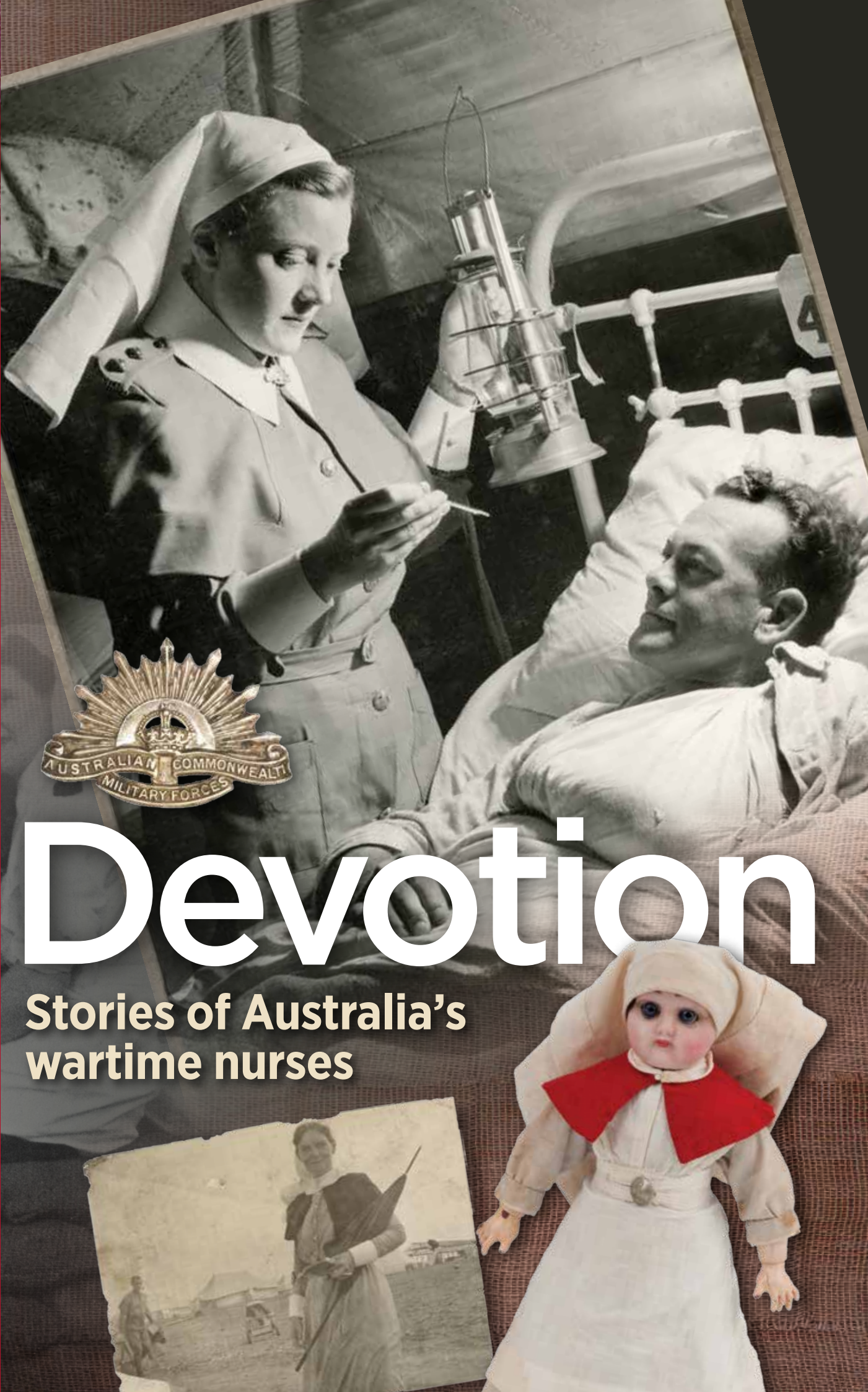




CENTURY OF SERVICE



# Devotion

Stories of Australia's wartime nurses





**Some of the stories in this collection relate to material from the Australian War Memorial's special exhibition *Nurses: from Zululand to Afghanistan*. This theme has been explored in depth in an online resource for teachers, with classroom activities for students, which is available at [www.awm.gov.au/education/resources/nurses/](http://www.awm.gov.au/education/resources/nurses/)**

*Devotion: stories of Australia's wartime nurses*

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**AUSTRALIAN  
WAR MEMORIAL**





AWM ART90410.001

In the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, there are 15 stained-glass windows. Each shows a figure dressed in military uniform, and under each figure is a word which describes a quality displayed by Australians during wartime. One window features a nurse. She represents all military nurses who have shown dedication to their patients and a commitment to caring for the sick and wounded during wartime.

