BETWEEN the wars the Australian Army Nursing Service existed only as a reserve, and in this respect was at a disadvantage compared with the British service, the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service, which had a permanent nucleus. In Australia records were kept in each State of trained nurses appointed to the reserve and willing to serve in time of national emergency, but the reservists were given no training in military procedures, and no attempt was made to use their services even in militia training camps, from which the sick were sent to civil hospitals. A matron-in-chief attached to the staff of the Director-General of Medical Services at Army Headquarters administered the A.A.N.S., and in each State there was a principal matron who was responsible to the Deputy Director of Medical Services. The matron-in-chief and principal matrons were required to give a certain number of days each year to military duty.

From 1925 to 1940 the Matron-in-Chief was Miss G. M. Wilson. Late in 1940 Miss Wilson was sent overseas as Matron-in-Chief of the A.I.F. abroad, and Miss J. Sinclair Wood was appointed Matron-in-Chief at Army Headquarters, where she served until 1943. On her return to Australia in 1941 Miss Wilson retired. By this time Miss A. M. Sage, who had been in the Middle East, had also returned to Australia. Miss Sage took over as Matron-in-Chief, serving in this capacity until her retirement in 1952.

On the declaration of war in 1939 nurses were mobilised for service in the army both from the civilian community and the Army Nursing Service Reserve. There were approximately 13,000 trained nurses in Australia, and 600 on the army reserve. In the early months of the war volunteers far exceeded requirements, and by 1940 about 4,000 applications had been received for overseas service.

To be eligible for appointment an applicant had to be:

(a) a trained nurse, registered by the Nurses Board in a State of the Commonwealth of Australia, preferably with several years' general nursing experience as well as an additional nursing certificate;
(b) a British subject domiciled in Australia;
(c) single, or a widow or divorcee without dependants;
(d) between the ages of 25 and 35 years for overseas service in the case of sisters and staff-nurses, and below the age of 40 in the case of matrons;
(e) passed fit A1 by medical examination;
(f) of good character with personal attributes essential to the making of an efficient army nurse.

The ranks to which nurses were appointed in the A.A.N.S. were, in ascending order: staff nurse, sister, senior sister, matron, principal matron and matron-in-chief. Senior sisters were appointed as charge sisters in camp hospitals and casualty clearing stations, and in wards and operating
theatres; they also filled specialist positions in larger units. Military ranks were not used at the time, but all members of the A.A.N.S. were subject to military law and discipline.

The uniform of the Service had been modelled on that of the Q.A.I.M.N.S., and, despite changes made to suit variations of fashion, climate and conditions, the traditional grey and scarlet were retained. At the beginning of the 1914-18 War nurses had worn grey serge dresses which swept the ground and bonnets tied under the chin with bows. Their counterparts in the 1939-45 War dressed more comfortably. The standard outdoor uniform was a grey melange Norfolk jacket and skirt, the skirt 14 inches from the ground, a white silk shirt with a chocolate-coloured tie and a silver Commonwealth pattern brooch, brown laced shoes, fawn lisle stockings, brown leather gloves and a grey felt hat. Indoors, nurses wore a grey cesarine overall buttoning from neck to hem, with white starched linen collar and cuffs, a white organdie cap and a shoulder cape of scarlet cloth. The mess dress was of grey silk, made to the same pattern as the indoor uniform, with white organdie collar and cuffs, a white organdie cap, a cape of scarlet silk, grey silk stockings and black court shoes. There was as yet no proper summer uniform.

Senior sisters wore two narrow chocolate-coloured bands above the cuff of the ward dress and a narrow grey band on the epaulette of the Norfolk jacket. Matrons wore chocolate coloured cuffs with the ward dress and two or more narrow grey stripes on the epaulettes of the Norfolk jacket.

In 1942 there was a move to dress the A.A.N.S. in khaki, and the nurses had a struggle to retain their grey and scarlet uniform. The desire to keep it was inspired partly by sentiment and partly by the knowledge that the grey uniform was a relief to patients who were weary of the sight of khaki after having seen nothing else while they were in the field.

Nurses were appointed to general hospitals and to casualty clearing stations, the basis of distribution in 1940 being: 80 to a 1,200-bed, 50 to a 600-bed and 26 to a 200-bed hospital, and 8 to a casualty clearing station. In 1942 the number of nurses for 1,200-bed hospitals was increased to 120, and for 600-bed hospitals to 75.

In the early months of the war a number of nurses, some of them awaiting embarkation, were sent to camp hospitals. Most of the patients there were suffering from ordinary epidemic illness, and often required considerable care. The move was strongly resisted by a few Deputy Directors of Medical Services who considered that it would be impossible for nurses to adapt themselves to conditions in the camps. It was true that conditions were difficult; in the early days in some camps there was no accommodation for nurses; hygiene was poor; medical and nursing equipment and supplies were scarce; and sometimes patients had to be treated under canvas or in converted, unlined huts without proper heating, and in a few instances without bedsteads. Nevertheless, the nurses carried out their duties efficiently. They also helped in the training of
nursing orderlies, and they themselves were trained in army organisation and became accustomed to army routines.

Middle East: On 9th January 1940 the first contingent of A.A.N.S. under Matron C. A. Fall embarked for overseas in the *Empress of Japan*. They were the nursing staff of the 2/1st Australian General Hospital, which was to provide hospitalisation for the 6th Division in Palestine. The unit arrived in February, and proceeded to establish a hospital at Gaza Ridge. It was bitterly cold, and the nurses suffered as they were not equipped with warm clothing. They found that the hospital area consisted of 160 acres of ploughed land, with a kitchen, officers' mess, sisters' mess, store rooms and tents for sleeping. Three showers—there was no hot water—and three latrines completed the hospital equipment. Rioting among the Arabs and Jews made it unsafe for them to leave the camp, and within the camp they were forbidden to move far except in groups. The first time they went out was at the invitation of the British residents of Gaza; armed policemen travelled in the cars with them, and an armoured car led and another followed the rear of their party.

The hospital was officially opened on 16th April. It consisted of two marquees to which more were added as the bed state increased. The marquees were sunk well into the ground to camouflage them from the air, and the first heavy rains flooded them out. They were then pitched at ground level and for protection were revetted with sandbags or mud brick walls. Later hadded wards and a theatre were built. By October all patients were accommodated in huts, but the bed state continued to increase until there were 2,200 men in hospital, and tents had to be put up again. Because of the haste with which the first convoy had been dispatched there were many deficiencies. There was no sewerage and hygiene problems were manifold; water was limited with only one tap between two wards; the same primus was used for heating water, for washing the patients and for making hot drinks, and sterilisation in the wards was also by primus, although there was an autoclave in the theatre. Drugs were inferior in quantity and quality, but food was plentiful and good; it was taken round to the wards in trucks. In June 1940 Italy entered the war; a permanent blackout was imposed and slit trenches were dug everywhere.

A second body of nurses under the leadership of Matron Sage had left Australia for the Middle East on 15th April 1940. On arrival they were fostered by the 2/1st A.G.H. until their own units became operative.

During the year Ambulance Sea Transport Companies were formed to provide medical staff for transports sailing between Australia and the Middle East, and sixteen nurses were appointed to each company.

United Kingdom: A third party of thirty-two nurses under Sister E. J. Bowe left Australia for the Middle East on the 5th May in a convoy which included the *Queen Mary, Aquitania, Andes, Mauretania* and the *Empress of Japan, Empress of Canada* and *Empress of Britain*. When Italy entered the war in June they were in the Indian Ocean; their destination was changed to the United Kingdom, and course was set for
the Cape of Good Hope. On the way up the West African coast other ships joined the convoy whose escort at one stage included the battle-ship *Hood*, the aircraft-carrier *Argus* and a flotilla of destroyers. They arrived in England on 16th June 1940. Next month the Australian nurses in England were inspected on Salisbury Plains by King George VI, who was received by Sister Bowe.

Another Australian medical party, with forty-two nurses under Matron E. D. K. Butler, sailed for England in the *Stratheden* on 27th May. For part of the way it was escorted by H.M.A.S. *Australia*, but at Sierra Leone the Australian cruiser departed and did not rejoin its charges until some days later. The nurses learned that in the interval *Australia* had gone to join the engagement against the French fleet at Dakar. The nurses in the *Stratheden* reached Liverpool on 16th July, and when four more arrived within the next few weeks the total strength of the Australian Army Nursing Service in England was brought up to 78. All the nurses, with the exception of six who were attached to Tidworth Military Hospital for a short period, went to the 2/3rd A.G.H., which opened at Godalming in Surrey on 1st August 1940.

At Godalming the nurses lived in three huts. These were clean and new, and each had a good supply of hot water, and a coke stove which could be kept alight day and night when necessary.

The summer of their arrival was dry and warm. In London, 32 miles away, the blitz was raging, and during September districts around the hospital were severely bombed. At Godalming slit trenches were dug, air raid shelters built, and anti-gas drill carried out. Frequently the air raid alarm was sounded, and then the nurses would have to don steel helmets and work in them until the all clear was given. On some nights the raids went on for as long as 12 hours, but no bombs fell in the hospital area.

The work in the hospital was mostly medical, and was carried out under difficulties. There were no orderlies, and the only domestic help consisted of one girl for each ward. These girls were often very young, and it was not unusual for them to arrive on duty late and already tired, having spent the previous night in an air raid shelter.

A circumstance which caused the nurses some concern was that surface mail from Australia often took as long as five months to arrive, and at times did not reach England at all, having been mistakenly directed to the Middle East.

The nurses’ health in England was good. Upper respiratory tract infections were the greatest cause of invalidism, these being aggravated perhaps by the absence of adequate ventilation during the long blackout hours of winter. The average number of nurses in hospital was 3.5 per day.

Late in 1940 it was decided to transfer most of the Australian troops in England to the Middle East, and the hospital also. The first group of members of the A.A.N.S. under Sister Bowe left Godalming on 12th November and the main party under Matron Butler on 18th March. The nurses in the main party had an eventful departure. Their port of embarkation was Glasgow, and for two days before their arrival and for six
days after that city suffered some of the worst air raids of its experience. When they arrived in the Middle East the 2/3rd A.G.H. nurses with other medical people were transferred to various Australian hospitals in Palestine, and the 2/3rd A.G.H., although retained on paper on the Order of Battle, did not work again as an active unit.

When Italy entered the war Palestine, up to that time a training ground for operations on the Western Front, became itself a potential battleground. In September Italian forces invaded Egypt and advanced as far as Sidi Barrani. There they were halted by British troops and, in December, driven back to Bardia, which was strongly fortified. The 6th Australian Division was brought forward to attack Bardia and, supported by British artillery and armour, early in January succeeded in capturing it. The Australians pressed on to Tobruk, and by the 22nd this too had fallen. Hoping to capture the remaining Italian forces in Cyrenaica, British and Australian forces advanced westward; Benghazi fell without opposition on the 6th February.

The 2/2nd A.G.H. and the 2/1st and 2/2nd C.C.S's were the first medical units with nurses attached to follow the 6th Division from Palestine to Egypt. The 2/2nd A.G.H. nurses under Matron Sage had arrived at Gaza Ridge in May 1940, but their hospital did not begin to function until it moved to Kantara in December. In the meantime, its nurses were attached to various British hospitals in Palestine and Egypt. At Kantara the unit was set up entirely under canvas in a desolate sandy place, close to the Suez Canal, and early in the New Year the first ambulance convoys began to arrive, mostly men wounded at Bardia. The hospital could not offer them many comforts; the food was poor and the tented wards, set in the loose sand of the desert, seemed to have only an uncertain tenure. The building of hutted wards and accommodation for the staff was got under way—and only just in time, for one evening during a particularly violent sandstorm the tents could no longer be restrained, and all the patients had to be hurriedly moved to the not quite completed huts.

The 2/1st C.C.S. nurses under Sister M. J. Hanna had reached the Middle East in the second convoy, and were fostered by the 2/1st A.G.H. The unit set up a camp hospital at Gaza, and, when this closed after about a fortnight, they moved to Qastina, where the unit again acted as a camp hospital. Late in 1940 the C.C.S. was transferred to Amiriya, a few miles from Alexandria. There ward accommodation was in tents, which, like the nurses' tents, were dug in as a protection against the air raids. The cold was intense, particularly at night, and even on duty the nurses had to wear greatcoats and Balaclavas. On one occasion torrential rain flooded the wards and sleeping quarters; patients were moved to tents hastily erected above ground, and bedpans and other equipment, which were submerged, could not be located for days.

On New Year's Eve the unit moved by train to Mersa Matruh, arriving there at 11 p.m. in pitch darkness. It was impossible to unload any gear
until daylight, and the nurses camped in barracks for the night. Next morning they were allotted quarters in a building which was partitioned to the ceiling with sandbags. The British had sent back their own nurses, and almost as soon as the Australian nurses arrived the British Command ordered their withdrawal. However, Lieut-Colonel J. K. Adey, the commanding officer of the unit, insisted that they were needed, and eventually permission was given for them to remain, provided they were moved to safer quarters. These were about half a mile from the hospital in an underground regimental aid post, which had been built but not used as a British C.C.S., and was then part of the defence line surrounding the area. It consisted of three tunnels with concrete walls, converging in an area 25 feet below ground level, which contained a 500-gallon water tank, a kitchen with store, an operating theatre and three wards to take stretchers slung on the walls. Air was supplied by vents, but during dust storms dust flowed down instead of air. Bugs and fleas abounded. To get to and from the hospital the nurses had to pass through a minefield. This led to a harrowing experience for two of them when they were allotted a new driver who lost his way when well inside the minefield. They emerged safely after their driver turned round and followed his vehicle’s tyre marks through the sand to the entrance.

The hospital was established in the lower floors of a well-built barracks. The first wounded to come in were from Salum and the escarpment beyond. The nurses worked straight shifts of 12 hours, and more when the rush of casualties increased. Italian prisoners, previously attached to an Italian hospital, were allocated to the unit, and their help was welcomed. When Bardia was taken and its harbour made safe for shipping, wounded were evacuated direct to Alexandria; work at the C.C.S. slackened and the nurses returned to Alexandria.

This was the first C.C.S. to operate in forward areas. It was now highly mobile, its nursing staff being able to unpack the unit in approximately three hours and to pack it in slightly less. This ability was to be tested to the utmost in the months to follow.

The 2/2nd C.C.S. nurses under Sister V. Paterson had moved to Amiriya in December. The unit did not operate there, and the nurses’ work was confined to instructing the medical orderlies. Like the nurses of their sister C.C.S., they lived in tents in the desert under conditions of great discomfort, their nerves on edge from the constant dust storms and with insufficient washing facilities. Riding, their only relaxation, was a doubtful joy as the desert was pitted with slit trenches. At the beginning of January 1941 they left Amiriya for Alexandria, but without the men of the unit who went forward to Tobruk.

Another general hospital, the 2/4th, arrived in Egypt at the beginning of 1941. Its nurses, under Matron G. Thomas, were at first attached to the 2/2nd A.G.H. at Kantara. After the fall of Benghazi they were called forward to Tobruk, and travelling in a British hospital ship, arrived safely on 27th March. They were lucky to escape an unpleasant adventure. The men of the unit went on ahead in the notoriously unseaworthy Knight
of Malta: bad weather was encountered and the vessel was shipwrecked. All aboard managed to reach land, but only after many trials. It had been intended that five nurses should go too, but by a happy accident they had been left behind at Alexandria.

