial for the spirits of the men. They supplied an incentive for wholesome relaxation in decent company & from the dreary days of waiting on the deserts of Egypt to the nerve racking din & clash of battle on every front as the War thundered on, they stood with unconquerable courage to succour their men as the War flung them back shocked & shattered & useless in nerve & limb, a few miles behind the line, at the Base or on the long convalescence in Blighty.

Possibly their courage & patience & endurance were put to the hardest test in the convalescent wards as the men so slowly healed.

The sisters proved over & over again their ability to fulfil with competence their duties & heavy responsibilities at a Casualty Clearing Station, at the Base or in England. At the first named only a few orderlies became highly qualified as nurses or operating theatre assistants.

Certainly some did but as a general rule they lacked something essential in the ward nursing even if the few became skilled in theatre work sisters exerted a womanly influence impossible to remain unrecognised except by a few

extremely conservative & prejudiced men who objected to the extra work entailed in providing them with quarters & mess.

He did not differentiate between rank in the visitors to the Sisters' mess & many a private regarded & acknowledged his visit there as a Red Letter Day in his dreary round.

The sisters stood the strain of work, the noise, the lack of convenience & recreation at a Casualty Clearing Station, equally with men, their courage was as unflinching as 1917 & 1918 developed in danger, their optimism was helpful to all.

Sympathies were enlarged & the Soldier received the benefit. No ~~man's~~ sight was too distressing no duty too disagreeable to pass on

Rank

As the nursing staff were under orders from the medical officers it was equitable their rank should be high. A doctor was with very few exceptions given no lower rank than Captain with 3 stars on each shoulder so a sister was given by courtesy the rank of 1st lieutenant with 2 stars & a staff nurse the rank of 2nd lieutenant with one star.

A matron had 3 stars, a Matron in Chief had a major's crown.

Arrival in Egypt.

X Upon the 1st & 2nd Australian General Hospitals' arrival on January 14th 1915 in Alexandria on board the Hospital Ship Agarra, they were told there was no work & no arrangements for their disembarkation. After ten days nominal duty on board - much sight seeing & entertainments from the hospitable English residents the 1st Australian General was sent to Heliopolis a few miles out of Cairo & the 2nd Australian General to Mena opposite the Great Pyramids some distance in the other direction where Australian nurses sailing with the troops in

October 1914 were already established.

The 1st Australian General proceeded to equip the Helipolis Palace Hotel as a hospital. It was a place of much magnificence & many ^{bed & bath} rooms marble corridors, oriental brass electric hanging lamps, alabaster columns, an extensive ^{city} outlook & little or no comfort or convenience. The supply of water was abundant, hot & good. Equipment from Australia was unpacked & the place gradually became less chaotic.

For the fees, a Frenchwoman undertook to supply officers & sisters & a service of Arabs was installed. No table appointments were supplied beyond condiments. The sisters had to provide their own plates knives forks spoons cups etc & these were carried to & fro at meals. The food was new & generally uninteresting but icecreams & oranges were excellent & cheap. Army orders were issued with regard to the danger of eating salads or uncooked fruits.

Volunteers for Pt Said & transport to Australia.

To cope with an expected Turkish engagement, volunteers from the sisters were called for & staffed the ^{at Pt Said} while others were sent back on transport duty to Australia with sick & undischarges.

Work.

✱ January 1915 & the first operation took place in the Operating Theatre on 1st February. This had been previously one of the Suite of rooms belonging to the King of the Belgians who was, it is understood, a large shareholder in the Helipolis Palace Hotel Company.

The war had had of course a very marked effect on the financial success of this Company which

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even before the outbreak had not paid. The Casino & main rooms of the building had been planned to eclipse the Casino at Monte Carlo & certainly from an architectural point of view did so. But the British Government refused to licence the Casino. Thus the building intended as a magnificent playground for the wealthy from every continent became the temporary home of pain & suffering.