This window bears the word *Devotion*.

# Devotion

**Stories of Australia's  
wartime nurses**

**Written by Robyn Siers**





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## Note to the reader:

Most of these stories take place during wartime. You may feel sad after reading some of them. Teachers may wish to be sensitive to those students who have parents serving overseas in war zones.





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# Introduction

Australian nurses have been going to war for more than 100 years. Often serving far from home, they care for the sick and wounded on land and sea, and in the air. Their skills save lives.

Military nurses often work in remote and dangerous places, under difficult conditions. Such service does not come without a cost. Some nurses have not returned home, losing their lives to sickness or at the hands of the enemy. For all, the memories of spending many hours with wounded or dying patients are hard to forget.

After her experiences caring for seriously ill soldiers in the Crimean War in the 1850s, British nurse Florence Nightingale introduced strict new practices of cleanliness, hospital organisation, and nurse training in Britain. Her ideas spread to Australia, and nursing became a respected career, undertaken by disciplined, hard-working women. Their commitment to caring for others led many to volunteer their service in the military during wartime. Now both men and women can serve as nursing officers in the Australian Defence Force.

Reading these stories, you will discover some of the qualities shared by Australian military nurses: a spirit of adventure, a desire to use their skills to make a difference, and the discipline required to work in a military team. After more than a century, service nurses remain devoted to putting their patients first, come what may.



AWM 000407

AWM REL25570

AWM REL39961





# A pioneer of the profession: Matron Nellie Gould

When Sydney nurses Nellie Gould, Penelope Frater and Julia Bligh Johnston arrived in South Africa in February 1900, they encountered a dreadful state of affairs: contaminated water, widespread disease, and inadequate supplies in makeshift, dirty hospitals. Sometimes they were not made to feel very welcome by the British nurses in the hospitals where they were stationed, and the male **orderlies** did not always like taking directions from women.

Ellen Julia “Nellie” Gould was born in Wales in 1860, and began her working life as a teacher in England. After moving to Australia when she was 24, she settled in Sydney and began her nursing training. She worked in a number of hospitals, and also used her teaching skills to train other nurses. In 1899, with 14 years of nursing experience behind her, Nellie was invited to be the first Lady Superintendent of the New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve (NSWANSR). She personally chose 13 of its members to travel with her to South Africa during the **Boer War**.

The nurses had expected to care for men wounded in battle, but much of their time was taken up caring for the sick, particularly **typhoid** patients. The work was hard, and the days long and tiring. Many patients died. At one hospital, Nellie wrote that “thirty-one graves marked our short stay of three months”.

Dressed in heavy long grey skirts, starched white collars and cuffs and distinctive red capes, the nurses were often down on hands and knees, scrubbing floors and walls to transform filthy buildings into hospitals. In her report from their time spent at Kroonstad, Nellie wrote, “Here we nursed with No. 3 British General Hospital in a large Dutch church ... at night rats scampered over us. One tin of **condensed milk** had to do nine of us for a month, but who cared?”

New South Wales nurses with **souvenirs** of their time in South Africa: (left to right) **Matron** Nellie Gould with her leather **chatelaine** containing tools of the trade, **Sister** Penelope Frater with her Queen Victoria chocolate tin, Sister Julia Bligh Johnston with a leather **sjambok** and Buller the dog.

AWM A03962







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# THE BOER WAR FAST FACTS

The Boer War began in South Africa in 1899 and lasted for almost three years.

Around 16,000 Australian soldiers were sent to assist the forces of the British **empire**.

The New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve, formed in 1899, was the first Australian military nursing organisation.