Nurses of the 2/2nd C.C.S. also joined their unit at Tobruk, bringing the total of nurses there to 63. All were housed at the Albergo, a hotel which normally accommodated eight people. Some Italian prisoners were sent along to do the cleaning, but they really preferred to sing, much to the annoyance of the nurses who had been on duty during the night and who wanted to sleep. The hospital was some distance away in what had been an Italian barracks. The walls of the wards were scarred with shrapnel and bullet marks, and the nurses had to clean away a quantity of rubbish before the beds could be set up. Water was brought from Alexandria, and was therefore scarce, and there was little linen. In this forward area blackout regulations were strictly enforced, and if a light showed, a shot was fired and questions asked afterwards; there was still danger from booby traps left behind by the retreating enemy, and an armed escort marched the nurses to and from the hospital. Casualties began to flow in even before the hospital was ready, and soon the nurses had forgotten about such things as days off; they worked until they had to sleep, and then started again.

After the fall of Benghazi the British advance westward slowed to a halt, and at the end of March a German counter-offensive began. The 9th Australian Division, which had replaced the 6th in Cyrenaica, withdrew to Tobruk, where some of the troops were destined to undergo an eight months' siege. Although the great value of the nurses' services was appreciated, it was decided, in view of the instability of the military position, that they must leave. Much against their will they were evacuated in the British hospital ship, Vita, on 8th April. On board they were allotted to wards and during the voyage were kept occupied, looking after the wounded. On arrival at Haifa, they were sent on to the 2/1st A.G.H. at Gaza.

By this time the 2/2nd A.G.H. at Kantara was very busy, and after a short period at Gaza the 2/4th A.G.H. and 2/2nd C.C.S. nurses were sent there. The hospital was in a target area, and there were frequent air raids; walking wounded, who were in a nervous condition as the result of previous bombings, were apt to take off into the desert during a raid and the sister-in-charge of the ward would have some difficulty in collecting them when it was over.

The nurses spent a good deal of their time off duty at the Y.W.C.A. recreation centre in Ismailia, but they had no respite from air raids there. The Y.W.C.A. building was on a corner, and the buildings on the other three corners had all been hit by bombs. It was in Ismailia that the 2/4th A.G.H. nurses suffered their first losses. A car in which Matron Thomas and two nurses were returning to hospital during a blackout was involved in a head-on collision with another vehicle; Matron Thomas and one of the nurses was killed and the other seriously injured.
In October 1940 Italy had invaded Greece through Albania, and it seemed likely that Germany would eventually give military support to her ally. Fears of German intervention in the Balkans were realised, and on 5th March a strong British Commonwealth force began to sail for Greece, where R.A.F. and other units were already established. Included in the force was the 6th Australian Division, which had been recalled from Cyrenaica for the purpose: its medical holding units were the 2/5th and 2/6th A.G.H's and the 2/3rd C.C.S.

Nurses of the 2/6th A.G.H. under Matron J. S. Abbott, and of the 2/3rd C.C.S. under Sister F. J. Deane, arrived in Greece on 3rd April, and those of the 2/5th A.G.H. under Matron K. A. L. Best nine days later. The first arrivals were billeted in Athens, and the later ones at Ekali, just outside the city.

The Australian nurses would have liked to explore Athens, but they were to have few opportunities. On 6th April German aircraft attacked Piraeus; an ammunition ship blew up, setting other ships alight and severely damaging the docks. The nurses of the 2/6th A.G.H. had been instructed to join their unit at Volos, but the instruction was cancelled and they went to work in a British R.A.P. near the docks. These were the target for continuing air attacks, which gained in ferocity, and after a week the nurses were withdrawn to Kephissia. A British hospital was operating there, and casualties were pouring in, but an offer of help from the Australians was not immediately accepted.

Meanwhile the C.C.S. nurses had joined their unit at Elasson. Their arrival seemed opportune as casualties had begun to come in and more were expected, but on 9th April it was decided that the unit was sited too far forward for their safety, and they were withdrawn to the 1st New Zealand General Hospital near Pharsala. Here in an Arcadian setting war seemed far away; on the surrounding hills shepherds tended their flocks, and the only road into the town was a donkey track behind the hospital. However, almost immediately the Allied military position began to deteriorate. The nurses at Pharsala were ordered back to Athens, and they left on the 15th April, arriving on the same evening.

With resistance collapsing everywhere before the German thrust the decision was made on the 21st to evacuate Greece. Brigadier D. T. M. Large, the D.D.M.S., British Troops in Greece, considered that the 26th British General Hospital and the 2/5th A.G.H. with their nursing staffs should remain to look after seriously ill men and those sick and wounded who would come in later, but the D.M.S. of the A.I.F., Major-General S. R. Burston, refused to agree to any Australian or New Zealand nurses being left. On the 20th the hospital ship, _Aba_, arrived at Piraeus, and nurses of the 2/6th A.G.H. were ordered to embark. When Matron Abbott and 24 nurses had gone on board there was an air raid, and the remainder had to return to their old quarters at Kephissia. That night they at last received a request for help from the British hospital. It was now so crowded that it was difficult to move between the beds. As well as British, Australian and Greek patients, there were Italians and a handful of
The care of the last-named was allotted to the Australian nurses, but after they had been at the hospital for only three days orders came for them to leave.

When Burston arrived in Alexandria he emphasised to Major-General P. S. Tomlinson, Director of Medical Services at Middle East Headquarters, that the Australian Government wished all the Australian and New Zealand nurses to be taken off. Brigadier Large still thought that some should stay, not only in the interests of the men to be left behind but because embarkation at such a late stage would involve hardship and danger. The navy shared this view. They feared that a hospital ship might now be sunk, and suggested, if the nurses had to be taken off, that a destroyer be used. The nurses themselves were willing to stay, but before he left for Egypt General Blarney, commanding the Anzac Corps, gave instructions that all were to be evacuated.

On the 23rd one half of the 2/5th nurses and all the masseuses set out from Ekali in charge of Sister J. L. Cook. They were joined by the remaining 31 nurses and masseuses of the 2/6th A.G.H. from Kephissia under Sister H. B. McAlpine, and by some British and New Zealand nurses. Their destination was Navplion.

Bomb craters, dead horses and donkeys, and vehicles filled with Greek refugees blocked the road, and progress was slow. This was disturbing because the British were going to blow up the Corinth Canal, which they had to cross. They managed to get to the canal in time and were almost in Argos when enemy aircraft appeared. They machine-gunned the convoy, and one of the trucks carrying nineteen of the New Zealand nurses overturned, slightly injuring four of them. Everyone took cover, some in a barley field and others in a cemetery, where they remained during the day while the planes kept up the attack. When darkness fell they resumed their journey. Fortunately the night was moonless, and there were no more air raids. At Navplion they were to be taken off in a destroyer. The navy would not allow trucks to approach too close to the harbour for fear of attracting enemy attention, and while the convoy was still a few miles away the nurses were ordered to get out, to throw away their surplus baggage, and to refrain from talking or smoking as they made the last part of their journey on foot. At Navplion they were taken on board Greek caiques; all around them ships were burning, but they reached the destroyer *Voyager*, and sailors, who had been hauling on board a succession of men in tin hats and khaki greatcoats, were astonished to find that the tin-hatted, khaki-clad figures now being helped over the side were women—so astonished that they dropped the first one into the water: fortunately, she was rescued unharmed. The nurses were desperately tired and, despite their strange surroundings, most of them were asleep when *Voyager* left at 1 a.m. Towards noon on that day Stukas appeared. Some of the nurses took cover in the galley as the cook was leaving to go to his battle station, and he charged them light-heartedly to "Keep an eye on the peas, girls". The air attack was abortive, and *Voyager* reached Crete without any further adventures.
The remaining nurses—40 from the 2/5th A.G.H. under Matron Best and 40 from the 26th Hospital—were ordered to leave on the 25th. The Australians after a last silent meal with the officers of the unit set out at 8 p.m. They were able to take with them only such personal belongings as could be stuffed into a haversack and the letters, watches and other tokens entrusted to them by the men who were staying, and which they promised to pass on to families back in Australia. They were driven in trucks to a beach near Megara, arriving about 1.15 a.m. When their eyes became accustomed to the darkness they saw about them a sea of waiting men. After more than an hour on the beach they were taken in small boats to the Thurland Castle, whose crew gave them the few cabins on board. The Thurland Castle was heavily bombed, but all the nurses reached Crete safely on the 26th.

In the beginning medical conditions on Crete were unavoidably chaotic. Some of the nurses of the 2/6th A.G.H. went on duty on the night of their arrival. They admitted walking wounded to their sleeping tent and themselves slept in the open.

Matron E. C. Mackay of the 1st New Zealand General Hospital was placed in charge of the British, Australian and New Zealand nurses in Crete. The Australians and New Zealanders were attached temporarily to the 7th British Hospital whose own nurses were still in Egypt. Air raids were frequent, and the nurses had to seek concealment in the crops and under the olive trees.

Greece had shown the folly of postponing the evacuation of nurses from endangered areas, and it was decided to take them all from Crete in a convoy which was to leave Suda Bay on the 29th April. H.M.A.S. Voyager took off some; others, who embarked in the Corinthia, had the task during the voyage of looking after the many civilians on board, mostly women and children; a small Greek ship, the Ionia, took off the remaining 200. The three ships were subjected to repeated air attacks, but all the nurses reached Egypt unharmed.

Most of the casualties from Greece and Crete were received at the 2/11th A.G.H. in Alexandria, which acted as an advanced casualty clearing station, transferring its patients as soon as they could be moved to the 2/2nd A.G.H. at Kantara. The 2/11th A.G.H. had been established at the end of 1940. Some of the nurses of the 2/3rd A.G.H., lately arrived in the Middle East from England, were transferred to its war establishment, and Miss E. J. Bowe became Matron. When Matron Butler and the rest of the nurses of the 2/3rd A.G.H. arrived in the Middle East in April 1941 they also joined the 2/11th A.G.H., and Matron Bowe returned to the 2/2nd A.G.H., with which she had served when she first arrived from England.

The 2/11th A.G.H. was situated in a modern building owned by the Greek Government, who lent the A.I.F. a 200-bed wing. The area, however, was unsafe with the railway on one side, a gasometer on another, and a water tank on a third. The nurses with other medical people were
housed in the main building, which did not have any air-raid shelters. During the first week in June it was decided that it was unwise to keep all of them in one building at night, and arrangements were made for the day staff to be taken out each night to the 2/9th A.G.H. at Amiriya and returned to Alexandria in the early morning. Travelling 25 miles each way to and from Amiriya, working hard during the day, and then having to spend part of the night sheltering in slit trenches, was a severe test of endurance. Fortunately, after about four weeks the army was able to provide a comfortable house for them in Alexandria about a mile and a half from the hospital. They lived there for the next five months.

Many of the casualties from Tobruk were also treated at the 2/11th A.G.H. Convoys arrived at Alexandria about twice a week, except during the full moon when it was considered unsafe for the ships to carry wounded. If the Australian hospital had already admitted to capacity, wounded would be taken to one of the British hospitals. It was always possible, however, that they would be looked after there by Australian nurses. When the war began many Australian nurses who were in England had volunteered to join the Q.A.I.M.N.S., and they had worked in that service on hospital ships and ambulance trains, in casualty clearing stations and in field and base hospitals. After Dunkirk many were transferred to British hospitals in the Middle East, where they had the opportunity of nursing Australian soldiers for the first time.

Australian troops were withdrawn from Tobruk between August and December 1941. On 22nd November the 2/11th A.G.H. was transferred to Palestine, its nurses being attached to the 2/1st A.G.H. during the staging period.

When the men of the 2/4th A.G.H. came out of Tobruk the nurses of the unit, who had been detached to the 2/2nd A.G.H. at Kantara, were overjoyed to learn that their own hospital was to be set up again, this time at Jerusalem. The hospital was housed in the former German and Italian hospitals, the surgical ward being in one and the medical ward in the other. The nurses' quarters were stone houses just outside the wall of the old city and overlooking the Garden of Gethsemane. The patients were mostly British and not so numerous as to prevent the nurses from appreciating the country. On Christmas Eve many of them attended the service at Bethlehem, and returned to the hospital after a heavy snow fall which made the city more than ever like a biblical picture. Early in the New Year they learned that they were to leave for an unknown destination.

On their return from Greece most of the nurses of the 2/5th and 2/6th A.G.H's were attached for duty to other hospitals in the Gaza Ridge area. The exceptions were some from the 2/5th, who accompanied part of their unit to Eritrea. There was a need for hospital accommodation in the Middle East remote from the danger zone of Palestine and the Canal, and it was thought that Eritrea would be suitable.

While waiting near Suez to embark for Eritrea the nurses lived under very primitive conditions. They messed with a British hospital, but lived
in a shed in the desert: it had no washing or toilet facilities, and some of them suffered from dysentery. Their situation improved when a truck was provided to take them into Suez, where they could swim and have baths at the French Club. Air attacks on Suez were frequent and the town had one of its heaviest raids just before they sailed. From Suez they travelled to Massawa, which they found had been heavily bombed by the R.A.F., so that their ship had difficulty in avoiding the wrecks which littered the harbour. After a further train and bus journey they arrived near Asmara, where they were billeted on an Italian aerodrome. Here they were very comfortable. However, it was found that the long journey to Eritrea was exhausting to wounded men, and only one convoy was brought down in the four and a half months they were there. Just before they left for home one sister was killed in a motor accident near the hospital.

Because of the possibility of large-scale German infiltration of pro-Vichy Syria and the consequent threat to Egypt it was decided that a combined British-Free French drive should be made into Syria. The invasion force, which included the 7th Australian Division, began to advance on 7th June 1941, and five weeks later, on 12th July, the campaign was over. Though comparatively short, it had been an arduous one.

Nurses were not sent to Syria during the fighting, but treated casualties at the casualty clearing stations and hospitals in Palestine to which they were evacuated—at the 2/1st C.C.S. at Nazareth, the 2/1st A.G.H. at Gaza and the 2/7th A.G.H. at Kafr Balu. The capacity of these units was strained to the utmost. The 2/1st C.C.S. had been set up in portion of the monastery known as “Terra Sancta”. Convoys were received late at night and even the corridors were crowded with patients. The nurses under Sister Hanna had most of them ready for further evacuation next morning, although many of the very ill had to be retained. The 2/1st A.G.H., a 1,200-bed hospital, increased its beds unofficially to 2,200, but the nursing staff under Matron Fall was not increased until August 1941 when about 50 nursing reinforcements arrived from Australia, most of whom were posted to the 2/1st A.G.H. The 2/7th A.G.H., whose matron was Miss E. F. Johns, was not properly established when the campaign began, but on alternate nights ambulances from each of the hospitals met the hospital train from Syria, and somehow the staffs managed to cope.

After the armistice, nurses were brought up to the 2/3rd C.C.S., which had opened in a school in Beirut, and to the 2/1st C.C.S., which was to operate in a mental hospital at Asfurieh between Beirut and Aley. Sister S. E. Deane was the Sister-in-Charge of the 2/3rd C.C.S. The 2/1st nurses under Sister Hanna and some of the orderlies preceded the rest of the unit to Syria. They had with them equipment for only 50 patients but on the first day admitted over 150, so that much hard work was necessary before everyone could be made comfortable. Their patients were a polyglot collection—Australians, British, members of the Foreign Legion.
—and sometimes it was a brawl which brought them to hospital. Before the units left Syria Sister D. A. Vines took over from Sister Deane and Sister D. M. Clinch from Sister Hanna.

