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Experiences at 38th C.C.S. by Sister NICHOLAS and Staff/Nurse REDMAN

22nd to 28th March, 1918.

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THIRD AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL

EXPERIENCES AT 38th C.C.S. BY SISTER NICHOLIS & S/NURSE REDMAN

22nd to 26th MARCH. 1918.

Experiences at 38th C.C.S.
by
Sister Nicholis & S/Nurse Redman.

THIRD AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITALEXPERIENCES AT 38th C.C.S. BY SISTER NICHOLIS & S/NURSE REDMAN

Friday March 22nd 1918 left Abbeyville by 10.40 train for Amiens in company with five English Sisters, including the Matron who was an Australian, but was with the Q.A.'s, making a party of 11. Arrived at Amiens, met two more English Sisters, making the party 13. Reported at No.42 Stationary Hospital, had a hurried lunch at 2.0 p.m. 7 Ambulances took us and luggage to No.38 C.C.S. which had left Italy three days previously. The 38th C.C.S. was situated at Mericourt, a distance of 30 Miles from Amiens. On arrival we were met by the C.O. Collow, who was surprised to see us, as he had not been notified of our coming.

The Hospital was taking in patients who were brought in on Motor Lorries. There was no accommodation for sisters, as there were only two wooden huts which had been fitted up with blankets to receive the wounded. We had tea in the Officers tent on our arrival at 5.0 p.m. after tea we picked up the blankets and we six Australian sisters put our stretchers down in the first hut. The second hut five English Sisters did likewise. Half of the latter hut was converted into a Mess Room for sisters. A tent was pitched for the night sisters, numbering two. After partaking of tea we got into indoor uniform, made our beds and each was told off for duty in different parts. Meanwhile heavy firing had been going on, and a stray Boche Aeroplane came over which caused a bit of a stir from the anti-aircraft guns around. I was detailed off to the Officers hut, which constituted a square hut with a wooden frame covered over with canvas, allowing nine beds along one side four lengthways on the other side with three length ways on down the centre, allowing just room for one to move between each bed. Five Officers were admitted at once. They sat on one bed while another sister and myself made up the beds with one white sheet and four blankets. A towel, soap and flannel and pyjamas was allotted to each Officer, who by the way, did not wash as the water supply was running low. By 7.0 p.m. the hut had 15 Patients in, leaving one empty bed which we kept for an Officer who was being operated upon and had not come from the Theatre.

The wounds were mostly arms and legs, and not very drastic. Managed to scrape up cups and bread and butter so fed them. The majority of them had had no food for two days. In less than an hour all patients in bed fast asleep. By now eight more Officers arrived so took them to a much larger hut which held 24 beds all packed close together on the floor. A Sister and self knelt on the floor and made those beds while the one Orderly saw to undressing the helpless ones. By 10.0 p.m. the hut was full - 11.0 p.m. everyone comfortable. Had a cup of tea and bread and butter. Left Sister to the ward while I helped the walking patients who were by now pouring in by hundreds, chest, arms and abdominals all walking from Peronne, where they had been sent on from Field Ambulance, which was 10 Kilos away.

The marquees numbered only 6, which by now were not sufficient for the number which was pouring in. Stretchers were placed on the ground and four blankets placed on each. With the help of several A.S.C. boys who were attached, managed to make quite forty stretchers. As each patient came in he was sent, if able to walk, to the cookhouse where he managed to get a cup of tea, and then he laid down on the first stretcher he came to. By 12 p.m. there were over 200 stretchers on the ground. At 1 a.m. went to bed got up at 6 a.m., went on duty and found all beds in one hut vacated and three cases in small hut - Evacuation between 2.0 a.m. and 3.0 a.m. 800 patients leaving by train. Saturday morning had a very sick patient; pulse very weak; S.W.Rt Thigh and Compound frac. Rt Arm; radial artery tied - a Padre who had walked to Field Ambulance then sent on for operation. He suffered from shock. Raised foot of stretcher on a box, got a blue flame lamp with an elbow of a chimney and fastened on to the lamp - raised it so that the pipe got between cradle at foot of bed also three hot water bags to give heat. The Patient revived.