Around 60 nurses from various Australian colonies served in this war. Some were paid by the government; others were privately sponsored or paid their own way.

Sister Fanny Hines from Victoria died in South Africa. She was the first Australian military nurse to die during overseas service.

By the end of the war, the six Australian colonies had **federated** to become one nation, the Commonwealth of Australia.



To celebrate the new year, Queen Victoria sent a gift tin of chocolates to the troops and nurses of the Empire serving in South Africa in 1900. The message printed on the top reads, 'I wish you a happy New Year, Victoria R'.

**How would you feel if you received a present from the Queen?**

AWM REL23561



This ward in a South African hospital has a bare dirt floor.

**How have the nurses tried to brighten up the ward for their patients? Why do you think they did that?**

AWM P04544.011





Boer War 1899–1902



First World War 1914–1918



Second World War 1939–1945



Crowds farewell the steamship SS *Moravian* as it leaves Sydney Harbour on 17 January 1900, bound for South Africa. The New South Wales nurses were among the passengers on board.

**How might the nurses have passed the time on their six-week voyage to South Africa?**

AWM P02292.012

After her return to Sydney in 1902, Nellie continued to be involved in the education of nurses, and the work of the army nursing service. When war broke out in 1914, even though she was 54, Nellie enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). She served as a matron, first in Egypt, and then in France and England, and was awarded the Royal Red Cross in 1916 for her service to nursing.

These first nurses faced the dangers and demands of wartime nursing, and willingly took on new roles and responsibilities. Nellie Gould's dedication and contribution to military medical service paved the way for thousands of nurses to follow in the years ahead.

### DID YOU KNOW?



Like most working women of the time, military nurses had to be unmarried. They were mostly aged between 25 and 40, and were well-educated, having trained for at least three years to become a qualified nurse. Because their pay was small, the nurses were often supported by their families as well.

**Why do you think the nurses had to be unmarried?**

Nurses accompanied the 3rd Victorian Bushmen's Contingent to South Africa in March 1900: (front row, left to right) Sisters Fanny Hines, Julia Anderson, Marianne Rawson, Ellen Walter and Annie Thomson. Julia Anderson later wrote of Fanny Hines' death on 7 August 1900:

*She died of an attack of pneumonia contracted in devotion to duty. She was quite alone, with as many as twenty-six patients at one time, no possibility of assistance, or relief and without sufficient nourishment.*

AWM P04544.003







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

## The Royal Red Cross: “Faith, hope, and charity”



The Royal Red Cross was introduced by Queen Victoria on 27 April 1883, “for zeal and devotion in nursing sick and wounded sailors, soldiers, and others with the army in the field, on board ships or in hospitals”. It was the first British military award intended just for women.

Men became eligible for the award in 1976, although none has received it.

More than 80 Royal Red Crosses have been awarded to Australian nurses.

AWM REL29121

Matron Gould was devoted to the job of nursing. More than 100 years ago, she described how she felt about her job:

*No one who has experienced the satisfaction that arises from work of this nature ever cares to go back to the dull routine of earning her living in any other of the spheres at present open to women.*

**How would you re-phrase her words to make them sound “modern”?**



After nursing for many hours in difficult conditions, Sisters Marianne Rawson (left) and Annie Thomson take time for a cup of tea and a chat. Marianne was awarded the Royal Red Cross in June 1902 for her outstanding work and courage in the care of patients.

**What do you think they might have been discussing?**

AWM P04544.012







# Beginning in Egypt: Sister Nellie Morrice

Talk around the Morrice family dinner table could be quite lively. Parents David and Sarah and children Emma, Mary, Arthur, Ethel, Muriel, Frank, Nellie, Linda, John, Wilson, and David lived on “Ealing”, a sheep property in the southern highlands of New South Wales. Nellie, the seventh of the 11 children, trained as a nurse in Sydney. She joined the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in 1910, and at the outbreak of the First World War she enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at the age of 33. Four of her brothers also joined up.

Arriving in Cairo in January 1915, Nellie was attached to No. 2 Australian General Hospital (2AGH), set up in Mena House, which had previously been a hunting lodge used by the royal family. Egypt was an exotic and interesting place, but thoughts of home and her close-knit family were never far from her mind. In one of her many letters home to ‘Mumsie’, she wrote: “I get a big ache to go back to Australia some times, but I’m here for a while yet.”