Nurses were also attached to the hospitals run by the 2/1st Field Ambulance at Zebedani, the 2/2nd Field Ambulance at Homs, the 2/4th Field Ambulance at Tripoli and the 2/8th Field Ambulance at Aleppo. In August another general hospital, the 2/9th, was brought up to Nazareth to provide hospital service closer to Syria. The unit took over the monastery which had been vacated by the 2/1st C.C.S. Since arriving in the Middle East the nurses of this unit and their matron, Miss N. M. Marshall, had not seen as much as they would have wished of hospital work in forward areas. The unit had arrived in Egypt in March 1941, and set up a small hospital at Abd el Kader, a desolate spot in the desert. They were overjoyed when they learned that they were going to Greece, but with the collapse of the Greek campaign, they were sent instead to Nazareth.

Meanwhile in the Western Desert the German Africa Corps, having taken Tobruk, advanced to El Alamein. The 9th Division was withdrawn from Syria, where it had relieved the 7th Division, and by 5th July 1942 was encamped at Amiriya for attachment to the Eighth Army. Units of the 9th Division took part in the many attacks and counter-attacks which were a prelude to the break-through of the German line at El Alamein, which was achieved in November.

During the action at Tel el Eisa, which preceded El Alamein, the 2/7th A.G.H., with its nurses attached, moved up to Buseili, and the nurses of the 2/3rd C.C.S., still under Sister Vines, came up to rejoin the men of the unit just before the battle of El Alamein. The C.C.S., with four wards and a theatre, all under canvas and sunk well into trenches in the sand, was outside a walled Arab village, Burg-el-Arab, about half-way between Alamein and Alexandria. In the neighbourhood were a British and a New Zealand C.C.S. The nurses knew that there was going to be a big battle, and on 23rd October went to bed early so as to be ready to receive the first patients, who were expected to arrive at noon on the 24th. Actually they started to arrive before breakfast, and they continued to come in, the C.C.S. giving them treatment and evacuating them as quickly as possible to make room for more. The nurses worked day and night for almost 48 hours.

After the break-through at El Alamein the enemy retreated westward pursued by British forces. The nurses of the 2/3rd C.C.S. with nurses from the New Zealand C.C.S. moved on towards Mersa Matruh in a convoy which stretched along the desert road as far as the eye could see. The marching men were surprised as well as cheered to see women in the ambulance. The C.C.S. was set up about 12 miles outside of Mersa Matruh, and at this time was in advance of the Australian forces. Sick Italian and German prisoners, who had been left behind when their armies withdrew, were admitted. Some of the male members of the unit went
into Mersa Matruh to work in a hospital there, but the nurses were not allowed to do so because of the fear of typhoid, and men who were seriously ill or who needed surgery were brought out to the C.C.S.

In addition to their nursing duties, members of the A.A.N.S. in the Middle East acted as instructors in nursing procedures. During 1941 four tutor sisters were appointed to the A.A.M.C. Training Battalion for male orderlies in Palestine: four model wards were erected and equipped for them, and each sister was able to give independent tuition. Another five sisters were attached to the special temporary training school for medical orderlies at Gaza Ridge. During the occupation of Syria nurses were also attached to the 2/1st, the 2/8th and the 2/11th Field Ambulances to assist in training male orderlies.

In the Middle East the A.A.N.S. worked under very varied conditions—in a workhouse in Nazareth, an Italian and German hospital at Jerusalem, the Kaiser's Palace on Mount Scopus, underground at Tobruk, in an Egyptian barracks at Mersa Matruh, a marble and brick edifice at Alexandria, on an aerodrome in Eritrea, in stone houses in Syria, and in tented wards in many places. Their living quarters were often primitive: in some cases four nurses shared an E.P.I.P. tent and at Mersa Matruh they lived in an underground shelter infested with bugs. Climatic conditions varied from the dry heat and dust storms of the desert, through the semi-tropical humid atmosphere of the Nile Valley, to the winter cold of Palestine and Syria.

The Matron-in-Chief, Miss Sage, considered that their melange uniform was too hot for the Middle East, and in the middle of 1941 a uniform with Norfolk jacket and skirt made of grey cesarine was approved. Later this was changed to a grey cotton dress, buttoned to the waist, with a gored skirt.

At a matrons' conference in August 1941 it was recommended that the A.A.N.S. should be granted the rank and not merely the status of officers and that instead of stripes they should wear the appropriate stars and crowns on their epaulettes as did male officers and officers of other women's services. However, nothing was done to put this recommendation into effect until 1943.

When Major-General R. M. Downes inspected the medical services in the Middle East in 1941 he reported very favourably on the A.A.N.S. “Their morale, efficiency, appearance and reputation,” he said, “were all on a high grade.”

**Malaya:** Two brigades of the 8th Division under Major-General H. Gordon Bennett arrived in Malaya in 1941. The medical holding units of this force were the 2/4th C.C.S., and the 2/10th and the 2/13th A.G.H's. The first body of nurses arrived in February. Those of the 2/10th A.G.H. under Matron O. D. Paschke went to Malacca, where the unit had been allotted part of the civil hospital. The nurses of the C.C.S. went with their unit to Kajang, moving to Johore Bahru in September and in the next month to Kluang. The 2/13th A.G.H. arrived in Septem-
ber, and for six weeks was housed at St Patrick’s School on Singapore Island. Matron I. M. Drummond, formerly of the C.C.S., was then transferred to the unit which moved into part of a mental hospital at Tampoi, seven miles from Johore Bahru. Sister K. Kinsella became Sister-in-Charge of the 2/4th C.C.S.¹

The conditions enjoyed by the nurses in those early days did not foreshadow events to come. Nurses stationed at Malacca, when on leave, could visit Kuala Lumpur or travel to Singapore by air-conditioned train. Nurses in the Singapore area suffered from the enervating climate, but the city had compensating attractions—its beautiful white bungalows set against the vivid green foliage of the hillsides, the native bazaars and the hospitality of the European residents who entertained them at dances and sampan picnics. They were made honorary members of the European clubs, and could play tennis and golf, or swim in a tiled pool surrounded by little tables under brightly coloured beach umbrellas. Major-General Downes, who visited Malaya in the middle of 1941, not unnaturally found that their conditions were good. Their only cause for complaint, he thought, was that their allowance for clothing and equipment—£40 supplemented by £10 from the Australian Red Cross and Comforts Fund—was inadequate. He also urged that they be issued as quickly as possible with the open-necked dress which had been designed for the tropics.

The scene changed quickly in December. On the 8th Singapore was attacked from the air, and in the following weeks there was the hardly-credible spectacle of British forces retiring from one position to another before the Japanese.

The site of the 2/10th A.G.H. at Malacca became untenable, and a new site was sought on Singapore Island by Colonel J. Glyn White and Matron Paschke. As there was no building available large enough to take the whole hospital the medical section was established at Oldham Hall, a former school for boys, and the surgical section at Manor House which had once been a boarding house. While the unit was moving, some of its nurses were detached to the 2/13th A.G.H. and others to the 2/4th C.C.S. at Kluang. Those at Kluang lived in planters’ bungalows among the rubber. There were air raids daily, from which the nurses sheltered in trenches. Big convoys of badly wounded men were continually arriving and the medical officers worked for days and nights without sleep. On 15th January all its nurses rejoined the 2/10th on the island. Conditions for nursing were difficult and all water had to be carried. Soon casualties began to arrive at such a rate that bungalows near by had to be commandeered to house the overflow.

The 2/13th A.G.H. also had to move to Singapore Island. The move was accomplished in 38 hours without one patient missing a dose of medicine. The site selected was the unit’s former home, St Patrick’s School. Some time before this the C.C.S. had fallen back from Kluang to Mengkibol, and now this unit too had to move on to the island. Its

¹The following narrative is based on statements, letters and interviews with surviving nurses, and on Betty Jeffrey, *White Coolies* (1954) and Jessie Elizabeth Simons, *While History Passed* (1954).
first site was the Bukit Panjang English School: when this came within range of Japanese artillery the unit was moved to the Swiss Rifle Club. On 19th January Colonel A. P. Derham, A.D.M.S. of the 8th Division, ordered that nurses of the C.C.S. should be evacuated to the 2/13th A.G.H. but the hospitals themselves were now in danger: the 2/13th on the coast had been hit by a bomb, and the 2/10th, although within the perimeter, had been shelled and two members of the staff killed. By 1st February most of the British troops had crossed to Singapore Island, and the engineers blew up the Causeway. This gave the nurses a feeling of security, but only briefly. On the night of the 8th the Japanese landed on the island. The C.C.S. and hospitals were now operating under almost insuperable difficulties. There were continual air raids, the municipal water-supply was threatened as the Japanese advanced towards the reservoirs, and water gushed from mains broken by Japanese bombardment; at night there was a complete blackout, which meant that nearly all the hospital work had to be done in the dark. Heavy casualties were pouring in straight from the battlefield: and in the wards there was so much overcrowding that men were lying on mattresses, closely packed together on the floor, while others had to be left on the lawns until room could be found inside.

On the 20th and 30th January Colonel Derham had recommended to General Bennett that the nurses be evacuated. Bennett refused on both occasions because of the effect such a move would have on civilian morale. However, Derham instructed Glyn White to send as many nurses as he could with casualties leaving Singapore, and on 10th February six members of the A.A.N.S. embarked on the hospital ship Wah Sui with wounded men of the A.I.F. The nurses themselves all wished to stay when they realised there was no hope of other hospital ships arriving to take away their patients, but on the 11th half the nurses from each hospital and all the physiotherapists were ordered to leave. They were driven to the docks through smoke-filled streets, past blazing buildings and wrecked and abandoned cars among which telegraph wires trailed lifelessly. At the docks they had a long wait. Air raids were now continuous, for the enemy was concentrating on this target, but when the nurses finally boarded the Empire Star no one had been injured. A member of the Royal Navy who had observed them waiting at the dockside noted that after each raid they attended to the wounded, and he paid tribute to their bearing and courage. The next day the remaining 65 nurses were instructed to meet at St Andrews Cathedral. Because of the destruction near the waterfront they had to leave their vehicles and walk the last few miles to their ship. This was the Vyner Brooke, which sailed on the 12th. Three days later Singapore capitulated.

The Wah Sui had been used at Alexandria as an anchored convalescent ship for officers. In the present emergency she was hurriedly fitted for sea, and painted white with a red cross on the side. A retired captain was put in command. With 350 people on board, lying in the hold and all over the deck, many of them seriously wounded, she moved into mid-harbour.
Bombers attacked but did not cause any damage. The Japanese signalled that the ship would be bombed again if she stayed, and on the 12th she departed. Enemy aircraft followed, flying low overhead but did not attack. Despite the danger, the ship had to anchor at night, as the boilers could not stand the strain of operating for 24 hours. During the passage three of the wounded died but the rest reached Batavia safely. The nurses disembarked and later sailed for Australia in the Orcades.

The Empire Star suffered more severely. It was a cargo ship with accommodation for only 16 passengers: on this trip it carried 2,154. The nurses were quartered in the hold. Waves of bombers attacked them soon after leaving Singapore. One was brought down by Lewis gun fire, but the ship received three direct hits. Many of the men on deck were killed or wounded, and Sisters M. I. Anderson and V. A. Torney of the 2/13th A.G.H. came up from the hold to attend to them.2 The Empire Star managed to reach Batavia. Some necessary repairs were carried out there, after which it carried on to Australia without further adventures.

The Vyner Brooke, which took off the last of the nurses, carried 300 people, mostly women and children. The nurses slept on the decks. They had very little to eat, and no washing facilities. Matron Paschke warned them that the outlook was black, and those who were not able to swim were allotted to lifeboats. The progress of the Vyner Brooke was slow; during the day the vessel hid among islands, at night making a dash for the open sea, where it steamed full speed ahead. On Saturday, 14th February, it was discovered by Japanese aircraft. Despite desperate zigzagging, it received several direct hits, and the order was given to abandon ship. Most of the lifeboats had been holed by machine-gun fire, and only two got away safely. These held the oldest people and the wounded. The nurses, two of whom had been wounded by flying splinters, saw that all civilians were off before they themselves took to the water.

Sisters W. E. F. Oram, C. J. Ashton and M. M. Wilton had clambered into a lifeboat which was full of women and children, but the Vyner Brooke was sinking so fast that it threatened to tilt over on top of them, and they had to jump out and swim hard to get clear. Rafts, kitbags and all kinds of luggage fell overboard, and at this stage Sister Wilton disappeared and was presumably drowned. Sister Oram was hit on the head by one of the falling rafts, but she managed to reach another raft, where she was joined by a civilian woman. They saw all around them other survivors clinging to lifeboats, rafts or whatever wreckage they had been able to grasp. The Vyner Brooke had gone down in Banka Strait off the south-eastern coast of Sumatra, and Sister Oram and the civilian woman spent the afternoon and night trying to row to the shore. When day broke they found themselves surrounded by Japanese in motor boats, none of whom offered to pick them up. They reached the shore under their own power at 6 a.m., and landed near the Customs House at Muntok, which was the Japanese headquarters. They were the first prisoners the Japanese had taken on Sumatra, and as such were objects of

2They were awarded the George Medal and the MBE respectively for their courage.
considerable interest. They were searched—an easy task as they were nearly naked—and questioned. When they explained that their ship had been sunk by Japanese planes and that they had had to swim the Japanese broke into gales of laughter. Soon afterwards more prisoners began to stream in and before long the limited space was overcrowded. There was no food, and not even water until an Englishwoman persuaded the Japanese to let her collect a bucketful; then a glass of water was handed around and everyone took a sip. Out of their own ration of rice, the Japanese gave each prisoner about five grains.

Night came and they lay down on the bricks to sleep. In the morning they discovered that the Japanese had segregated the men and women. The women remained at the Customs House during the next day without food and with only a few sips of water; the one toilet was overflowing and the place was becoming foul. At 5 p.m. the Japanese marched everyone across the road to the cinema, which was already full of people. In the morning they were each given a plate of rice, and, being unaccustomed to eating with their fingers, they used nail files and scissors or anything they could find which was suitable for conveying food to the mouth. A hole, dug just outside the door, with a transparent screen draped around it, served as a toilet. Each person went outside for a few minutes, and then the doors were shut and barred and no one was allowed out for any reason whatsoever. All spent a miserable night sitting up. Morning came, but no food, and later in the day the prisoners were marched to the coolie gaol.