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Several bad cases admitted - chests penetrating - Morphine given to quieten them - by 9.0 a.m. but full again. 8 Patients had not had their injection of KEM A F S given, so proceeded with the needle after giving them Tea and some bread and butter. By this time the guns were getting closer to us - civilians passing with their carts of furniture; big guns and lorries going towards Corbie - water scarcity - two water carts went for water but did not return - Patients thirsty, dressings scarce, food scarce - patients walking in; 6.0 p.m. train expected, all evacuation cases put on stretchers which were to be as few as possible so as to allow more patients for evacuation. Officers came in very depressed saying the Hun would be on us before morning. Evacuated 38 Officers all but one who was haemorrhaging from mouth, shot through jaw. Put him on bed and made pads for him to wipe his mouth. Stampede for train which could not stop as the Hun was on the watch for it. In less than 40 minutes evacuated 600 patients, over 200 came back on account of no room - poor disappointed Tommies. 8.0 p.m. an explosion - Dump at Peronne blown up - patients pouring in - several chests and abdominal came in - field dressing tied on over wound with Khaki tie - put them on the bed and covered them up - gave them tea. Stayed on duty until 12.0 p.m. allowing the Orderly to have one hour's rest - the first for five days and nights. During night heavy firing getting closer - wounded coming in walking - no dressings, no food, no water. Previously had packed all baggage for evacuation of Sisters at a minute's notice. Laid on bed with covering of a blanket. 4.45 a.m. had word to get ready to leave as two motor ambulances had arrived to take us to Abbeville. Left with a suit case each, 17 Sisters by two motors, feeling very sad. Passed bits of stray Regiments, old men civilians with blankets wrapped round them, women leading a stray cow, wounded boys walking, all retreating from Peronne. Colonel Low and 11 other M.O.s besides 70 M.C.O.s and men left to look after 1500 wounded boys, all anxiously waiting for news of a train to evacuate the patients. We passed lorries, huge guns and soldiers all retreating, and who were going to camp 5 Kilos from Mericourt.

We arrived at Abbeville 12.0 a.m. after an uneventful ride down. On Monday we proceeded to Amiens on route for 38 C.C.S. which had been moved further back at Corbie. Got three Motors for luggage and transport of the 15 Sisters. We arrived at Corbie 7.0 p.m. with a couple of bags of rations which we took up with us. No accommodation for us - another surprise visit for the Colonel. Tents were put up for us while we had tea in the Officers Mess. The C.C.S. was in a very pretty spot. The building had been used as a School of Instruction on Cooking for Sergeants. All sorts of different ovens had been built for the purpose of instruction which made it more useful for us all. The building itself was very old and dirty with a stair-case leading up to the third floor. The second floor had been converted into an Officers' Ward which held 18 beds. The next ward was much larger holding over 100 beds. I went on duty in these two wards on Tuesday morning - had five Orderlies, and 58 patients, 18 being Officers. In the Officers ward the diet was a worry as everything had to be sent up by the Company Cook. I had one knife spoon and fork which belonged to the Orderly, 8 enamel mugs, 2 enamel basins and three pint measures which, when I got the tea, constituted drinking vessels for the Officers ward. Bread and Butter with some fried bacon and bread was the morning meal which was thoroughly enjoyed by the Patients. After breakfast a bowl of water was given to each Officer who could wash his face himself, attending to the helpless ones myself. We were told to get patients ready for evacuation which would be at any time. All patients got dressed and the M.O. came along to see who could walk, as walkers go first. Out of my 58 patients, only 21 walked. 1 penetrating abdomen with perforation of bladder was the only very sick boy. He had been carried on a stretcher by four boys 10 miles to the C.C.S. his pulse was very feeble - he had 2 Morphine injection at 11.0 a.m. was taken to operating theatre at 12.30 a.m. and came back to ward after having 7 inches of intestine removed. Intravenous given in Theatre. Put up foot of bed - pulse better. Patients put on stretchers ready for evacuation - all ready 4.0 p.m. all but abdominal who was to wait until last. The last stretcher and walker put into train - train left at 5.0 p.m. Sisters given notice