The theatre was a place of many mirrors & gilded cornices but from a professional point of view possessed the advantages of a concrete floor & smooth painted walls. Sterilizing was done with the aid of blue flame kerosene stoves, heating the water in an oval iron washing tub for dishes, a fish-kettle for instruments & a cistern without a tap for sterile water.

Dry sterilizing was carried out first in a field sterilizer heated by a Primus stove & later in an autoclave heated by a larger six burner Primus. Many ordinary articles necessary for smooth working were not found in the equipment & the old linen provided in such generosity by the Red Cross of Australia proved a great acquisition to the ingenious doctors in charge of this ~~room~~ section.

Patients from surrounding camps continued to be admitted & the place was fairly busy from a civil hospital point of view.

Australian Sisters were sent to the native Hospital at Abbassiah on the Citadel to augment the English permanent staffs.

At Easter the troops who had been arriving steadily provided the 1st Aust. Gen. Hos. with a moderate amount of work from the camps.

Continual rumours of moving to Gallipoli were in the air & the men were tired of their long dreary

Moving on

training since November 1914. At last the move was made & the Sisters learn to thrill at & to dread the sound of troops marching away by night to their unknown destination.

It was decided that all medical students in their fourth & fifth years should go back to Australia to finish their course. Many of the orderlies therefore left about this time too, volunteers from the nursing Sisters were called for to staff a Convalescent Soldiers Home in England. But the Sisters were distributed throughout several English Military Hospitals much to their disappointment. They gained ~~much~~ great kudos for their first class nursing qualifications.

Leave stopped

On April 25th 1915 all leave was stopped & convalescent patients were sent to Luna Park an auxiliary building hastily converted to do duty as a hospital.

The 1st Australian Gen. Hq. received 300 sick but not wounded from Lemnos Island at 7 pm that night.

On 29th April came walking wounded patients. Those nurses on transport duty between Alexandria & Lemnos were working without ceasing with the surgeons.

Even in the Palace at Helipolis could be heard the bombardment of the Dardanelles.

On 30th April the injuries were much more severe & dangerous, numbers being in a deplorable septic condition.

Every available bed was filled yet more wounded came in & more were transferred to make room.

Then Australian women first knew the agony of watching for wounded men from battle. Nieces (for some of the Sisters were married) fiancées, Sisters, friends scanned the faces of the new ones stretchers in rows upon the marble floors in rooms & corridors originally designed for nothing

What's this?
 What was
 about women
 that they
 were not!

but fasting & dancing & pleasure & gaming
Although most of the wounds had caused injury to the limbs
only they seemed dreadful enough at this stage of
our experience

|||||

The Surgeons walked between the stretchers & indicated
to the orderlies which men to carry in to the operating
theatre, those whose chances seemed brightest among
the most seriously injured & collapsed.

which
of the
men

Yet more train loads came & the small hours of the
night passed at full pressure on those who had not
paused all day long. The train work was excellent
though in those days it had not become the slogan
it was in France & Flanders.

was it?

and was
it?

He then

was then
so

Preparations for much reserve sterile material had been
made but who could visualise receiving patients
300 a day time and every six hours or so.

One of the administrative heads had at last retired
about midnight 1st May but the theatre staff saw no
such opportunity for hours. The Sister-in-charge feared
that gauze might run short so about 2 Am. that
administrative head was roused with a request for
gauze. He supplied one thousand yards without a
murmur. But the stock did not run out then
or after. That pile was found a month later in a
cupboard when a breathing space permitted an
overhauling of stock.

Yes
put this
in

During the morning of 1st May, with daylight came
help from the light horse camps in the desert round
about. Medical men & soldiers helped both in wards
& theatre. Four tables were working full time in the
latter, the visiting regimental medical officers
doing whatever work the staff Surgeons wanted.
The running was very smooth.

Case after case foul-smelling & helpless, young &

9th vigorous men, the finest flower of golden Australia's
male population, whose wounds & suffering were the
baptism of a new nation, were operated on, the
essentials done & were passed on to the ward then to
Luna Park

That day ended at 4 Am as far as the theatre staff was concerned
and the 2nd began at 8 Am. It was worse than the previous
day & work was carried on by the staff with a dogged
persistence despite the camp help so willingly given
& received.