The two lifeboats from the *Vyner Brooke* managed to reach Radji Beach, where their occupants were joined by other survivors who had swum or drifted ashore, including Matron Drummond and 21 of the nurses. They lit a fire and, while the nurses tended the wounded, the chief officer of the *Vyner Brooke* sent a party to the nearest native village to ask for help. The natives were uncooperative and the chief officer then called everyone together; he told them that the island was in Japanese hands, and asked them what they wanted to do. All voted for surrender. Meanwhile, another lifeboat had drifted in containing about 25 English soldiers whose ship had been sunk on the Sunday night. The next morning the chief officer set off by himself for Muntok. No one had eaten for days, and while he was gone the civilian women and children became restless. To take their minds off their troubles Matron Drummond organised them into a party and they followed the chief officer into the town. They met him coming back with the Japanese and were told to wait, but, becoming impatient, they continued into Muntok. When the Japanese arrived at the beach they separated the men from the nurses; the men were taken up the beach and bayoneted; the nurses were ordered to walk into the sea. When they had gone a little way into the water the Japanese machine-gunned them, killing all but one, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel, who was shot above the hip. When she regained consciousness she was lying on the beach. She managed to creep into the jungle, where she remained sleeping for long intervals. After two days she realised that
she had a terrible thirst and struggled down to the beach to get water. There she discovered an Englishman, one of the party who had been bayoneted by the Japanese. Sister Bullwinkel looked after his wounds as best she could, but he was in a serious condition having also been wounded before landing on the beach. Three times she went into the native village to beg food for him. On each occasion the village men refused, telling her that she should give herself up, but always when she reached the outskirts native women stole out and pressed rice and fish upon her. She and the Englishman were convinced that the Japanese were not taking prisoners, but, as there seemed no hope for them otherwise, they decided, after ten days, to give themselves up. They realised, however, that, as witnesses of the horror on the beach, their position was particularly dangerous, and they determined to say merely that they had been shipwrecked. On their way into Muntok they met a naval officer in a jeep who drove them to the naval barracks. The Japanese without harming them further sent them to the coolie gaol in Muntok.

Two nurses, W. M. Davis and J. P. Gunther, joined a raft which already held Sister J. E. Simons, a Eurasian radio operator, and two British sailors, one of whom was badly burnt. There was barely room on the raft for four, and those who could took turns swimming and holding on by ropes. Later three civilian women were carried up; one who was unconscious drifted away and was not seen again; the others, a mother and daughter, joined the party swimming and resting on the raft. They saw the fire of the party on the beach, but the currents would not allow them to approach. During the night the burnt sailor slipped off the raft, and the others were too weak to drag him back. Once they hailed a dark shape which loomed up, to find with terror that it was a ship carrying Japanese landing craft destined, as they learned later, for the invasion of Sumatra. From then on they wove in and out of the Japanese invasion fleet. Eventually one of the Japanese ships took the women on board and towed the raft to shore. On the beach the Japs debated the prisoners' fate. Having decided against execution, they gave them a drink and a little food and at night confined them in a pig pen. The next day they were taken to Muntok and imprisoned in the cinema and later in the coolie gaol.

Another party which boarded a raft was not so fortunate. It included two Malay sailors, some civilian women, Matron Paschke and Sisters A. B. Jeffrey, I. Harper, A. M. Trennery, G. M. McDonald, M. H. M. Dorsch, M. D. Clarke and C. M. Ennis, the last named with two small children in her care. They too saw the fire on the beach and the Japanese invasion barges. They paddled all night, and several times came near the shore but each time were carried out again by the strong currents. When day came they were as far from land as when the Vyner Brooke went down. Realising that the raft was too heavy, the Malays and Sisters Jeffrey and Harper left it to swim alongside. All were making good progress when a current caught the raft and carried it out to sea. It was not seen again. Sisters Jeffrey and Harper continued to swim towards the
An Australian nurse in the indoor uniform of the 1914-18 War.

An Australian Army nurse in the indoor uniform of the 1939-45 War.
King George VI with Brigadier L. J. Morshead during an inspection of the Australian nurses in England. The officer on the left is talking to Sister E. J. Bowe.

Inspection of a hospital ward of the 2/1st A.G.H. at Gaza Ridge, February 1941, during the visit of the Australian Prime Minister to the Middle East. Left to right: Lieut-General Sir Thomas Blamey, Matron C. A. Fall, Mr R. G. Menzies, Matron G. M. Wilson, Matron-in-Chief, and Lieut-Colonel J. K. Adey, commanding the 2/1st.
A ward of the 2/10th A.G.H. at Malacca, 1941.

A tented ward of the 2/9th A.G.H., Port Moresby, 1943.
Colonel A. M. Sage, Matron-in-Chief Australian Army Nursing Service, followed by Matron M. E. Hurley, during a tour of inspection of the 2/1st A.G.H. at Port Moresby, 20th February 1944.

Sisters A. M. Ayrton, J. M. Doran, W. H. Drylie, F. M. Petrich and D. A. Burnett reorganising the operating theatre of the 2/5th A.G.H. at Morotai, 4th May 1945.
The current had taken them past the beach, and they landed in a mangrove swamp. After swimming up and down creeks they were found by Malay fishermen and taken to their village: they had been in the water for 72 hours. The Malays persuaded them to surrender, and they too were taken to the coolie gaol in Muntok.

**Prisoners of the Japanese:** Thirty-two A.A.N.S. had survived from the *Vyner Brooke*. They were suffering from exhaustion, severe sunburn and from abrasions, particularly of the chin and armpits where their lifebelts had rubbed. Nevertheless, in a small part of the gaol which had been set aside as a casualty room and hospital, they did dressings and took turns at looking after the wounded and sick, including many with dysentery. The sick, like everyone else, slept on a long sloping cement platform; there were hardly any drugs; the supply of food was small, and each person was rationed to one mug of water a day. Sanitary conditions were appalling. The death rate was high, but all the nurses survived, and after two weeks they were embarked in an overcrowded freighter for Palembang.

When they arrived they were driven through the streets in an open lorry to the accompaniment of jeers from some of the natives, to which the nurses responded with spirit. At first they were housed in a native school and then in two houses, in one of which they were delighted to find an electric stove. Dutch people not yet interned brought them a little food, toothbrushes and other necessities, and their rations were increased. This relatively carefree period ended when they were moved next door so that the houses they vacated could be turned into a Japanese officers' club. All the A.A.N.S. were ordered to attend the opening night, which they did, leaving only the sick behind. Ill-nourished and dressed in rags, their appearance was not attractive, and they contrived to make it even less so. With hair plastered down, no make-up, and wearing men's boots, sandshoes or with bare feet 27 of them set out to entertain six Japanese officers. The latter were nonplussed both by their appearance and numbers, and during the evening the nurses were able to keep their advantage. They densely refused to understand their hosts' laborious English, refused an offer of powder and lipstick, and insisted that they drank only milk. In one of the houses the Japanese quickly became bored and sent the girls home. In the other house they kept four of the girls and sent the rest home. The four who stayed were threatened with starvation and death unless they became more agreeable. They held out, and, after one of them simulated a T.B. cough, they were allowed to go home. Weeks of fear followed until a Dutch doctor managed to get word of their plight to Japanese headquarters. The club project was then abandoned.

On 1st April 1942 the nurses were transferred to a camp called Irenelaan, where they were told to "nanti nanti"—wait. They waited for 17 months. There were 300 women at Irenelaan and they shared ten three-roomed bungalows, 30 women on an average being crowded into each bungalow. They slept on bare tiled floors, without nets, among hordes of mosquitoes. The sanitary system was primitive and needed
careful supervision. During the early days in the camp food was adequate in quantity but not in quality. It consisted mostly of weevily rice, with occasionally a few decayed vegetables thrown in. On a predominantly starch diet some of the nurses actually put on weight, but they were not getting enough proteins, vitamins or minerals, and deficiency diseases began to appear. Diet supplements could be purchased on the native black market by those who had the money, and the nurses began to look around for a way of acquiring a little. They found it in making such items as mah-jongg sets, hats from native grass bags, and food products from soya beans, which the Japs supplied but most of the internees found indigestible. Buying on the black market was resorted to only with reluctance because of the severe punishments meted out to any natives who were detected. Later the Japanese capriciously changed their attitude, and allowed a weekly shop to be set up in the camp. Firewood was another problem. At first the Japs supplied none and the few sticks of furniture in the houses were quickly used for the purpose, and, when these were gone, doors and other parts of the structure were torn down.

The Japanese subjected the women to many petty annoyances. Sometimes when they were asleep a guard would poke his torch through the open window and flash it on and off until they were all awake. They also suffered from the Japanese fondness for tenko—counting. They would suddenly have to stop whatever they were doing and stand for hours, perhaps in the sun or rain, waiting to be counted.

There were English, Australian, Dutch and Eurasian people in the camp—the Dutch had at last been interned. A few of the women, particularly those who had been in the East for a long time, were still unable to grasp how desperate their situation was. They kept saying brightly: "The Japs are bound to send us out soon; we were just due for leave. No white woman ever stays in the tropics for more than three years." But most of them were realistic, and they set about organising the camp in a commonsense manner. Each house elected a captain to act as spokesman, and various committees were set up—sanitary, rationing, nursing and entertaining. Education was carried on by means of discussion groups.

There was a hospital in Palembang run by some Dutch nuns. The Camp Commandant, Dr McDowell, persuaded a Japanese doctor to provide a weekly ambulance to bring the worst cases and those needing dental treatment to the hospital. This provided an underground contact with men imprisoned in Palembang gaol. Husbands and wives met at the hospital, and patients acted as letter carriers. If caught, they were severely beaten but still the practice went on. The Palembang servicemen, who were given small money payments by the Japanese for work performed, made a generous allowance of 75 cents a week to each destitute person in the women's camp. They also arranged to chop wood for the women, for when the Japanese did supply wood it came in large chunks. In the wood the men would conceal personal messages, and news items picked up on a secret radio.
In September 1943 the women received a message by means of the wood supply that they and the men were to be moved. They hurriedly stripped their old camp of everything useful. They found that the move was only a short distance to what had been the men’s camp. It was situated in a low-lying, damp and unhealthy position and was in a filthy condition, purposely left so by the men who did not know who their successors would be.

Accommodation was in atap-roofed huts, which were airless, but when there was a storm rain easily penetrated the roof. Water was severely limited. There were three wells, which were almost empty, and one tap from which water only trickled and which usually had a queue of 100 women. Mostly the nurses had to carry water for long distances, not only for themselves but for the Japanese, and for the gardens which they were forced to cultivate.

In April 1944 the administration of the camp changed from civil to military control. The new commandant was a Captain Siki. Under him the small food ration became progressively less; the nurses no longer received any income from the men, and, although they redoubled their efforts to earn a little money—making hats, cooking for other internees and sewing—they were always hungry. In this condition they had to do hard manual labour, unloading heavy sacks of rice from lorries and, worst of all, cultivating the gardens. Slight or imaginary offences were punished by face slapping or by a period of standing in the sun. It seemed that their fortunes were changing when Siki announced that each of them was to be paid 4 guilders 50 cents a month—about two shillings a week—enough to allow them to supplement their food ration. The payments, however, soon ceased. At this stage they were given injections for typhoid, dysentery and cholera, and these undoubtedly saved many lives.

At the beginning of their captivity the nurses had listened hopefully to rumours that they were to be repatriated, or that the Japanese were losing the war. After more than two years in Japanese prison camps they no longer believed such stories, but in August 1944 their optimism revived when a near-by oil refinery was bombed by Allied aircraft. In the same month the first mail arrived from home, and in October American Red Cross parcels arrived. After the Japanese had taken what they wanted from the parcels the nurses received some cigarettes, chocolate, powdered milk, sugar, soup powders, jam, meat, salmon, cheese, coffee essence and butter, but in such minute quantities that the general picture of malnutrition was not much changed.

In October they were moved back to Muntok on Banka Island. The trip was a nightmare. They travelled in three parties in boats which were hopelessly overcrowded. Although diarrhoea was prevalent, there were no sanitary arrangements, except a bucket. The only food they had was a few fried rice cakes, small pieces of pork and some tea, all prepared before the journey. Some of the nurses, in addition to handling their own baggage, had to move heavy trunks belonging to Indonesian internees.
When their efforts slackened Japanese guards slashed at their legs with swords.

The camp at Muntok was new and clean, and close to the men’s camp, which was in the coolie gaol the nurses had originally occupied. The men sent quantities of food to welcome them. Seven hundred women were in the camp, which was in a malarious area. The only water-supply came from wells usually dry, which were just a few feet away from the lavatory pits. The Australians here worked both as hospital and “district” nurses. Many of them also entered the hospital as patients—the accumulated result of almost three years’ starvation, malaria, beri beri and dysentery. They also suffered from an epidemic which swept the camp; the symptoms were high temperature, periods of unconsciousness and skin affection and it was named “Banka Fever”.

The 32 nurses who had survived the sinking of the *Vyner Brooke* were still together, but in February 1945 Sister W. R. Raymont of the 2/4th C.C.S. died. In the next three months three more sisters died—I. A. Singleton of the 2/10th A.G.H., P. B. Hempsted of the 2/13th A.G.H. and D. S. Gardam of the 2/4th C.C.S.

In April 1945 the nurses were told that they were to leave Muntok and return to Sumatra. Weak as they were, they had to load the stretcher cases on to lorries and unload them again at the wharf. Here they were left in the hot sun: one Dutch woman died and had to be brought back to the camp for burial. Conditions aboard ship were appalling both for those suffocating in the hold and those on deck who were exposed alternately to glaring sun and rain. They had very little water, and no food apart from greasy rice cakes they had brought with them; there were no sanitary arrangements. During the voyage eight more people died, and, as there were no weights, their bodies when dropped overboard floated alongside the ship, providing a macabre escort. At Palembang they were herded into a train and after a 30 hours’ journey reached their destination—a camp on a rubber estate which had been subjected to the scorched earth policy and was in a highly malarious area. The only comfort was the proximity of the civilian men’s camp. The nurses were housed in atap huts with leaky roofs. Sweet potatoes and other vegetables with palm oil for cooking were added to their diet, but the rice ration was reduced. Their impaired digestion could not cope with the change, and they suffered from bouts of indigestion. Starvation, always close at hand, had now to be kept at bay by strange expedients. They ate grass, young fern fronds, and on one occasion a monkey. Most of them had now lost two or three stone in weight.

In May another of the nurses—Sister G. L. Hughes of the 2/13th A.G.H.—died as did Sister W. M. Davis of the 2/10th A.G.H. in July. Sisters R. D. Freeman and P. B. Mittelheuser, also of the 2/10th, died in August, the month in which the war with Japan ended. Although fighting ceased on 15th August, the nurses did not hear of it until the 24th. Siki then made a short speech: “Now there is peace, and we will
all soon be leaving Sumatra. If we have made any mistakes in the past, we hope you will forgive us and now we will be friends.”

Male internees from the neighbouring camp came over. Husbands and wives were reunited. The men, in better physical condition than the women, carried water, chopped wood, shot some wild pigs and took over the cooking. Siki threw open the Japanese stores. The nurses ran-sacked the stores for clothing, and what they could not wear they exchanged with the natives for food. Two Dutch paratroopers arrived at the camp a few days after the peace announcement, bringing messages to the A.A.N.S. from the prisoners at Palembang, and on 15th September they were told that they were to be evacuated. Hayden Leonard of the Australian Broadcasting Commission and Pilot Officer Ken Brown, who had been searching Sumatra for them for three weeks, found them and escorted them to Lahat, where Matron Sage flew in to welcome them. They were then taken by air to Singapore, where they spent a few weeks recuperating before sailing for Australia by the hospital ship 

Despite nearly four years of privation, medical examination indicated that all of them had a good chance of recovering completely.

Rabaul: In March 1941 an A.I.F. force had been sent to garrison Rabaul. The medical party included a detachment of the 2/10th Field Ambulance, which was joined later in the month by six nurses. They were Sisters K. I. A. Parker, M. J. Anderson, D. C. Keast, L. M. Whyte, M. C. Cullen and E. M. Callaghan.