Experiences at 38th C.C.S. by Sister Nicholls & S/Nurse Redman

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to peak at once in case of ambulance turning up. Packed up and sat on baggage waiting for news to come through. Officer came through on car said the Hun was two miles away. Despatch rider appeared - Motors 2 drew up - all Sisters and two pieces of baggage each packed into two cars and we left the H.C.S. and Orderlies to the packing of blankets and equipment. As we passed in to the Town of Corbie, the village was deserted of civilians - just a few Tommies and a few big guns in the square. Bridges were being mined prior to being blown up by the Tommies as we passed by.

We passed through Amiens and overtook civilians from Corbie and Amiens wending their way to Abbeyville. We arrived at Abbeyville between 11.0 p.m. and 12.0 p.m.

The conduct of the H.C.S. was admirable - not a grumble passed their lips while they had a cheery word for ~~for~~ all the patients.

(signed) E. C. NICHOLLS

Sister.

Experiences of S/Anna Redman.

Left 3rd A.C. Hospital on 22-3-1918 with five other Australian Sisters, met seven other Sisters at Station, thirteen in all including Matron forming the 38th C.C.S. Train left Abbeville for Amiens at 10.40 a.m. arrived 1 p.m., had dinner 42nd British Stationary and left Amiens 2.15 pm by Ambulance for Mericourt, a distance of 30 miles. Arrived Mericourt about 4.30 p.m., we were not expected, but were made very welcome by the staff; had a cup of tea, put up our beds and went on duty by 6 p.m. I was put in the Dressing Station with another Sister & Medical Officer, the wounded were just pouring in, Abd. Chest & almost every kind of wound, men walked in with. In a good number of cases the men collapsed and fainted as soon as they got inside, every wound was dressed; the rush was so great that the Colonel gave us permission to mark up the cards as the men were dressed, except in cases where the Chest, Abd. or severe haemorrhage was involved, then the medical man sent as many as possible to the pre Op. Ward for operation, we had brandy which we gave freely to the men and hot drinks of tea, all that could walk went outside where they had food given to them.

After we had been there about thirty six hours food gave out, splints were finished and we had very little dressings. In many cases of broken limbs and in some cases where the limbs were just hanging on by muscle, all we could do was to bandage as firmly as possible, give an injection of Morphia and turn the case into the paddock with a couple of blankets over the patient. The men were splendid, not one of them complained, their only trouble was to get away before the Germans took them prisoners; in many cases as soon as they were dressed they started to walk hoping that some of the transport or an ambulance would pick them up. We had very little accommodation, six marquees and two huts in all, from seven hundred to one thousand stretcher cases in the paddock.

On the evening of the 23rd between 5 & 6 p.m., Soldiers, guns and transport of every kind started to pass our C.C.S. retreating from the front lines, all the soldiers looked absolutely tired out, even the horses looked done; mingled with the Army were Civilians, in many cases the very old folk and children in carts, all absolutely panic stricken flying for their lives, the firing and bombardment was terrific.

About 2 a.m. on the 24th Colonel said he could not take in any more wounded as we had over 1000 stretcher cases and very little dressings left and we could not get a train or any transport to take away our wounded, we had no food and very little water and the enemy were on the railway and only then five miles away. It was terrible to see the distress of the patients, their one cry was would they get away before the Huns took them prisoners.

We were all terribly busy, which was really a very good thing, as we had no time to think, just doing our best, which seemed so very little.

On the morning of the 24th about 4.30 a.m. the Colonel told us all to get a small hand case and be in the Ambulance in a quarter of an hour's time to go to Abbeville, that they hoped to get a train in shortly and get all the patients away, if not, they were going to stay with them.