Reinforcements

During that evening a reinforcement of Sisters from
Australia, came in & were sent on duty to Luna Park
where hitherto since the rush, had been 700 patients
five nurses & two orderlies. night & day in practically
a barn with no sanitary conveniences, or water to speak
of. Small wonder relief could not be given the theatre
staff while they could stand & work

When from the Light House Field Ambulance came in &
helped with carrying patients to & fro for there were no
ordinaries, gas conveniences, no rubber-wheeled trolleys or
tables. There were flights of shallow marble stairs
& galleries & pillars to pass, between theatre & wards. A

couple of the Sisters & three Surgeons broke under the strain
with very severe colds or septic fevers & a short hour or
two was snatched by the others to go outside for a time
Within the next four days wards for medical officers &
Sisters respectively were opened the Sisters in charge had
to carry meals for their patients from the mess-rooms
up two flights of stairs

The strain of the theatre to the staff of Surgeons & Sisters
working without relief day & night for a time was
very great but at least anaesthesia was merciful in
sparing them the pain & consciousness of the patients
as the ward Sisters & orderlies had to bear.

107 There the womanly sympathies of the sisters was stretched
to breaking point there too they gathered information erroneous or
correct, of other battalions. And there was no cheer.
Few indeed during that ghastly initiation of War but
were torn with anxiety. But there were a few who had
no personal interest in any of the Australian Imperial
Force

Orderlies. The orderlies worked splendidly for when, as was
frequently the case, trains came in at midnight or later,
a fall-in would sound for orderlies on duty all day
to assist in unloading the train of three hundred
or so patients.

About this time the civilized world was horrified to
learn of the Sinking of the Lusitania.

● Secondary haemorrhages were common, unfortunately
& unavoidably, as all the cases were septic upon reach-
ing the hospital, ^{after} so many days travelling in discomfort
& heat with lack of proper attention.

So alert did all the staff become that it was no
uncommon thing to see a Sister applying pressure
upon a part she had detected bleeding freely, the
while the orderlies carried the patient down the stairs
along the gallery & into the theatre where all were

● standing ready for anything.

The hospital remained extremely busy till about the
3rd week in May & the weather ^{grew} ~~continued~~ oppressively
warm. The theatre thermometer registered 98° Fahrenheit
as work began & 104° Fahrenheit at 3 pm.

Patients were brought in from surrounding camps
suffering from heat stroke.

The ward Sisters had an extremely trying time
in their administrative work particularly at
meal times. For instance four distinct wards were
in one large room originally intended for a
dining-hall. All meals were served to this

room in mass call Sisters & orderlies partook of the Scramble to serve their own section first. It was inevitable that difficulties arose too, with laundry, instruments, dishes, dressings. Nothing was labelled. Any extra cooking for very sick patients had to be encompassed on spirit lamps the property of the Sisters. One sister was sent to open a surgical section & was instructed to requisition for everything necessary. She did so & received one packet of pins. This ward was to receive patients for one of Melbourne's foremost surgeons.

Transport to N. Zealand.

On June 6th six sisters were chosen to go on transport to New Zealand, they had an excellent reception there & came back refreshed in September.

A Convalescent Hospital was established at Ras-el-Tin Alexandria about this time where Australian Soldiers were received & Australian medical officers, Sisters, Staffs. Many more ~~Australians~~ Sisters from Australia reinforced the 1st Australian General Hospital & the original members were in turn granted a week's leave in Alexandria, at the Red Cross Home established at Zizinia Bacos or at Aboukir.

Death of a sister. On 26th June everyone was distressed at the death of a sister from septic pneumonia starting from a septic finger.

In July, some sisters went down to Suez on duty. About the end of July another auxiliary hospital was opened at the Sporting Club Heliopolis. Wounded men continued to come in steadily, & the weather was extremely trying, owing to the moisture due to the rising waters of the Nile.