The situation which met them at Rabaul was one often to be repeated. The medical orderlies regarded them as intruders, and for three weeks they were told that there was nothing for them to do at the hospital, but when they did begin to work the orderlies were quickly won over by their friendliness and efficiency. The patients, who had endured the well-intentioned but sometimes ungentle ministrations of the orderlies, were of course delighted to see them.

The hospital had been set up in tents. When the volcano Matupi began to erupt in July scoriae and dust fell over the hospital area. Several other sites were tried, and in December Government House, which had been vacated by the Administrator, was taken over for the purpose.

It was realised that if Japan attacked, the small garrison at Rabaul could offer little effective resistance. Japan’s intentions were not to be long in doubt. On 4th January enemy aircraft raided the two airfields. There were more air raids on the 20th and on the 22nd, and the hospital decided to send the walking patients back to their units, and to withdraw the rest to the Roman Catholic Mission at Kokopo. On their way to Kokopo they were machine-gunned by Japanese planes. That night Sisters Parker and Callaghan and an orderly went out to find a shovel to dig slit trenches round the hospital. When they were near the road they suddenly heard Japanese voices, and a truck full of soldiers passed by only a few yards away. They were not detected, and made their way quickly back to the hospital. Early next morning the two medical officers set off along one of the escape routes which had been planned for the force. All
the medical orderlies went with them, except two, Corporals L. Hudson and M. Langdon.3 There were more than 100 patients in the hospital with more coming in, and the nurses would have refused to leave them unless ordered to do so. However, the possibility of evacuating the nurses does not seem to have been considered, although there was an opportunity to do so when the last R.A.A.F. aircraft was sent out with wounded on the 22nd.

The Japanese arrived at the hospital at about 11 a.m. Padre John May went out to meet them carrying a white handkerchief. The Japanese did not seem disposed to accept the surrender, and the nurses were lined up, and machine-guns trained on them. After a period of suspense the Japanese announced: “You will not be shot today.” After that they inspected the hospital. Many of the patients had rifles hidden under their bed covers, but at the nurses’ request they put them on the floor. About every fifth man was taken outside and the nurses did not see them again.

The six women now set about the task of keeping the hospital running. There were hardly any drugs and no food, and they managed to feed their patients only after they had broken into the Burns Philp store and found a quantity of food which they hid in the hospital. After a week the Japanese became organised. All drugs and food had to be surrendered, and the nurses were told that they might continue to look after their patients if they bowed to every Japanese they met. Sisters Keast and Anderson, who did not bow sufficiently low to a Japanese officer, were brought back and made to bow several times as a punishment. Hoping to improve their status with their rank-conscious captors, Sister Parker when questioned said that she was a captain and the other nurses lieutenants. Thereafter the Japanese called her “Tai”. She thought they were saying “Kay”, her name, which puzzled her because it sounded so friendly.

But the friendliness of the Japanese was almost as alarming as their ferocity. They issued pressing invitations to the nurses to come and live in the Japanese officers’ club at Rabaul, invitations which were politely refused. The nurses, with four Methodist missionaries and the civilian nurses, lived at the Dutch Convent where the nuns had given them refuge. At first they slept downstairs. On the night after the Japanese arrived Sister Callaghan awoke to find that a Japanese had forced a window and had his bayonet pressed against her cheek. She called out, and when one of the other nurses switched on the light he went away. Thereafter they lived in dread of these nocturnal visits. The nuns moved them upstairs to the sacristy, but this proved no deterrent. At all hours of the night there would be loud bangings at their door. They always opened quickly pausing only to put on their red cross armbands. The Japanese would saunter in, lie down on the beds and demand that someone play the piano for them. The Seventh Day Adventist Minister, thinking to give them some protection, came and slept outside their room, but he was

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3 Both were later killed by the Japanese.
soon taken away. The attentions of the Japanese ceased suddenly with the arrival of a boatload of Geisha girls.

Not all the Japanese were formidable. Some of them were only fourteen years old. When they left Japan they had believed they were going on a cruise, and they were now homesick and frightened. The nurses comforted them, and Sister Whyte taught a few of them to knit.

A crisis occurred in July. The Japanese said messages were being sent out of Rabaul, and they suspected the nurses. They were brought out into the blazing sun, and for the second time machine-guns were trained on them, but again they were not harmed. A few days later on 5th July they were taken into Rabaul and put aboard the *Naruto Maru* for Japan. With the nurses were the Methodist missionaries, one civilian woman, the civilian nurses and the Australian officers.

Accommodation and hygiene facilities on the *Naruto Maru* were no worse than those usually provided by the Japanese for their sea-going prisoners. When they disembarked at Yokohama the nurses were separated from the other prisoners and taken to the Bund Hotel. In the dining room a gleaming array of cutlery was set before each place, but the food which materialised was not on a par with the excellence of the cutlery. After six weeks at the Bund they were transferred to the Yokohama Yacht Club. For some reason the Japanese now regarded them with more than ordinary suspicion, and, in addition to their usual guards, a woman gaoler, formerly the matron of a home for delinquents, was detailed to watch them. With tongue in cheek they called her Mama San. Some weeks after their arrival they heard Australian voices in the room below. As soon as they were able to get Mama San out of the way they eased notches out of the wooden floor and peered through. They found that the voices belonged to the Australian officers with whom they had travelled to Japan, and lively conversations followed.

At Yokohama Sister Parker became ill. The Japanese diagnosed her trouble as appendicitis, and she was taken to the hospital for surgery. The hospital was filthy with unemptied pans under the beds, and the nurses were also filthy. Sister Parker refused to submit to an operation, and she later recovered without benefit of surgery.

At first the nurses were put to work making the little silken bags in which the Japanese kept images of their gods. Later they made envelopes, an occupation with more possibilities. In every packet of 100 envelopes they concealed a note in English and, having discovered that the glue intended for the envelope flaps contained some nourishment, they ate as much as they could digest. The Japanese, finding their employment uneconomic, transferred them to manual labour. They did gardening, dug trenches, cut down trees, swept streets, emptied lavatories, and once they had to pull an ox cart when the ox dropped dead. They received a small and irregular wage, and sometimes they gave money to Mama San to make purchases for them. Food and clothing were unprocurable but she brought them what she said was carbolic tooth powder.
They were still in good spirits. When they heard that the Emperor was coming to Yokohama to review the Sea Scouts they jokingly told their guards that they intended to capture him and tell him their story. They were promptly taken to the police station and kept there for two weeks until the Emperor's visit was over. Strangely enough, the supervision there was not so strict as at the Yacht Club. One of the guards whom they called “Happy” used to sleep while they kept watch for him, and they took this opportunity to steal the gaol curtains to make clothes. They suffered intensely from the cold. When they first arrived in Japan they had each been given four yards of woollen material. This was shoddy stuff, and by now their only clothing was shorts and a singlet made from sheets which the Reverend Mother had given them when they were leaving Rabaul.

After 18 months in Yokohama they learned that they were going to be moved. As there was a repatriation ship in the harbour they leapt to the obvious, happy conclusion, and when they left the Yacht Club did not bother to take their paltry belongings with them. However, their destination was not the ship but a town 30 miles from Yokohama, Totsuka, where they were accommodated in a former tuberculosis hospital.

During the early days of their imprisonment in Japan the food had been adequate but progressively rations were reduced until they were existing on a starvation diet—mostly watery rice to which dogs' entrails were added as an infrequent treat. Determined to keep alive, they stole food whenever they could, although, if caught, the punishment was a beating. At Totsuka, where they worked in the fields, it was easier to steal, and they would conceal pilfered vegetables under their arms, calling this axilla drill. As well as Mama San, they now had another special gaoler, a clerk from the Foreign Office. He was with them almost continuously, but never spoke a word. One of their chores was to take him his meals. Being themselves very hungry, they would proffer the steaming food with somewhat insulting remarks, all of which he received with a blank, uncomprehending stare.

Sister Callaghan contracted tuberculosis at Totsuka. Her friends begged that she be given proper treatment, but this was refused. “More better she die,” the Japanese said. They did not, however, force her to work. After four years of captivity the other five nurses were also ill; all of them suffered intermittently from malaria, dysentery and beri beri, and the only drugs available were a little aspirin and quinine. Work was now a torture. When Mama San ordered them to cut down a large camphor tree they were too weak to do so, and pretended not to understand what she wanted. To their horror the Foreign Office clerk interposed in perfect English, “Madam wants you to cut down that tree.”

They were still at Totsuka when the war ended. For five days they were kept in ignorance of the fact, but they suspected it from the dispirited mien of the guards. Eventually Sisters Parker, Whyte and a civilian nurse managed to escape from the prison and make their way to the main road. A jeep driven by a Japanese and carrying an American officer and an
enlisted man came by and they stopped it. Although the Japanese driver tried to prevent them speaking to the Americans, they were able to make themselves known, and at last the war was over for them. They heard later that another American had seen them working in the fields a few days before their rescue, and that the Japanese had told him they were English women married to Japanese.

Java and Ceylon: At the beginning of 1942 most of the Australian nurses in the Middle East returned to Australia with the I Australian Corps.

In January the 2/5th and the 2/11th A.G.H's left Suez in the Mauretania, and at Bombay trans-shipped to the City of Paris and the Esperance Bay respectively. The 2/5th's heavy baggage in charge of a medical officer, Captain M. J. McNamara, reached Java in the Orcades. Captain McNamara was taken prisoner there, and was drowned when a ship in which he was being transported to a prison camp was torpedoed in the Pacific. The City of Paris and the Esperance Bay meanwhile were diverted to Ceylon, where the 2/5th's baggage caught up with it. After staying there a week both ships sailed for Australia.

In February the 2/9th A.G.H., with the nurses of the 2/2nd A.G.H., left Suez for Australia, arriving at Port Adelaide in March.

Also in March the 2/6th A.G.H. took over from the 2/1st A.G.H. at Gaza, and the 2/1st nurses under Matron Fall embarked at Tewfik in the Laconi. In the same ship were Matron Sage and Sister J. E. Headberry, Matron Sage's assistant. The Laconi sailed for Bombay where the nurses were disembarked and distributed between the Katoomba, the Duntroon and the Holbrook. These three ships set course for Colombo, where they found ships in the harbour still burning from a recent air attack, and while they were there the naval base at Trincomalee was bombed. They were not allowed to go ashore and after a few days their ships left for Mombasa. From there they proceeded to Durban, where they saw landing craft preparing for the invasion of Madagascar. They arrived in Australia at the end of May 1942.

Another medical unit included in the movement, the 2/2nd C.C.S., was diverted to Java. Its nurses, travelling in the Orcades, disembarked at Tanjong Priok, and were sent to Bandung in the hills inland from Batavia. The six nurses who reached Batavia from Singapore in the Wah Sui were also sent to Bandung after helping to evacuate wounded in H.M.I.S. Kapala. However, because of the precarious military position they were all returned to Batavia after a short time and on 21st February sailed for Australia in the Orcades.

Miss M. J. Hanna had become matron of the 2/4th A.G.H. in November 1941. After leaving the Middle East the unit accompanied two brigades of the 6th Division which were sent to Ceylon. The hospital opened in St Peter's School on 10th May 1942, and the nurses worked there until November, when they returned to Australia.

Another Australian General Hospital, the 2/12th, had been established at Welisara in Ceylon since late in 1941, its nurses arriving in October
1941. The hospital buildings consisted of ten wards, administration and specialists' blocks, plus various messes and living quarters. They were of brick, with the exception of the sleeping quarters which were constructed of palm leaf, and were ideally suited to the tropical climate.

Patients included British troops, Australians of the 6th and 8th Divisions and many naval patients, survivors from the *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, *Hermes* and *Yarra*. There were also air force casualties from Japanese raids on the island. In January 1942 the first casualties from Malaya were received, and in February 250 more, mostly mothers and children. The last hospital ship to leave Malaya also called at Colombo.

Nurses of the 2/12th gained their first large-scale experience of tropical diseases in Colombo. They nursed cases of scrub typhus, malaria, black-water fever, dengue and sandfly fever, sprue, dysentery, tropical skin diseases and ulcers, and ankylostomiasis.

One sister who had studied occupational therapy in Australia established this service at the hospital with such success that British hospitals asked for instruction, and one British sister was attached for training.

In their leisure time the nurses played tennis and cricket, swam and surfed. The unit had leased a bungalow at a hill station, 6,200 feet above sea level, where Europeans retreated from the humidity of the coast. The nurses usually spent their leave there, neighbouring tea and rubber planters helping to entertain them.

Apart from air raids, the anticipated attack on Ceylon did not come, and the 2/12th A.G.H. closed late in 1942. Its nurses returned to Australia about the same time as those of the 2/3rd C.C.S. and the 2/6th and 2/7th A.G.H's, who had remained behind with the 9th Division in the Middle East.

*In Australia*, meanwhile, nurses were serving in base, general, camp and women's hospitals, at casualty clearing stations, convalescent depots, internment camps, on ambulance trains and in medical research and training units. Most of the mainland units in which they served are listed in an appendix to this chapter. Not all these units were static: many were moved to different locations within Australia and some were sent overseas.

In some areas the A.A.N.S. provided a civilian hospital service—in the Northern Territory, in north-western Australia, the Torres Strait area, and even in the southern States. During 1943 a severe outbreak of typhoid fever occurred on the outskirts of Melbourne, and nurses from the army helped to care for those affected. They also nursed German, Italian and Japanese prisoners at various camp hospitals within Australia.

As the war progressed and specialisation increased, the A.A.N.S. began to train its own sisters in specialist departments, in theatre and blood-bank techniques and in facio-maxillary, plastic and orthopaedic work. Some aspects of malaria research were included in their activities, and when a Malaria Research Unit was raised at Land Headquarters in 1943 four and later five nurses were posted to it.
In October 1943 the L.H.Q. Army Women's Administration School was inaugurated, and principal matrons, matrons and sisters engaged on administrative duties attended. Other nurses were trained in all aspects of nutrition at the L.H.Q. Catering School. Working as mobile teams, these nurses visited hospitals in different areas to check on the nutritional aspects of hospital work and to instruct the staffs. In 1944, when the army began to train selected members of the A.A.M.W.S. as nurses, army nurses acted as instructors.

While most of the nurses serving in Australia envied their colleagues who had been given the opportunity to work closer to the battle areas, this did not interfere with the competence or cheerfulness with which they carried out their equally important if sometimes less spectacular roles at home. Of the nurses who remained in Australia further reference must be made to the work of those posted to units in the Northern Territory. A detachment of the 2/5th A.G.H. arrived at Darwin in July 1940 and remained there until the end of the year, when they rejoined their parent unit in the Middle East. However, the strategic importance of Darwin called for the establishment of a full-scale army hospital, and in the middle of 1940 Bagot Compound, previously a hospital for aborigines, was acquired for the purpose. Bagot was opened in December. It provided accommodation for 150, the infectious patients in tents and the rest in hutted wards, and was known as the 19th A.G.H. until April 1941, when the 119th A.G.H., a 1,200-bed hospital, arrived to take its place.

The nurses of the 119th A.G.H. and their matron, Miss E. McQuade White, landed at Darwin on the 22nd April, but because of a strike on the waterfront the unit's equipment was not unloaded for another five weeks. The existing buildings at Bagot were not extensive enough to house the nurses, and until tents could be provided, they lived at the Quarantine Station some miles away. The day after they arrived a melancholy incident occurred. A truck in which a number of them were travelling between the Quarantine Station and the hospital was involved in an accident; a nurse, Sister M. High, was seriously injured, and an immediate operation had to be performed to amputate her right arm.