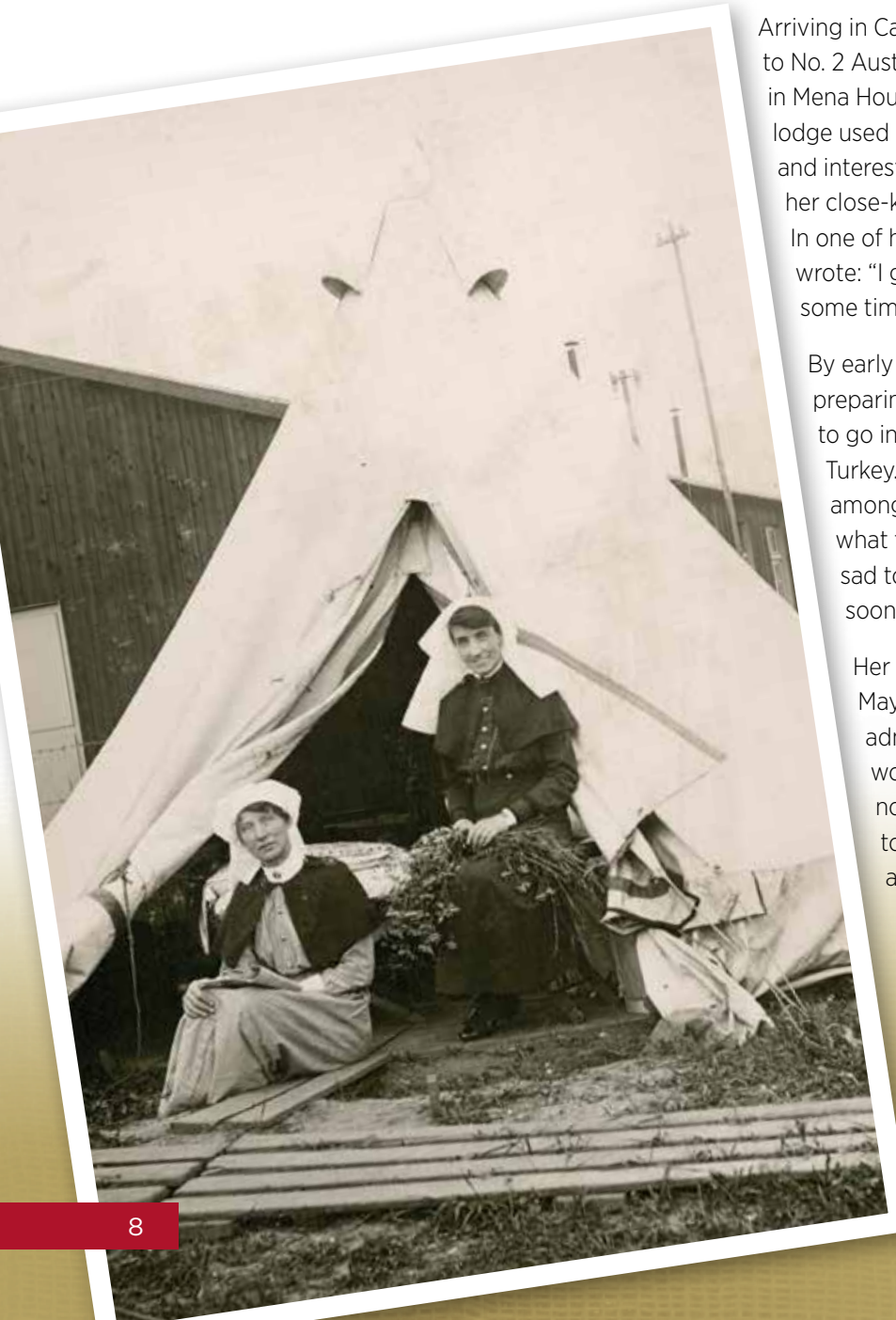
By early April, thousands of soldiers were preparing to leave the training camps in Egypt to go into action on the **Gallipoli** peninsula in Turkey. While this news caused much excitement among the troops, Nellie was worried about what the future might hold: “It made me feel sad to see them go and know that they will soon be under fire.”

