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[944]

Egypt  
Hospital Ship  
C.C.S.

S. E. Birkin

10  
58

115 To VO 1 A 5 H

1916 No 1 Stationary Hosp. Suez.  
Wounded from Romanian attack.  
Hosp. badly provided w vegetables +  
cool water. Red Cross very helpful.

Reps 1916 Hospital Ship "Solilia"  
Indian Med Service British  
Regulars, II Australian Division  
British M.D.s and Maltese most  
considerate - very happy relations.  
As British Hosp. ill-dressed -  
conditions disagreeable - British  
Maltese disliking Aust. Soldiers  
& Differ.

To VO 2 A 5 H - Thanks to C.C.S.  
Spirit of comradeship among Soldiers  
made the heavy work endurable.

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."



9

G. Birkin France

10.  
58

Leaving Suez in November 1915 by the "Orsova" with 110 Sisters. we had a very satisfactory trip to Port Saïd. there being very little sickness aboard. rations & provisions provided being of good quality & the general comfort all concerned being considered

On arrival I was detailed for duty at Ghizeh Palace Hospital Cairo this hospital is beautifully situated & was in great favour both with the patients & staff though possibly not quite as well provided for as could easily have been

Being transferred to Ismailia in July 1916 where No. 1 Stationary Hospital was located between the edge of the desert & the outskirts of the town, the work was mostly medical cases which usually responded to the better care available

After the stunt at Romani on Aug<sup>r</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> /16 wounded arrived by hospital boat down the canal from Kantara where they had been brought by train a distance of twenty eight miles from the battlefield these were mostly Australian & New Zealand troops suffering from rifle shots

The general condition of these troops was remarkable they always tried to make light of their wounds regardless of its nature their chief aim being to get back to their unit before the next attack, when the

medical Officer said some of them would be sent to Cairo for Convalescence & that he was besieged with requests that they should be returned to the Regiment, their health was splendid & their skins as brown as berries with no surplus flesh but great heat.

The Hospital was very badly provided for in a matter of vegetables, & cool water was impervious which would have naturally relieved the patients who made repeated requests for it, the Red Cross did their best to relieve the lack of vegetables by the issue of preserved fruit which in a measure relieved the want.

In September 1916 I left Alexandria in the hospital ship "Letitia" belonging to the Indian medical service, this was a real pleasure as the boat adequately provided for & the Major Miss Low an English regular (with eleven Australian Nurses) did all in her power for our comfort & I feel very grateful indeed to her for the way she treated me.

There were some Indian doctors & orderlies as usually the "Letitia" only carried Indian troops, this trip they were mostly Tommies, one Digger, a New Zealand private, & three Australian Officers.

On this boat I did night duty in the aft wards where the patients were a mixed variety there being a most interesting assortment of head cases bites &c.

When two days out from Southampton a S.B. patient died & was given a Sailors grave, this ended what otherwise was an uneventful voyage though a great quantity of wreckage





was sighted of recent victims  
 On arriving in England was sent to an English  
 Hospital in Middlesex a beautiful building  
 containing over seven miles of corridors so  
 it was quite unnecessary to go outside in  
 the cold for a walk

The wards looked very pretty with their  
 highly polished floors, beautiful flowers, ferns,  
 &c. but unfortunately the Sister in charge did  
 not fit in with the surrounding harmony as  
 she was old & cross & unlike most English  
 she was not at all fond of Australians so  
 Sisters & Doctors alike shared her displeasure

A relief arrived when I was detailed to  
 No 2 A.G.H. Cranee then at Wimereux in Jan  
 '17 when the intense cold had burst the hot  
 water pipes & the scanty supply available  
 had to be carried on from melted snow

Here the cases were mostly surgical & the  
 work though interesting was heavy as it so  
 constantly happened that the hospital was  
 very short handed the nurses being sent from  
 there to the G.C.S. to relieve <sup>during</sup> ~~the~~ a storm

It was with decided pleasure one noticed  
 the great spirit of comradeship & unselfishness  
 exhibited to one another which has so largely  
 been responsible for the grand work they have  
 accomplished

Here the air raids caused us not a  
 worry besides giving us no chance of rest after  
 unduly heavy days the effect on the condition  
 of the patient was most detrimental to progress

Miss Gray was major & it is only giving  
 honor where honor is due to say she never  
 spared herself when either her patients where  
~~either~~ concerned or in the very best interests

First interests

4.

Of her sisters it was with great pleasure  
when with No 1 A.F.H. some months afterwards  
we heard she was coming as Matron in Charge

Beryl invalided to England from No 2 A.F.H. was  
afterwards sent to No 1 Amal Aux. Hospital at  
Warefield there the nursing was surgical  
cases sent from British Hospitals, & from  
here was sent to No 1 A.F.H. Sutton Bery

E. Birkin:  
(Dobson)



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