Bagot was intended only as a temporary site, but even so it was an unhappy choice. In addition to the fact that it was situated between the civil and the R.A.A.F. airfields, a great deal of work was required to make it even habitable. The septic system was faulty; the drains were inadequate and laundering facilities could only be described as primitive. The nurses slept in tents, and their mess was a hut divided by bamboo screens into dining and lounge compartments. They found the heat and insects of the area a bane but once they had become accustomed to them they settled in with their usual adaptability.

A hospital of a more permanent type was planned at Berrimah, nine miles south of Darwin. Berrimah, the aboriginal word for “Make sick fella better”, was opened in January 1942. This was a 600-bed hospital. The wards, which were of wood lined with masonite, had cement floors
and were connected by covered ways. The nurses at first shared a mess with the medical officers. The army also took over Kahlin, the new civil hospital.

In the meantime, emergency wings of the 119th A.G.H. had been established at Katherine and Adelaide River, so that at the beginning of 1942 nurses were serving in the Northern Territory at the hospitals at Bagot, Berrimah, Kahlin, Katherine and Adelaide River.

An air raid alert was sounded in Darwin on 11th December. After an hour the "all clear" was given, but a few days later a state of emergency was proclaimed by the Administrator; the digging of slit trenches began, and all civilians were ordered to leave. Further alerts were sounded in the days following, but no Japanese planes appeared. On 18th February the first battle casualties arrived at Bagot. These were eleven men who had been badly wounded while in a convoy bound for Timor which had been turned back by Japanese aircraft.

At 10.5 a.m. the next day the Japanese bombers came. When the alert was sounded patients at Berrimah who were able to walk made their way to the long grass or to the few slit trenches which had been dug. Low-flying planes machine-gunned four of the wards, and one patient too ill to be moved far was killed while sheltering under a bed: a nurse showed great courage in protecting another with her body. The R.A.A.F. hospital was bombed, and ceased to function, its four nurses coming to work for the time being with the 119th A.G.H.

Ships in the harbour suffered most severely. The hospital ship, *Manunda*, which was anchored about a mile from the shore received a direct hit. Twelve of the staff were killed, including one nurse, Sister M. A. de Mestre, and another, Sister L. S. Blow, was seriously injured; other nurses received minor injuries.

Casualties, mainly from the R.A.A.F. airfield, began to arrive at Berrimah at about 11 a.m. and the nurses and physiotherapists worked continuously for 36 hours attending to them. Kahlin was bombed and looted, and on the 20th its patients were transferred to Bagot. Hundreds of cases from bombed ships in the harbour were admitted to the hospitals on shore. Facilities for dealing with them were poor, and on the 20th as many as possible were evacuated to the *Manunda*, which despite its damaged condition was still seaworthy.

It was decided to close Bagot and Berrimah, which were badly situated, and to reopen Kahlin, which, although damaged, was still habitable. A new site was chosen for the 119th A.G.H. on the north side of the Adelaide River, about 70 miles south of Darwin. On the 7th March 22 nurses and 50 patients made the long dusty journey over bad roads from Berrimah to Adelaide River, and a week later the rest of the hospital staff followed. The matron of the 119th wrote:

The site chosen at Adelaide River was very low-lying with thick bush; sanitary and bathing conditions were shocking, or perhaps I should say non-existent. Much of our equipment had been lost, not due to enemy action, but apparently to
looting. Messing arrangements were very primitive. . . . Laundry was a greater problem than ever before, and a kerosene tin was a great prize to anyone lucky enough to obtain one.4

The site too was between a petrol and an ammunition dump, and after about six weeks the hospital was moved again, this time to the south side of the river. There the engineers had built roads and laid water pipes and a 1,200-bed hospital was established. The nurses’ lines were about a mile and a half away, and trucks brought them to and from the hospital. Near by was an army farming unit, and the food at the hospital immediately improved. Fruit and vegetables became available and sometimes eggs.

On 23rd October 1942 the hospital at Adelaide River received the first evacuees from the islands in the north, including some nuns who had been hiding in the hills of Timor. All were in a pitiable condition, ill, starving and without proper clothing. Few were able to speak English, and this made their treatment more difficult. Later 45 men from “Sparrow Force”, which had been sent to defend Timor, were admitted to the hospital.

Patients from the hospital at Adelaide River were evacuated to Katherine on a hospital train known as “Leaping Lena”. Two nurses were included in the medical staff detailed for duty on this train. Instead of the smooth-running carriages with air-conditioning, indirect lighting, sliding doors and chromium-plated appointments of the ideal hospital train, “Lena” consisted of cattle trucks, painted white with red crosses on the roof and sides. The medical officer’s truck was at the rear of the train, preceded by that of the nurses. At one end of the nurses’ truck there was a 4-berth sleeping compartment with frilled curtains and pretty counterpanes, divided by curtains from a lounge with a tiny shower room in the corner; at the other end of the truck stores and emergency equipment were piled. After the nurses’ truck came the first of the four wards, each of which accommodated 16 patients in upper and lower bunks which ran along both sides. The kitchen truck, conveniently situated between the wards, contained a set of kerosene cookers and a kerosene refrigerator, all very allergic to the bumps and jerks of the train. Meal-times were usually made to coincide with a watering hole. The trucks had no windows, only two 6-foot fly-wire apertures at the top and bottom of the bunks, and a single door, something like a stable door. Through this the nurses could watch the country, and it was a red-letter day for them when, after many months, the train was turned around, and they were able to see the country on the other side of the line for the first time.

There was no covered way between the carriages, and the nurses became adept at stepping over the gaps between carriages as the train swayed on. Mostly the engines were very old; one nicknamed “Snowdrop” was built in 1865. They would draw the carriages gasping and grunting up inclines on slippery rails, or would career downhill at breakneck speed. If the train was overloaded and the engine could not make the gradient, the crew would try getting up more steam and putting sand on the slippery rails. If this failed, the train was divided and the engine took the first part to

4E. McQuade White, Reminiscences of an Australian Army Nurse (1954), p. 49.
the nearest loop, and returned for the remainder. Three blasts on the whistle announced that the engine could hold the carriages no longer, and the guard would hasten to apply the brake in the guard’s van. One night the carriages broke away from the engine and started to run back down an incline. As the nurses waited for the guard to apply the brake they heard him running alongside the train and shouting for them to open the door. They wasted no time in hauling him aboard, and disaster was averted. Another of “Lena’s” unnerving habits was to run off the line. When she did the guard would climb a telegraph pole and tap the wire, and all would have to wait, usually in glaring sunshine, for the arrival of the breakdown gang.5

The ambulance train’s most memorable journey followed the flooding of the Adelaide River, and the subsequent evacuation to Darwin of the patients of the 119th A.G.H., which was situated on its banks. When the waters had subsided sufficiently the ambulance train took the evacuated patients back to Katherine. The trucks were overcrowded to an unbelievable extent. Men with their helmets and haversacks were lying all over the floor, and heads, arms and legs protruded from the bunks. Through this medley the nurses had to weave their way back and forth during the long 24-hour journey. Psychiatric patients were difficult to handle in the confined space, but with the cooperation of the other patients they were always delivered safely.

There was one casualty. During a Japanese air attack on Darwin a bomb fragment hit the train, which was standing in the station yard, and a young orderly was struck. He later died of his wounds.

As mentioned, army nurses in the Northern Territory, in addition to nursing military personnel and evacuees, also undertook the care of the civilian and native population. Thus the 109th A.G.H., under Matron S. Haines, Principal Matron, Northern Territory, took over the civilian hospital at Alice Springs. As there was no accommodation there for the nurses they slept in tents and messed in a hostel, belonging to the Australian Inland Mission. Both civilians and soldiers were nursed at the hospital. The service to civilians included a midwifery section and a maternity and infant welfare clinic, and clinics were held for school children, among whom a constant watch was kept for trachoma, drastically prevalent in that area.

Night duty in Alice Springs could be rather daunting. It was not unusual for dusky Don Juans to come prowling around the ward where the sick lubras were accommodated. A hair-raising yell usually announced their advent. However quickly the nurses rushed in they were always too late to catch a glimpse of the intruder, and in fact few of them really wanted to.

A 600-bed hospital, the 121st A.G.H., was built at Katherine and camp hospitals were established throughout the Northern Territory, the first at Larrimah, 116 miles south of Darwin. Kahlin became the Fortress camp hospital. In March 1942, when there was a big air raid on Darwin,  

there were no nurses at Kahlin, but they returned there in January 1943, and remained during the many raids which followed.

The conditions under which the nurses worked in the Territory, especially in the early days, were extremely difficult. For seven months of the year the country was covered by a fine, red dust, and when the wet season came the dust turned to mud. Most of them lived in tents, which during the “wet” were by no means weatherproof. Heat and humidity were high and fungi grew on clothes and in shoes. Snakes often invaded the wards and living quarters, and insects, particularly flies, were troublesome. Food was poor. There were no organised entertainments or clubs, and at Adelaide River some of the nurses remained in the hospital enclosure for weeks at a time because they had nowhere to go. Yet there were compensations. The country with its flamboyant colour schemes had a strange beauty, and it offered its own distractions. Some of the nurses went buffalo and duck shooting, and others, less energetic, took pleasure in meeting the “characters” of the Territory—such people as the aboriginal whose trachomatous eyes they were treating, who turned out to be the son of a character in the book *We of the Never Never*, or the old cattleman who had been the companion of Lasseter on some of his explorations.

While all members of the A.A.N.S. volunteered for overseas service, at first only those posted to overseas units were given an A.I.F. number and the privilege of wearing the bronze Australia on their epaulettes. This seemed hardly fair, for nurses in the Territory were exposed to enemy attack and, as mentioned, the conditions under which they worked were very difficult. In 1942, however, they were given A.I.F. status.

General conditions of service in the Territory also improved. Roads were built and farms started. At the various hospitals huddled wards and living quarters gradually replaced tents, and at Adelaide River where previously all officers, male and female, had messed together, a separate mess and recreation hut was built for the nurses. A hygiene squad dealt with the menace of flies and other insect pests.

At 4.15 a.m. on 14th May 1943 the hospital ship, *Centaur*, on her way from Sydney to Port Moresby was torpedoed off the Queensland coast, despite the fact that she was fully illuminated and marked with the red cross. She sank in three minutes. There was no time to launch the lifeboats. Of those who managed to get off the burning ship, some were killed in the water by flying metal, some pulled down by suction, and others burnt by the flaming oil which escaped from the ship. Two hundred and sixty-six people lost their lives.

Eleven of the twelve nurses on board were killed, including Matron Anne Jewell. The survivors clambered on to rafts and bits of wreckage which they tied together. Among them was Sister Ellen Savage. She was seriously injured, but she concealed this from her companions; she administered what first aid she could; rationed out the food and water, and by her own courage helped to keep morale high. After 36 hours, during
which sharks swam round the rafts, the survivors were rescued by an American destroyer. Describing her experiences later, Sister Savage wrote:

On 13th May I was allotted to Regimental Aid Post duties with Dr Thelander. That afternoon proved to be very busy with many men from the 2/12th Field Ambulance reporting their minor complaints. We were interrupted in our duties by the ship's siren alerting us to lifeboat drill (that was the fourth for that one day). After being dismissed I dashed to my cabin and, still having many duties to attend to, left my life-belt on the floor at the side of my bed instead of storing it on top of a wardrobe as usual. The reason I mention this is that it was fateful that the life-jacket should be beside me next morning.

The evening on board ship was as usual and we retired about 10 p.m. Early next morning my cabin mate, Merle Moston, and myself were awakened by two terrific explosions and practically thrown out of bed. In that instant the ship was in flames. Sister Moston and I were so shocked we did not even speak, but I registered mentally that it was a torpedo explosion. The next thing Sister King, a very great friend, who was in the next cabin screamed near my door “Savage, out on deck”. As we ran together we tied our life-jackets in place. We were so disciplined that we were making for our lifeboat stations when out on deck we ran into Colonel Manson, our commanding officer, in full dress even to his cap and “Mae West” life-jacket, who kindly said, “That’s right, girlies, jump for it now.” The first words I spoke was to say “Will I have time to go back for my great-coat?” as we were only in our pyjamas. He said “No”, and with that climbed the deck and jumped and I followed, hoping that Sister King was doing likewise. There were other people on the deck by then and the ship was commencing to go down. It all happened in three minutes.

I endeavoured to jump as we had been instructed, but the suction was so great I was pulled into the terrific whirlpool with the sinking ship. It would be impossible to describe adequately that ordeal under water as the suction was like a vice, and that is where I sustained my injuries—ribs fractured, fracture of nose and palate by falling debris, ear drums perforated, and multiple bruising. When I was caught in ropes I did not expect to be released. Then all of a sudden I came up to an oily surface with no sign of a ship, and very breathless from this ordeal.

My first contact was with an orderly, Private Tom Malcolm. We exchanged a few gasped sentences and swam to a piece of flotsam which proved to be the roof of one of the deck houses. We balanced our positions and floated on this till about 8 a.m. There were other people swimming around and scrambling on to whatever was available to hang on to; a few rafts had floated off but not one life-boat was launched. . . . I am the only one who survived from the deck where the doctors and sisters were quartered and I never saw Colonel Manson, Sister King or any of the others again. I feel that some would have been concussed in their beds and some would have been endeavouring to dress, but there was no time.

About 8 a.m. we were floating not so far from a raft which was already crowded but those on board unselshishly decided to make room for us, and a brave lad from Western Australia swam with a piece of rope in his mouth and pulled the raft to us; we stepped across and that is when we saw the first shark, as we had floated away from the oily sea surface. During the day we tied up with other rafts and I suppose about 32 of us floated together surrounded by layers of tiger and grey nurse sharks which frequently shook our rafts. We had two badly burnt men with us, one of whom died that night.

During the 34 hours we were adrift we sighted four ships and several aeroplanes. We would get wildly excited, and, as they passed on their way, an air of despondency would descend on the men. It was a long 34 hours, especially the night time, but morale was very high and I shall never forget the qualities that were displayed by our Australian seamen and soldiers. The submarine surfaced during the night and that was a terrifying experience. An R.A.A.F. aeroplane eventually sighted us

Australian Army nurses on a picnic in the Northern Territory.
Members of the A.A.M.W.S., led by Captain J. M. Snelling, march past Lady Gowrie at Victoria Barracks, Paddington, New South Wales, 1943.
and signalled the U.S. destroyer *Mugford*, which picked us up. Meanwhile, the submarine was still within range.

In the course of the war changes were made in the regulations governing conditions of the nursing service. Originally members of the A.A.N.S. were automatically discharged from the service if they married. In 1942 this policy was modified, and some married women were allowed to remain. This proved unsatisfactory, for there were limitations on the employment of married members—they could, for instance, be employed only in base areas and, once married, their interests and loyalties were divided, and their continued presence in a unit could not be relied upon.

Regulations of 1935 had stated that “members of the Australian Army Nursing Service when on active service may become subject to Military Law by operation of *Defence Act* 117A”. Although holding officer status, they were not officers; that is, they were on the same footing as accredited correspondents and official representatives of philanthropic bodies. In March 1943 members of the A.A.N.S. became commissioned officers.