Her worst fears were confirmed when, in early May, her brother, Private Arthur Morrice, was admitted to 2AGH, after being seriously wounded on Gallipoli. In his diary, Arthur noted that his sister Nellie “brought me tobacco and a toothbrush. I am well looked after.”

Sister Morrice (right) with her friend Sister Eleanor Jeffries outside their tent at 3AGH in Abbeville, France, in 1917. Despite the mud and mess around them, the nurses have found some flowers to pick.

**What do you think they would have done with them?**

AWM H16063







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# THE FIRST WORLD WAR FAST FACTS

The Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) was formed in July 1903 as part of the Australian Army Medical Corps. More than 2,000 of its members served overseas during the First World War.

Australian nurses also worked with other organisations, such as the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, the **Red Cross**, or privately funded facilities.

Nurses worked in hospitals, on hospital ships and trains, or in **casualty clearing stations** closer to the **front line**. They served

in locations from Britain to India, including France and Belgium, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

In early 1916 AANS nurses were given **officer** status and badges of **rank**, although they were only paid around half what their male equivalents received.

Many nurses were given awards, with eight receiving the **Military Medal** for bravery.

Twenty-five died during their service.

The adventure begins for a group of Australian nurses departing from Melbourne in the troopship **HMAT Euripides**, May 1916. On the long sea voyage, the women were kept busy assisting with vaccinations and operations, and training male orderlies.

**How do you think the soldiers and nurses were feeling as they left Australia?**

AWM PBO381



Private Arthur Morrice after recuperating at 2AGH in Cairo.

**Can you imagine what it would be like to be in hospital in a palace?**

AWM P10300.001



While in Egypt, Nellie hand-stitched a miniature nurse's uniform for a small porcelain doll and named it 'Sister Helen'. She sent it to her niece Peggy MacInnes back in Australia, accompanied by a short note which read:

A great big 'lub' [love] and lots of kisses

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

To my darling Peg from Auntie Nell

I want you to call the dollie 'Sister Helen', because Mummy always calls Auntie Nell 'Helen'.

AWM REL39961; AWM PR04232





With the increased arrival of patients from Gallipoli, hospital facilities in Egypt were soon overcrowded, and equipment and supplies were inadequate. Nellie wrote home: “We are so tired when we get off duty that we just crawl into bed as soon as we can.”

To cope with the demand, hospitals were set up on the island of Lemnos, much closer to the action on the Gallipoli peninsula. In September, Nellie volunteered to work there. Conditions on the island were harsh, and she described many of the incoming patients as “dishevelled and dirty, looking more like wild men, unshaven, and weeks of dirt and **vermin** on them”.



At the end of 1915, Nellie returned to work in Egypt, before being posted to hospitals in Britain and France. She was awarded the Royal Red Cross 2nd Class for “valuable services with the Armies in France and Flanders” in 1918.

After the war, Sister Morrice continued her devotion to nursing, but with quite a different focus to her wartime service. She was involved for many years in the organisation of the New South Wales Bush Nursing Association, specialising in **midwifery** and the care of babies and young children.

In Egypt, Lake Timsah (also known as Crocodile Lake) provided relief from the intense summer heat for nurses and soldiers alike. Nellie (pictured at left in bathing cap) wrote home to her young niece: “I can swim now, and when I come home will teach you too. The water is so buoyant – we couldn’t sink if we tried.”

AWM PR04232; AWM P10300.007

After the war, Nellie (centre) was welcomed home by her parents.

AWM P10300.013







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today



This beaded purse, made by Turkish prisoners of war, was purchased in Egypt by **Staff Nurse** Elma Lowe as a memento of her time abroad.

AWM REL33244



In their time off in Egypt, nurses engaged in souvenir-hunting or went on excursions to the pyramids. Socialising with officers was also popular. Matron Grace Wilson wrote, "I suppose we did most of the things one is supposed to do in Egypt – sailed in **feluccas** on the Nile, rode donkeys, rode camels across the desert to **Sahhar** [*sic*], watched the moon rise in front of the Sphinx, [and] had our fortunes told in the sand."