We arrived in Abbeville about midday, reported at the Nurses' Home and then back at No.3 about 1 p.m. Left the Hospital again 25th, 6 a.m. reported at Club & at Station 10 a.m. - waited on Station for train till 12.45 a.m. arrived at Amiens 3 p.m., reported at No.42 British Stationary, then had a good tea at the Buffet at Station. Left by Ambulance about 6.30 p.m. for Corbie; arrived there about 8 p.m., were told that we would have to fly next day, but hoped the Huns would be stopped, were overjoyed to find our baggage there, mine was quite all right, some of the girls had had theirs looted, one little English Sister lost all her luggage.

We put our beds down and some of the girls went on duty. I went to bed and was called at 3 a.m., we were very busy, the wounded were coming in fast, some of the cases had a pad tied over their wounds with ties, putties, handkerchiefs. There was no Field Dressing Station in front of us, every man had to have an injection of A.T.S. and in many cases Morphine was injected also. One case, a severe abd. case, was carried in by four of his pals a distance of ten miles, the case was hopeless, we packed him with hot water bags, inj. Morphine; he died shortly after being admitted. The Hospital this time was pitched near the ruins of some old mill, we had our dressing station in a large room, appeared to be a barn, another two storey place we had for our Theatre and where we put our severe cases.

We had seven bell tents erected for our use, but were told not to unpack anything but our beds as we might have to go any time, our tents were pitched on a very pretty site - among gum trees on the bank of a canal; the Officers' tents were pitched the other side of the canal.

At 5 p.m. on the 26th an Ambulance train came & took all our cases away and we were told to get ready to leave for Abbeville at very short notice; almost immediately two Ambulances came along to take us away, we were told that we could each take two ~~king~~ pieces of luggage, luckily I had some uniforms, aprons & other clothing in one case & some collars, stockings, handkerchiefs & writing case in the other, but had to leave all my treasures, such as photos, snaps I've collected from all parts, books, boots, bed & bedding and all my summer uniform; still we are very thankful to have got away with what we have as we were told by some wounded that just come in that the Germans were coming over the ridge just two miles behind us, and that all the bridges were to be blown up immediately. As we came through Corbie the village was deserted by all the Civilians, only soldiers, guns & ammunition to be seen; all the bridges we crossed were ready to be blown up at any moment, one Tommy rushed to our Car & gave us a little canary in a cage which Miss McCarthy claimed when we reached Abbeville.

We met quite a number of New Zealand boys on the outskirts of Corbie, it was lovely to see these happy big fellows helping the old women and their bundles along. They were all so cheery and assured us that the Germans would not get any further.

As we flew along towards Amiens we could see huge explosions & fires, did not go through Amiens - just the outlying parts; seemed quite deserted. About 8.45 p.m. we could see the Aeroplanes over Amiens and the explosions in the Air.

Reached Abbeville about midnight, reported at the Club where we stayed the night; we were terribly dusty, tired and all feeling rather miserable. Our Matron, Miss Grieves, An Australian, was splendid, all through it all she was here, there and everywhere, helping in every way and always so cheerful.

Our Colonel and the Medical Officers were splendid, they never rested day or night, when they were not dressing or attending the wounded, they were round the paddock giving drinks & tucking in the stretcher cases.

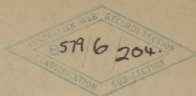
The Orderlies were splendid, they never had any rest day or night, the work they did was splendid, and were prepared for anything.

We had a Surgical Team of Canadians and two Canadians - they were shelled out of their own station.

At Mericourt our Staff consisted of twelve medical officers, sixteen Sisters, Matron & Sixty odd men & N.C.Os. At Corbie twelve Medical Officers, Matron & twelve Sisters and some staff of men and N.C.Os.

(Sgd) Ella M. Redman.

17-2-18.



~~H. Ch. Aust. Div. Mach. Gun. Coy.~~

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