Lone Pine. In the first week in August wounded came in in large numbers from the Battle of Lone Pine.

66 heading

This apparently had a bad effect on the Arab population rioting took place & Cairo was placed out of bounds. Many of the patients received during August were suffering from typhoid fever & dysentery. Owing to the regular inoculation against the former the nursing was rendered considerably less arduous & the convalescence was much quicker.

In September 1915 more of the original staff volunteered for duty in England but worked among English Military Hospitals. Indeed between all the various hospital transport to Dardanelles, England & Australia, the continual additions to accommodation for convalescent patients very few sisters seemed to be permanent at all. Reinforcements arrived at intervals & were welcomed but none so thankfully as those arriving a few days after the Gallipoli rush.

A certain amount of sight seeing was enjoyed as the staff instead of having 3 hours daily off duty had every alternate afternoon & evening.

The flood waters of the Nile were witnessed in September. During October the hospital was kept busy several of the medical officers & the sisters developed typhoid fever & eventually went back to Australia.

In November two New Zealand Sisters died from the effects of a transport being sunk by submarine while others were sick in Alexandria.

Rumors of Evacuation.

During this month persistent rumors were heard of the evacuation of Gallipoli & the Australians were once again in Cairo about Christmas 1915.

Early in January 1916 a Club was opened for the use of all Army Sisters & was immensely appreciated. The weather was now much cooler & the hospital work was steady from the Camps.

13. Another sister an original member from Queensland died from pneumonia on 21st January. Sisters from No 3 Australian General Hospital stationed on Lemnos arrived & were attached for a short time during February work was again heavy but Supplies were more readily received & the whole place running more easily while leave was granted for a few days to visit Luso.

Closing of Hospital

On 14th March orders were received to admit no more patients & packing of equipment commenced for a destination unknown

On 29th March 1916 the Staff of the 1st Australian General Hospital started once more, embarking on the Transport ~~Saltia~~ ^{Saltia} & ~~Steamer~~ ^{Steamer} for Marseilles fortunately having avoided the many submarines in the Mediterranean Sea. These were seen & boats were provisioned in readiness. Life-boats were ordered to be worn continually.

Early on 5th April 1916 Marseilles was reached & a landing of staff & baggage took place on 7th. The unit was split up fifty going to Rouen others to Boulogne, Etaples, Le Tréport, Hesdigne & Dieppe. Everyone was very disappointed. The medical officers were not yet billeted.

Rouen with its beautiful medieval city, was reached after two days travelling by train and the fifty Australian sisters were sent to various English hospitals in the district. Snow & rain were plentiful & added to the biting wind proved very trying after fifteen months of Egyptian heat. After a week's work with the English units the 1st Australian General Hospital was established again this time in tents on the race-course. Water was not laid on neither was there a path or a road made. There was no drainage but were a new experience for most of the sisters to work in. Tents were in readiness for quarters for the nursing staff who had to share a cubicle 10 feet by 6 feet with a friend. The camp furniture brought from Australia in 1914

14th was for the first time put into use. There ~~was~~ ^{was a} hut for
messing & a sitting-room detached from this ~~part~~ ^{with}
a French stove

For the patients there were two huts for acute surgical cases
attached to the theatre also a hut, the rest of the accommodation
of the thousand patients was in tents.

The theatre-hut had previously been on fire & was
scorched & blackened everywhere. No paint was avail-
able apparently & four sisters were sent to make it fit
for use. The work was portioned off & every inch ~~was~~ of
wall was swept & scrubbed. The water was carted
daily to a few big wooden tubs in the compound.
Such a supply speedily ran out & frequently the
water ~~was~~ ^{procured} for the scrubbing was caught in
buckets from the leaky roof of the adjacent ~~the~~ ^{the} Surgical
hut.

On 1st May patients were received & operations began in the
strangely cleaned but satisfactory theatre next day.
Sterilizing was done as in the Palace Hotel Cairo
on blue-flame stoves. Instruments were more plentiful
& a set of usual major operation instruments with
saws & bone instruments was always left boiling in
readiness for the next operation.