AWM PR01870; AWM P00411.001

With increased **casualties** from Gallipoli, 1AGH in Egypt took over a nearby amusement park, turning the scenic railway and skeleton house into wards and the ticket office into an operating theatre. Within three months it was operating as a 1,500-bed hospital.

**Around how many patients can you count in the former skating rink?**

AWM H18510



## DID YOU KNOW?



Like the soldiers of the AIF, members of the **AANS** wore a "rising sun" badge on their uniforms. The nurses' badges were coloured silver, and the men's were made of brass.

AWM REL30251





# Snapshots of Lemnos: Matron Grace Wilson

Queensland nurse Grace Wilson arrived on Lemnos with 3AGH in August 1915. Just days before, she had learned of the death of her brother, Graeme, shot by a Turkish **sniper** on Gallipoli three months earlier. As casualties began to arrive on the island, she was horrified by the lack of equipment and the conditions, with “things just too awful for words”.

***Convoy** arrived, about 400 – no equipment whatever – just laid the men on the ground and gave them a drink. Very many badly shattered ... All we can do is feed them and dress their wounds. The heat and the flies are terrible here. (AWM PR01870)*

Despite their own discomfort and the huge workload, the nurses persevered and within a month were treating more than 900 patients at a time. **Dysentery** was a constant problem, and winter brought men suffering from **frost-bite** and **gangrene**.

Fresh water was always in short supply, so it was hard for the nurses to keep themselves and their clothes clean. Some cut off their long hair to make it easier to care for. As winter approached, the nurses’ uniforms were not warm enough, and Matron Wilson insisted that the army issue them with warm **tunics**, pants and boots. Food for staff and patients was also scarce; sometimes it was just tinned meat and hard biscuits. In her diary Grace recorded: “We all know what it is like to be actually hungry and thirsty.”



Armed with parasol and notebook, Matron Wilson does her rounds of the tent wards at 3AGH on Lemnos.

AWM A05332



In 1929 Grace was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal by the Red Cross. It is the highest international award a nurse can achieve and is given for “exceptional courage and devotion to the wounded, sick or disabled”.

AWM RELAWM31816.014





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

On 5 August, 3AGH was landed on a bare and treeless hillside on the island of Lemnos. The tents and equipment were delayed for three weeks, water was scarce, and there was no **sanitation**.

AWM J01366



On 9 August, Matron Grace Wilson and 80 nurses arrived and were marched into camp, accompanied by bagpipes. More than 150 patients from Gallipoli arrived soon afterwards.

**Why do you think the nurses were marched into camp?**

AWM A04118

With limited water for washing, it was hard to avoid sickness, and even some nurses fell sick on Lemnos. They nicknamed the dysentery “Lemnositis”.

AWM J01455







Leading by example, Grace set about bringing order out of chaos at 3AGH. When she felt the needs of the nurses were being overlooked, she was not afraid to ask the commanding officers for better equipment or for something to be done about the terrible conditions. Sister Frances Selwyn-Smith wrote of Grace's leadership: "At times we could not have carried on without her. She was not only a capable Matron, but what is more, a woman of understanding."

After Gallipoli, Grace returned to Egypt, then went on to Abbeville in France until 1918. For her outstanding service she was awarded the Royal Red Cross in 1916. Grace continued to work as a nurse on her return home after the war, and at the outbreak of the Second World War was appointed as Matron in Chief of the Army Nursing Service.

The tent hospital on Lemnos presented new challenges for the nurses. They had to learn how to mend tears, re-hook walls, and manage **guy ropes**. And they were constantly at the mercy of the weather, with tents regularly blowing over.

AWM J01438







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

## DID YOU KNOW?



Right from the Gallipoli landings on 25 April 1915, nurses cared for hundreds of casualties in the hospital and transport ships anchored off-shore. Despite the constant threat of Turkish shelling or torpedoes, the exhausted nurses cleaned, bandaged, warmed, and comforted their patients, many of whom had terrible wounds or were suffering from the effects of gangrene and disease.

Wards on the lower decks were crowded and poorly ventilated, and seasickness struck down nurses and patients alike.