Seniority in the Army dated from 1943 for members of the A.A.N.S. and from the date of enlistment for members of other women’s services. This led to an anomalous position, as many senior members of the A.A.N.S., who had served in the Middle East, were junior in Army seniority to officers of the other women’s services who had enlisted some two years later.

Apart from the question of seniority some of the nurses did not favour the idea of becoming commissioned officers. They felt that hospital was something of a haven to the soldier, a place where he might unburden grievances and worries to a sympathetic female ear, and perhaps go out feeling the better for it. They feared that rank would have an inhibitory effect, causing patients to regard them as officers rather than as nurses. They had, in any case, always been accorded the utmost respect, and they did not think that their influence and authority would be in any way increased by the badge of rank. In the event, the effects of rank on the nurse-patient relationship were probably rather less than anticipated. Officers of the A.A.N.S. were not addressed by their military rank or by the term “Madam” but by the old titles of “Matron” and “Sister”, military rank being used only in official documents. Nor did members of the A.A.N.S. give the formal military salute. Instead they came to attention and acknowledged a salute with a bow and a smile as did army nurses of past generations. The following ranks were held:

- Matron-in-Chief: Colonel
- Principal Matron: Lieut-Colonel
- Matron: Major
- Senior Sister: Captain
- Sister: Lieutenant

In April 1944 a new appointment was approved for matrons in hospitals of 600 beds or more: that of senior matron, with the rank of lieut-colonel,
and in December this appointment and rank were given to the matrons of all hospitals of 600 beds and over.

**New Guinea:** The original army hospital in Port Moresby was at King's Hollow. Early in 1942 the nurses serving there were sent back to Australia because of the precarious military situation. In May, however, the Japanese invasion fleet aimed at Port Moresby was turned back in the battle of the Coral Sea; the Japanese force which attempted a landing at Milne Bay was decisively repulsed by Australian land and air forces in September, and, in the same month, another Japanese force which was advancing over the ranges towards Moresby was halted at Ioribaiwa.

In this brighter military atmosphere it seemed safe to bring the nurses back to Moresby, and preparations were made for their arrival, the most obvious being the erection of hessian screens around the showers and latrines which were located at vantage points along the roadside. Seventy-two Australian nurses landed from the *Manunda* on the 28th October 1942, and were given an exuberant welcome by the troops, extraordinary numbers of whom managed to find a pretext for crowding into the town.

Four of the nurses under Sister M. L. Dunman went to the 5th C.C.S. and the rest under Matron N. M. Marshall to the 2/9th A.G.H., which was known as "the Seventeen-Mile". Both units at first consisted of tented wards, a few grass-hut wards being added later to the hospital. In tropical downpours the tented wards were liable to flood and, with thick mud underfoot, the nurses found it difficult to move from patient to patient, especially when they were carrying heavy objects such as oxygen cylinders. The grass-hut wards, while picturesque, were the homes of innumerable rats, scorpions and other insects. Much of the cooking had to be done in the open, and tropical showers frequently interrupted operations. Food was either tinned or dehydrated and the latter, cooked in chlorinated water, was at its best uninteresting. Water was heated on Sawyer stoves, and at first there was no refrigeration.

At this time the nurses' appearance was less smart than usual. When the New Guinea campaign began changes were made in the summer uniform, a safari jacket and skirt of grey cotton replacing the grey cotton dress. At the same time a uniform was designed for malarious areas. It consisted of a grey cotton safari jacket, drill slacks, brown boots and gaiters, a khaki slouch hat with the A.A.N.S. band instead of a puggaree, and a grey cotton beret for use in the wards. Many of these items, however, were not immediately available. In the meantime, the nurses wore their Cesarine ward dresses, without white collar and cuffs, during the day, and after 6 p.m. khaki boiler suits, boots and gaiters or, if they preferred, the long-sleeved ward dresses, provided they also wore gaiters. These were of cotton, long, loose and made to fit over the shoes, so affording protection to the legs and ankles against mosquitoes. No new clothing was available for the first three months, a long time in a climate where clothing rotted quickly.

Soon after the nurses arrived there was a heavy influx of casualties, which were distributed between the C.C.S. and the hospital. On 15th
November four more nurses arrived to complete the complement of the C.C.S., and this was fortunate as numbers of severely wounded men from Myola and Kokoda were admitted during the first ten days of November. The commanding officer, Lieut-Colonel T. G. Swinburne, recorded that many lives were saved because of the presence of the nurses in the unit at this time.

In November the nurses for the 2/2nd C.C.S., still under Sister V. Paterson, also arrived. This unit was established on a rubber plantation at Koitaki, the operating theatre in the planter's home and the rest of the unit under canvas. One of the nurses, M. A. Marshall, had a terrifying experience. While she was working in a ward at night a rat ran up the leg of her boiler suit; the patients tried frantically but unavailingly to help her, and it scurried several times round her body before finally jumping out through the neck of her suit. This underlined the necessity for wearing gaiters. Stray cows were less sinister visitors. One wandered into a nurse's tent and breathed into a box of powder on an improvised dressing table and another into the ablution tent, where it tramped tooth brushes and the like into the earth.

On 2nd November the 25th Brigade entered Kokoda, while the 16th pressed on to Oivi. The Australians succeeded in cutting the track at Gorari behind the Japanese, who broke and retreated to their bases at Gona and Sanananda and Buna on the north coast. Each of these strongholds was bitterly defended, and heavy losses were sustained by both sides before the last of them, Sanananda, fell in the third week of January 1943.

Once the coastal campaign began the medical holding units at Moresby could not expand quickly enough to cope with the inflow. The 600-bed 2/9th A.G.H. was expanded first to an 800-bed and later to a 1,200-bed hospital. With admissions sometimes at the rate of 200 a day, even this was not enough, and by Christmas Day 1942 the hospital had 2,000 patients, still with the establishment of A.A.N.S. for a 600-bed hospital. When no more beds were available, men had to be nursed on stretchers under the beds. In addition to the troops, patients included some sick nuns from a mission at Yule Island.

The hospital situation eased at the beginning of 1943 with the establishment of the 46th Camp Hospital and the arrival of the 2/5th A.G.H. The camp hospital was set up under Matron M. M. Mullane at King's Hollow, five or six miles beyond the 2/9th A.G.H. over Hellfire Pass. It was the only hospital in the Moresby area to have the services of native boys. The latter, wearing white ramis with a red cross, did the nurses' laundry and worked in their mess. This was elegantly furnished. It had an iced water fountain, previously to be seen at the Moresby hotel, and odds and ends of lounge furniture rescued from deserted civilian homes. The 2/5th A.G.H. under Matron J. L. Cook was set up near Bootless Inlet, at first in tented and later in huttered wards. Eight months later it was followed by the 2/1st A.G.H., whose nurses under Matron M. E. Hurley worked with the 2/5th A.G.H. until their own hospital had been com-
completed. They arrived in Moresby on 8th September 1943, the day after a Liberator bomber had crashed into a company of the 2/33rd Battalion which was waiting to emplane for the forward area, and they worked without respite for many hours treating men injured in this tragic accident.

The first months in New Guinea were a strain on the nurses' physical and mental endurance. The work was hard and unremitting, and, when they did get an opportunity for rest, they went to tents which, more often than not, were leaking. On moonlight nights air raids were common, and on one occasion a bomb fell in the hospital area, fortunately without causing any casualties. Apart from swimming and picnics, they had few facilities for relaxation. Later a club was established for them, also a rest camp. The latter, which was at Rouna Falls, was found to be in a scrub typhus area, but only after two nurses and some of the medical staff had contracted the disease. It was then closed.

They were compensated for these hardships, however, by the appreciation of their patients. A medical officer later wrote:

"The nurses in New Guinea are wonderful" were the opening lines in many a sick boy's letter home and, if anything, this was an understatement. The conditions in the early days were bad enough for men, but were indescribably worse for women. They had arrived at the beginning of the wet season. Properly made paths and drains were few and the mud was ankle-deep, so that they had to wear high gumboots whenever they ventured outside their tents or wards. The terrible rush of work day after day, the rough conditions, the discomfort, the irregular meals and lost sleep all combined to tax their powers of endurance to the utmost, but they fought on and eventually pulled through until they reached the quieter times that followed in a few months.

The effect their presence had on the morale of the patients was unbelievable to those who were not there to see it. No orderly, however gentle, could make our lads well as quickly as these brave girls. The tired sick boys knew that here was someone who would care for them, shoulder their burdens and share their troubles.7

The A.A.N.S. also served in the transports which brought troops to New Guinea. Early in 1943 three sea ambulance units were raised for employment on these ships, and two members of the A.A.N.S. were appointed to each unit.

The Japanese, frustrated in their drive against Moresby, in January 1943 dispatched a force to capture the airfield at Wau. The airfield was held but only by reason of the arrival by air of reinforcements who actually landed in the face of small-arms fire. In April operations in the Wau-Salamaua area were assigned to the 3rd Division, and later to the 5th Division which succeeded in capturing Salamaua on the 11th September.

The capture of Salamaua was part of a wider offensive which aimed to expel the Japanese from the whole of the Huon Peninsula from Lae to Madang. On the 16th September Lae fell to converging thrusts from the 9th Division, which had landed on a beach to the east of the town, and from the 7th Division, which had been brought by air to Nadzab. On

7 Captain B. Robinson, Record of Service (1944), pp. 122-3.
the 2nd October Finschhafen also fell, and, after wiping out commanding
Japanese positions at Sattelberg the 9th Division continued to advance
along the coast. An American force, which by-passed the retreating
Japanese, made a landing at Saidor, where it was joined by the Australians
in February 1944.

Meanwhile the 7th Division advanced from Nadzab up the Markham
and Ramu Valleys and after a bitterly contested action drove the Japanese
from the heights of Shaggy Ridge. In April the headquarters of the 11th
Division took over direction of these operations from the 7th Division.
Its leading troops, accompanied by troops of the 5th Division advancing
along the coast, entered Madang on the 24th. Two days later Alexishafen
was captured.

Holding units for the Huon Peninsula campaigns were the 2/7th, 2/8th
and 2/11th A.G.H's and the 2/2nd, 2/3rd, 106th and 111th C.C.S's.
The 2/11th A.G.H. had been established in the Buna Sub-Base
Area in July 1943 to act as a transit hospital for casualties from the
7th and 9th Divisions. Nurses, under Matron O. A. Kestel, began to join
the unit in September, being flown up from Queensland where they had
been stationed since returning from the Middle East in March 1942.
They found that because of the danger of air raids the hospital had not
been concentrated in one spot: in fact, the wards were so scattered that
Miss Kestel had to make her rounds on a bicycle of ancient vintage
brought to the area by the Japanese. On an average there were 2,000
men in hospital, and during the first six weeks at Buna none of the
nurses had a day off. Convoys of sick and wounded were coming in
continuously, mostly from Finschhafen. Many patients had taken two or
three days to reach hospital, travelling by barge and plane, and were
exhausted. Among them were men with scrub typhus, who were extremely
ill and in need of constant nursing.

In November 1943 the 2/8th A.G.H. was set up near by with Miss
M. A. Tisdall as matron. For the first weeks all nursing was done by
A.A.M.W.S., but in December the unit’s nurses arrived. By now the
number of hospital admissions in the area was decreasing, but there were
still many cases of malaria and skin disease and some scrub typhus.

Conditions were not easy for the nurses in the Buna Sub-Base Area.
They suffered to some extent from tropical illness; they worked very hard,
and air raids provided a disturbing accompaniment. The presence of an
American negro battalion in the area was another menace. The negroes
had attacked some of their own nurses, and they made several raids on
the quarters of the A.A.N.S., fortunately without success. On the other
side of the picture, the nurses had pleasant living quarters and an attrac-
tive mess, decorated with tropical ferns and flowers and set in a coconut
grove where there had once been an old native village. Concert parties
came up to entertain them, and as well as going to the films they could
dance and swim. There were also horse races at Soputa. The horses had
been left behind by the Japanese, and anyone enterprising enough to
acquire one could enter it in the races. The horses thrived on a diet of
dehydrated carrots—which they seemed to enjoy more than the nurses did—kunai grass, army biscuits and rice. At the races the riders wore proper jockey silks, a tote operated, and the crowds were large and cheerful and, unlike other race crowds, not at all captious. Towards the end of the campaign the nurses were able to retreat to a rest station at Popondetta.

A light section of the 2/3rd C.C.S. had provided medical support for the landing at Lae. When this unit moved out it was succeeded by the 106th C.C.S. with its nurses attached. During the last three months of 1943 this C.C.S. bore a heavy burden, the number of its patients at one stage reaching 1,100. In February 1944 when the pace had begun to slacken it was relieved by the 2/7th A.G.H. whose nurses, under Matron E. F. Johns, arrived soon after. This hospital, its wards tented, was situated on the bank of the Busu River. There was no separate native hospital and the nurses also cared for native patients, and on one occasion for a ward full of Sikhs, who had been rescued by the navy from an island where the Japanese had left them to die. At Lae the nurses’ quarters and mess were native huts with palm leaf roofs.

After Finschhafen was taken the 2/3rd C.C.S. set up at Simbang. Large numbers of casualties began to come in once the battle for Sattelberg was joined, and the nurses, who had been detached to the 2/1st A.G.H., were very much missed. Early in January the unit moved to Heldsbach, where the 2/2nd C.C.S. was already operating, but without its nurses. The 2/3rd C.C.S. nurses, now under Sister J. M. Langham, rejoined their unit on 22nd January, and in March when the unit left for the mainland joined the relieving C.C.S., the 106th.

The first medical holding unit assigned to Madang, the 111th C.C.S., arrived in June 1944, and next month Sister E. M. Moriarty and its other nurses, who had been detached during the previous twelve months while the unit was serving at Nadzab, also arrived. In August the C.C.S. moved to Alexishafen, being relieved at Madang by the 2/11th A.G.H. The 2/11th nurses after staging at Lae were called forward to Madang on 15th August, and remained there until December, working with the 111th C.C.S. when their own unit closed in September.

After their return to Australia from the Middle East the nurses of this unit had started to give concerts and card parties for the Red Cross, and they continued the practice in New Guinea. At Madang they staged a concert before a large and appreciative audience, the pièce de résistance on the program being the ballet Les Sylphides. Their efforts succeeded in raising about £4,000.

Meanwhile at Alexishafen nurses of the 111th C.C.S. were kept busy. During the advance along the coast cases of scrub typhus had occurred in alarming numbers, and a building of the old mission had been converted into wards to receive them. Throughout the island campaigns the services of the nurses were particularly valuable where there were large numbers of cases of scrub typhus. Patients with this disease required constant attention, and before the arrival of the nurses in New Guinea a
high percentage had died. Very often a nurse after being on duty all day would continue to work throughout the night, as she knew that the night sister could not give the scrub typhus cases the necessary attention and also perform her normal tasks in the ward. This devotion to duty was repaid by a steep decline in the mortality rate.

*Bougainville.* Late in 1944 the II Australian Corps was concentrated at Torokina, Bougainville, to release American troops for MacArthur's projected advance on the Philippines. The task of the corps was to attack the Japanese in three sectors, in the central sector which ran from Torokina to the opposite coast, in the north where the Japanese were to be driven into the narrow Bonis Peninsula, and in the south, an area containing rich native gardens and also strong enemy concentrations. By the time the war ended the Australians had made considerable advances on all three fronts.