Three tables were generally engaged & wounds were
much more serious as high explosive became
commonly used on the battle-field.

A tent theatre was equipped for clean cases.

Early in June the news optimistic & pessimistic
of a battle off the coast of Denmark came through
& a little later the news was confirmed of the
drowning of Lord Kitchener on his way to Russia
on board the Hampshire.

Orders were issued to prepare for a big rush of
wounded early in July.

Huge quantities of stocks were sterilized & stored &
the complete equipment of another theatre was
gathered together quietly in anticipation.

15/2 This foresight was appreciated when on 2nd July fresh
wounded poured in to No 1 A.S.H. as indeed into every
one of the many hospitals in the Rouen area thus the
second general theatre was ready immediately if
was required & operations were conducted with tremendous
despatch all day & up till 3 AM in both hut
theatres. As there was soon after this a theatre night
staff for the first time the burden was lightened for the
Sisters working there, but many of the Surgeons continued
working sixteen to eighteen hours per day. The base
hospital was practically a Casualty Clearing
Station at this time as these were not thoroughly
organised near the Line till next October.

All the orderlies worked splendidly & ungrudgingly
during these strenuous days & nights. When convoys
came in three hundred patients at a time most
frequently at night or convoys left for "Blighty" the
men on duty during the day were called up still to
assist load or unload the cars.

Pressure of work continued & the weather grew warmer
during July & August. Convoys of wounded were very fre-
quent both day & night & evacuation to England
correspondingly frequent. The Red Cross supplies from
Australia were gratefully appreciated by the Sick
& wounded as they lay on stretchers ready to be conveyed
to the "other side". Socks, gloves, mufflers, balaclavas
were used in huge numbers. The "Blighty-Smile"
became recognised.

During September 1916 the work fluctuated though as many
as forty-eight cases were operated on daily, in each theatre
& all were evacuated immediately, cots were available to
England.

In October the Australians realised winter had again
set in. All the water-pipes laid on in the Spring
round the camp burst early one morning in October
& the carting of an inadequate amount of water
began ~~again~~ ^{once more}. Water for the operating theatre was

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stored in a big galvanised iron washing tub over which a wooden lid fitted. Antiseptics were relied on as sterile water could not be supplied for scrubbing of hands. The class of wounds was very heavy, many being thigh injuries as well as other limb conditions.

The medical wards filled to overflowing with trench feet & rheumatism & with trench fever.

In November many Australians saw their first fall of snow a beautiful sight.

During the bitter weather of December 1916 & January & February following, the health of the Sisters was not good.

The sick-tent was kept full & many had to be evacuated to the British Hospital opposite the Forest Vert thence to England where a Sisters Hospital at Southwell Gardens 5th Kensington had been established.

Reinforcements to the nursing staff continued to arrive at all hours of the day or night to supplement those vacating.

During the early days of 1917 Zeppelin raids ~~were~~ were experienced & were an example of the increasing personal dangers the Sisters had to face. Those who had gone to Staff the Casualty Clearing Stations nearer the Line were more frequently in danger of bombing from the air & shelling of roads near their Station were by no means uncommon.

In January 1917 water was very scarce as the intense cold had caused all water mains to burst. Streets in Rouen were merely sheets of frozen ice of which labourers chipped so that pedestrians & horses could secure a foothold.

All this time the Hospital was very busy. Besides the continual movements of the Staff, overdue leave was arranged for everyone in turn for a fortnight in England or to the South of France in limited numbers & particularly for those with

17. Chest complaints. On the latter journey at each stopping place the sisters were met by Red Cross representatives who arranged details of travelling.
At intervals during the campaign in France the staff received gifts from the Australian Comforts Fund which were appreciated warmly.