Wounded soldiers from Gallipoli are transferred from a barge into a hospital ship. These ships were painted white, and clearly marked with green stripes and red crosses.

**How are the patients being loaded on board?**

AWM P01531.007



Staff Nurse Clarice Daley passes through an archway of drawn **bayonets** with her new husband, Sergeant Ernest Lawrence, on Lemnos in October 1915. As a married woman, she was unable to continue nursing, so returned to Australia soon afterwards.

AWM P01360.001







# Courage under fire: Sister Pearl Corkhill

On the **Western Front**, it could take many hours for a wounded man to get from the trench into the care of nurses at a casualty clearing station. Not surprisingly, the sight of a nurse there, in her white apron and veil, was like that of an angel to a wounded soldier.

In June 1918, Sister Pearl Corkhill of New South Wales was temporarily attached to 38th British Casualty Clearing Station (38BCCS) near Abbeville in France. Here the wounded men arrived straight from the battlefield, often cold and wet. Within a few hours hundreds could be admitted for treatment or evacuated to other facilities. The noise of exploding shells could be heard from the battlelines not far away. Casualty clearing stations were considered dangerous places to work.

One night in July, 38BCCS came under attack in an enemy air raid. Pearl was on night duty, and in charge of the hospital. One bomb wrecked the **sterilising** room, and other bombs fell within the camp. Despite the chaos and confusion all around her, Pearl stayed calm and continued to care for her patients. She ignored the warning to take shelter, even though there were enemy aircraft overhead. For her courage and devotion, Pearl was awarded the Military Medal.

In a letter written to her mother soon after, she expressed her surprise that she should be rewarded for doing her duty: "I can't see what I've done to deserve it." She was a little worried about the cost of a new uniform for the medal presentation: "I suppose I should not grumble. I'm still wearing the one I left Australia in and it is about worn out now."

Pearl Corkhill was one of eight Australian nurses to receive this award during the First World War.

AWM PR88/165

Sister Pearl Corkhill worked at various hospitals in Egypt before being posted to France in April 1916. To commemorate the first Anzac Day, on 25 April 1916, she and two other nurses pinned gum leaves to their capes, on which they had written "**Dardanelles 1915**". They also distributed small gifts to their patients.