The holding units assigned to the operations were the 2/1st A.G.H. and the 106th and the 109th C.C.S's. The 2/1st A.G.H. set itself up at Torokina, where its nurses provided some unexpected comforts for their patients. At the instigation of Matron Hurley, the Red Cross flew up 100 fowls, and the nurses regularly distributed eggs to the sick. They were proud of their egg run, and vigilantly guarded their fowls against possible raids. After a struggle they also managed to bring up an ice-cream machine, which provided ice-cream for 600 patients each day.

The nurses tried to solve their laundering problems by teaching the native girls to wash and iron, an ambitious project as none of their pupils had previously seen an electric iron. After a day's tuition the girls would remove their Mother Hubbards and set off into the jungle in their grass skirts, over which they would sometimes tastefully pull a pair of worn-out step-ins, salvaged from the garbage.

The 109th C.C.S. was situated 30 miles south of Torokina at Motupena Point. Its eight nurses under Sister E. I. Uren treated patients—Australian Army, Papuan native infantry and Japanese prisoners of war—who came in ambulance convoys from the field ambulance a few miles up the line. At first the clearing station's only transport link was a motor launch by which its patients were evacuated to the hospital, but later a road was made through the jungle. The sisters' lines were surrounded by a 15-foot barbed wire fence; troops maintained a 24-hour patrol outside, and the sister on night duty always had an armed escort. Once four of the C.C.S. nurses approached even closer to the front line. They travelled by jeep to inspect the field ambulance which was only 2,000 yards from the Hongorai River, where heavy fighting was in progress. A contrasting experience for the C.C.S. nurses was a visit by H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester.

*New Britain.* In New Britain American forces had landed at Cape Gloucester and Arawe on the west coast in December 1943. They were relieved by the 5th Australian Division in October 1944. Advancing eastward the Australians made contact with a strong Japanese force at Waita-
volo, and after heavy fighting succeeded in occupying the position in March.

The 105th C.C.S. had landed at Jacquinot Bay in January 1945, and next month its nurses arrived. During March the C.C.S. held as many as 290 patients, many of whom were battle casualties. The 2/8th A.G.H., its nurses now under Matron M. O. Wheeler, opened at Jacquinot Bay in March. By that time, however, the war was drawing to its close, and the work at the hospital was only of a routine nature.

After the first hectic month the nurses enjoyed Jacquinot Bay. Their quarters were good, the climate was agreeable and their work no longer too arduous. A pleasant interlude was the arrival of Gracie Fields who flew in to entertain service people in the area.

After the Japanese capitulated on the 15th August the 105th C.C.S. was sent to Rabaul to take care of the recovered prisoners of war, most of whom were suffering from the effects of Japanese ill-treatment and neglect.

**Aitape-Wewak.** In April 1944 the Americans made a successful landing at Aitape, and from September to November the 6th Australian Division took over from them in the area. The chief objective of the division was the capture of Wewak, which was to be encompassed by a two-pronged advance, the 17th Brigade clearing the Japanese from positions in the Torricelli-Sepik area, while the 19th and 16th Brigades pressed towards their objective along the coast. Wewak was taken on 11th May; the 19th Brigade continued its eastward advance as far as Brandi Plantation, and then turned southward in the direction of the Prince Alexander Range. In the inland sector the 17th Brigade after expelling the Japanese from successive villages captured Maprik in April and Yamil in the following month. When the Japanese surrendered the two prongs of the advance were separated by only 16 miles.

In November the nurses of the 104th C.C.S. under Sister N. G. Luke landed at Aitape with their unit, which was ready to admit patients by the end of the month. The 2/11th A.G.H. opened on 1st January 1945 and its nurses began to arrive soon afterwards.

During the Aitape-Wewak campaign the nurses both at the hospital and the C.C.S. had to cope with a terrific rush of work. Battle casualties were heavy; there was a high incidence of skin diseases and finally a devastating outbreak of malaria. At the C.C.S. embarrassment was caused by a breakdown in the system of medical air evacuation. This was particularly serious as numbers of psychiatric patients had to be held; there were no proper facilities for dealing with them, and on occasions they represented a physical menace to the nurses.

During December and January there were heavy rains, and the Aitape River rose to a dangerous level. The hospital was situated on one of its banks and the nurses' lines were completely flooded, one nurse awaking to find fishes swimming under her stretcher. The C.C.S. suffered too. It was situated on the flat, and in one ward all the beds were standing in water,
As the Australians advanced towards Wewak the C.C.S. was moved to But. The nurses did not accompany it, and were very much missed. They were detached to the hospital, and did not rejoin their own unit until it had moved to Cape Worn near Wewak.

**Morotai and Borneo.** As American forces pressed on towards the Philippines and Japan the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions were allotted the task of invading Borneo. The plan of attack involved the capture of three bases, which in addition to their strategic importance, possessed valuable oil refineries. They were Tarakan Island, Brunei Bay-Labuan Island, and Balikpapan. The springboard for the invasion was to be Morotai Island in the Moluccas, which had been occupied by the Americans in September 1944. The Australian landings met with fierce resistance, but when fighting ceased in August 1945 the Japanese defence had collapsed on all three fronts.

The Australian Army Nursing Service's part in the Borneo campaign was played to a great extent at Morotai to which many of the men requiring hospitalisation were evacuated. The medical holding units allocated to the campaign were the 66th Camp Hospital, the 2/4th, 2/5th, 2/6th, 2/9th and 2/12th A.G.H's and the 2/1st, 2/2nd, 2/3rd and 110th C.C.S's.

The 66th Camp Hospital was the first of these units to become operational. The Sister-in-Charge, Sister E. M. Mounsey, and five nurses arrived at Morotai in January 1945, and they were followed in mid-April by the Principal Matron, Advanced L.H.Q., Matron E. J. Bowe and nurses of the 2/5th under Matron Cook and of the 110th C.C.S. under Sister B. M. Millard.

The Tarakan landing took place on 1st May. The nurses of the 110th C.C.S., which supported the landing, were detached to the 2/5th A.G.H. at Morotai, which began to receive casualties of the battle on the 4th. The next day the hospital ship *Wanganella* arrived at Morotai, bringing up the 2/9th A.G.H., whose matron was now Miss H. Croll, and afacio-maxillary and plastic unit whose nurses joined the 2/5th A.G.H., where they were to work. The 2/4th A.G.H. with Miss J. Hanna as matron and the 2/1st and 2/3rd C.C.S's arrived at the same time but these units were only staging at Morotai.

On 10th June simultaneous landings were made at Brunei Bay and Labuan Island. The 2/1st C.C.S. came ashore at Labuan on the day of the landing, and two weeks later its nurses arrived by air from Morotai. Because of the volume of work at the C.C.S. it was a relief when the 2/4th A.G.H. with its nurses arrived at the beginning of July. The hospital opened to receive patients on the 16th. The 2/6th A.G.H. after staging at Morotai also arrived at Labuan in July.

On 1st July the final Borneo landing was made at Balikpapan. The 2/2nd C.C.S. landed on the 7th, and the 2/3rd C.C.S. a week later. The 2/12th A.G.H. arrived on the 14th. Towards the end of the month all the units were joined by their nurses.
The conditions which faced the nurses during the early days on Morotai were difficult. It was the wet season when they arrived, and there were no roads, only slush, underfoot. The whole of the 2/5th A.G.H., apart from the kitchen, was tented. Most of the wards were set up under coconut palms which, although picturesque, did not provide the expected protection from the heat. The operating theatre, with walls formed by hanging up four sheets dipped in disinfectant, was lit by a shadow lamp, and the operating table was set on a few feet of concrete; water for sterilising instruments was heated by primuses. The nurses' tents were erected close to the beach, and because of drainage difficulties were frequently flooded. It was not unusual for them to find, on returning from a day's work in the hospital, that their stretchers were kept out of the water only by jam tins which someone had set under the legs, and some adroitness was then required to remove gumboots and crawl under mosquito nets without tumbling into the water. Uniforms were washed in salt water and, as there were no irons, pressed with books or other heavy objects.

After the first weeks, however, living conditions were improved, and Morotai began to present to them the atmosphere of a typical tropical isle—waving palms, white beaches, and coral gardens among which colourful tropical fish flashed and darted. When the 2/9th A.G.H. arrived it was set up on the harbour side of the peninsula. The site was properly drained, and was more pleasant than that of the 2/5th, although separated from it only by the main road. Special mess halls were built for the nurses of the two hospitals. These were large huts, open at the sides. Baskets filled with ferns and orchids decorated the upright posts supporting the roof, and brightly painted deck chairs added further colour. There was a dance floor in each, and the 2/5th A.G.H. had a piano which they had brought with them from Eritrea. Later an open-air theatre was set up on the beach front.

When Japan surrendered on 15th August the nurses at Morotai and Labuan had the task of caring for returning prisoners of war. Most of these men were in a shocking condition, and required careful nursing to fit them for the long journey home. Nutrition was a problem; special food was flown up, and the diet of the prisoners, after so many years of malnutrition, required careful supervision. Medical investigation of prisoners—dental, X-ray and pathological—was begun on Morotai.

At the end of August 24 nurses from army hospitals at Morotai and Borneo were attached to an American medical corps unit in Manila. They worked for approximately six weeks in R.A.P's in conjunction with the American medical corps, which was responsible for the reception of British troops who had been prisoners of war.

There was some question, particularly during the island campaigns, whether nurses should be included in the war establishments of casualty clearing stations. A problem was created by their detachment, sometimes for long periods, while their units were in forward areas. At a time when action casualties were pouring in the whole burden of nursing in the wards
and in the theatre usually fell on the male orderlies, and, because of the inclusion of nurses in the war establishment, the orderlies were not always sufficiently numerous or sufficiently experienced to cope. When the military position allowed the nurses rejoined their units, and they invariably insisted on maintaining their own high standard of nursing procedure. This caused some resentment among the orderlies who had been getting along to their own satisfaction. For these reasons Lieut-Colonel J. H. Stubbe of the 2/2nd C.C.S. recommended that the war establishment of casualty clearing stations be reorganised to include male personnel only. This was never done because it was realised that the value of the nurses' work far outweighed any inconvenience caused by their temporary detachment, or in isolated cases, by the friction to which their presence gave rise within the units.

Demobilisation began with the cessation of hostilities in Europe, but was very gradual. A prisoner-of-war reception group was established in the south of England to take care of prisoners of war from Europe, and five Australian nurses had been attached to this unit in April 1945. They remained with the unit for about two months.

In Australia it was arranged that all medical units would transfer their patients as rapidly as possible to the base military hospital in each State, these base hospitals to be taken over by the Repatriation Department and staffed by civilians. The department, however, experienced difficulty in finding the necessary staff, and in some States members of the A.A.N.S. carried on until 1949.

Nearly six years of war had made great physical, mental and emotional demands on nurses. After demobilisation some of them were unfit to return to their particular pre-war job and for others any nursing at all was impossible. All nurses were eligible for rehabilitation benefits as prescribed for members of the Women’s Services, and special post-graduate courses were provided for them in such subjects as midwifery and infant welfare.

The number of the A.A.N.S. who served between 1939 and 1947 was 3,477. The States contributed to this total as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deaths due to enemy action totalled 53:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaya</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/1 A.H.S. Manunda</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3 A.H.S. Centaur</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifty-five members of the Service received decorations and 82 were mentioned in despatches:

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8In the First World War the total number of nurses who served was 2,692, of whom 2,269 served abroad. Twenty-one died overseas, and 385 were decorated for their services. The decorations received included 1 CBE, 1 OBE, 42 RRC, 138 ARRC and 23 foreign decorations.
In 1948 the title “Royal” was granted to the nursing service in recognition of its work in the two World Wars, and in the same year the army decided to include the Royal Australian Army Nursing Service within its establishment. In 1951 the Service was designated a corps, becoming the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps.

**APPENDIX**

*Australian Army Medical Units Operating Within Australia*

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

Casualty Clearing Stations
- 7th, Greta
- 11th, Gunnedah

Hospitals
Base (or military)
- 113th, Concord

Camp
- 11th, Cowra
- 12th, Showground, Sydney
- 13th, Dubbo
- 14th, Hay
- 16th, Ingleburn
- 17th, Liverpool
- 18th, Narellan
- 54th, Wagga Wagga
- 68th, Ingleburn
- 72nd, Ingleburn, Bellevue Hill, Wallgrove
- 77th, Tenterfield

General
- 2/5th, Armidale
- 102nd, Tamworth
- 103rd, Baulkham Hills
- 104th, Bathurst
- 114th, Goulburn

Women’s
- 3rd, Concord

**NORTHERN TERRITORY**

Hospitals
Camp
- 42nd, Mataranka
- 45th, Larrimah
- 55th, Tennant Creek
- 65th, Pine Creek
THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY NURSING SERVICE

General
101st, Katherine, Northfield, S.A.
107th, Adelaide River, Darley, Vic
109th, Alice Springs
119th, Darwin, Berrimah, Adelaide River
121st, Katherine
129th, Darwin

QUEENSLAND
Casualty Clearing Stations
2nd, Woodford
6th, Haughton Valley, Ipswich
Hospitals
Base
112th, Greenslopes
Camp
1st, Horn Island
2nd, Chermside
3rd, Enoggera
4th, Exhibition Building, Brisbane
5th, Cairns, Stony Creek
6th, Torres Strait
7th, Redbank
8th, Warwick
10th, Cooparoo
22nd, Canungra
47th, Goondiwindi
67th, Warwick
74th, Mount Isa, Whyalla, S.A.

General
2/2nd, Watten Siding, Atherton Tableland
2/4th, Redbank
2/6th, Atherton Tableland
2/11th, Warwick
2/14th, Charters Towers, Townsville
116th, Townsville, Charters Towers, Cairns
117th, Toowoomba

Orthopaedic
1st, Toowoomba, Frankston, Vic

Women's
2nd, Redbank

SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Hospitals
Base
105th, Daws Road
Camp
32nd, Woodside
33rd, Terowie
34th, Loveday
35th, Warradale
52nd, Wayville
59th, Largs Bay
74th, Whyalla, Mount Isa, Qld

General
101st, Northfield, Katherine, N.T.
121st, Northfield, Katherine, N.T.
TASMANIA
Hospitals
Base
111th, Campbell Town
Camp
41st, Campbell Town
56th, Cowan, Lytton
80th, Brighton

VICTORIA
Hospitals
Base
115th, Heidelberg
Camp
19th, Bendigo
20th, Broadmeadows
21st, Dandenong
23rd, Geelong
26th, Royal Park
27th, Seymour
28th, Tatura, Warranga
29th, Darley
30th, Ballarat
48th, Watsonia
49th, Wangaratta
50th, Balcombe
58th, Queenscliff
62nd, Portsea
73rd, Caulfield, Fisherman's Bend, Ivanhoe
86th, Puckapunyal
General
106th, Bonegilla
107th, Darley, Adelaide River, N.T.
108th, Ballarat
Orthopaedic
1st, Frankston, Toowoomba, Qld

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Casualty Clearing Stations
4th, Moora
8th, Mullewa
Hospitals
Base
110th, Hollywood
Camp
37th, Melville
38th, Northam
39th, Rottnest
40th, Narrogin
53rd, Narrogin
60th, Claremont
75th, Claremont
General
2/1st, Guildford and Merredin
118th, Northam
125th, Guildford
Women's
1st, Claremont