In March 1917 the Allies were further embarrassed by the Russian Revolution & after the long severe winter the spirits of possibly everyone in France were at a very low ebb. In April nearly all the wards were full of Surgical patients. This continued during May as the beautiful Spring came to rejoice the people, who only saw a further opportunity to open a more furious & death-dealing offensive.

In June 1917 An American staff took over two English hospitals on the Race Course near No 1 Australian General Hospital & in July Queen Mary honored the Australians with a visit.

During the '16, '17 campaign a great deal of Casualty Clearing work had to be done in the Base hospitals in Rouen, Abbeville & elsewhere. To lessen this, surgical teams consisting of Surgeon anaesthetist, sister & orderly, were organised & travelled to the various Clearing Stations augmenting the permanent staff during the various engagements. Often English, Canadian, Australian, & African Americans formed one staff. These teams were found to work very well. At times six tables were occupied day & night, being regularly relieved.

The wounded after visiting a dressing station for a preliminary injection of Antitetanic serum & perhaps morphia, received skilled attention within an hour or so of being hit. Serious cases were retained at the Casualty Clearing Station while others with the first essentials of relief & comfort given were rapidly evacuated to the Base in a much less dangerous area.

All supplies were very liberal at these Stations both hospital & Red Cross. The latter had depôts within

18 - a few miles of the Stations which were generally very mobile indeed the sisters stay in the Australian Service was limited to six months at a Casualty Clearing Station their work was pleuraria both in theatre, resuscitation, surgical & medical wards & their presence valuable to their patients apart from their very evident worth as skilled & experienced nurses.

Recreation which was taken between evacuation & admitting, often only a brief period of an hour or two, consisted of riding, tennis on a cinder court of their own preparation, tentative gardening & walking the flat fields of Flanders. Hospitality was exchanged between neighbouring Stations & Camps.

All entertainments were overlooked by the British authorities & practically every division & brigade & head-quarters staff had excellent Companies of entertainers & actors who visited the various districts between "pushes"

Each Casualty Clearing Station largely specialised in one or two classes of cases which were of course getting increasingly severe as the war progressed in horror.

At times a convoy might consist of nearly all gassed patients these were to some the most hideous of all the hideous sights one had to work among.

The stations worked in conjunction & while one was evacuating its neighbour was admitting patients the continuous noise of bombardments, barrages, shelling day & night with the whirr of aeroplanes & their bombing proved very tiring & nerve-racking often the locality of the Station was under direct fire from shells or bombs & as everyone knows, the Red Cross painted, or marked conspicuously, proved no protection for those working among the wounded. Personal danger was gradually increasing for the sisters who stood steady while men were brought in dead as a result of shelling only ten minutes walk distant.

1918 During the Great Offensive of March 1918 all preparations were made for rapidly moving the Stations back if the Germans came nearer. And as the tide of War ebbed & flowed so did the Sisters English, Canadian, Australian, South African, American move to & fro tending the wounded with no thought of their own safety or comfort.

At times instead of living in permanent huts or tents & messing at the Station, the Sisters were provided for in billets with French or Belgian residents until a permanent camp was established.

Many amusing incidents occurred at such times owing to the French point of view of what was seen as in domestic life.

While an air-raid was in progress during the moonlight nights, Sisters had orders to repair to the dug-outs upon hearing the warning siren. Thus were spent many hours of the night during the otherwise lovely Summer evening of 1918. & this served to further rack the nerves worn out by war.

When in London on leave Sisters often had to endure an air-raid there too.

But at last War ceased & the Armistice was declared at the beginning of another winter.

Nothing remained now but to care for the wounded till they were evacuated to Australia, from all the British Hospitals as rapidly as ships could be commissioned and to nurse the Soldiers during the two influenza epidemics.

Australian Sisters messed at the three Australian Auxiliary Hospitals in Harefield, Southall & Dartford until they sailed for Australia on duty while travelling back with Soldiers & their dependents.

Other Sisters while waiting for transport were permitted to take up non-military employment which included horticulture, bee-keeping, motor-driving, midwifery, baby health music, languages and needle-work & painting.



Australian War Memorial

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