AWM A04728







Korean War 1950–1953



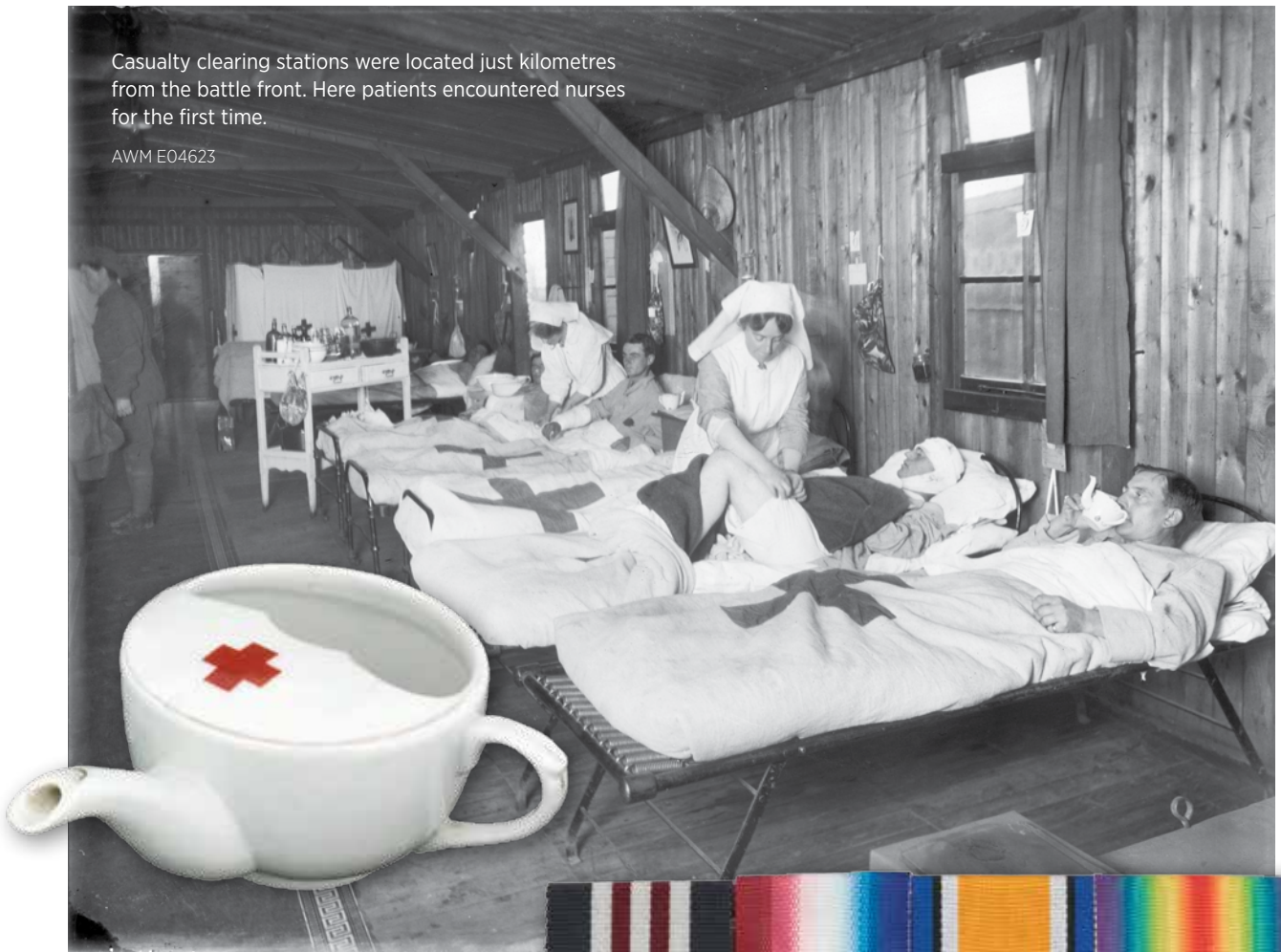
Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

Casualty clearing stations were located just kilometres from the battle front. Here patients encountered nurses for the first time.

AWM E04623



Can you see how this invalid's feeding cup is being used by the patient in the photograph above?

AWM REL35032.001



Sister Corkhill's medals included (left to right) the Military Medal, 1914–15 Star, British War Medal 1914–20, and the Victory Medal.

AWM REL/03142.001–004



Sister Corkhill receives her Military Medal from Lord Foster, the Governor-General of Australia, on 6 June 1924 at Victoria Barracks in Sydney.

AWM P01850.006





Boer War 1899–1902



First World War 1914–1918



Second World War 1939–1945



Laurence Howie, *Interior of ward 3rd Australian General Hospital, Abbeville* (1919, watercolour with pencil on paper, 25.8 x 47.2 cm, AWM ART93081)

For sick or wounded soldiers, the care and comfort the nurses provided was almost as important as their medical treatment. Nurses sometimes found themselves taking on the roles of letter-writer, cook, and even stand-in mother. It was up to the nurses to bring a much needed touch of home. Many soldiers repaid their kindness with gifts, cards, and letters.

## Battlefield evacuation

There were more than 200,000 Australian casualties during the First World War. More than 80 per cent of these occurred on the Western Front, in France and Belgium. A system of transport and treatment was developed to get wounded soldiers the medical treatment they needed as quickly as possible:

1. Stretcher-bearers collected the wounded from the battlefield, bandaged their wounds and moved them away from the front line.
2. At regimental aid posts, usually located in rear trenches, doctors assessed and treated wounds or sent patients on.
3. At advanced dressing stations, doctors gave anti-**tetanus** injections, treated patients for shock, or performed urgent operations.
4. Soldiers who had suffered the effects of gas were treated at main dressing stations.
5. If further treatment was required, patients would be sent on to casualty clearing stations for surgery and nursing care.

The wounded men were then transported, often by train, to a general hospital, which could care for around 1,000 patients. From there, men were evacuated to specialist hospitals in Britain, **repatriated** home to Australia, or returned to their units in the field.







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



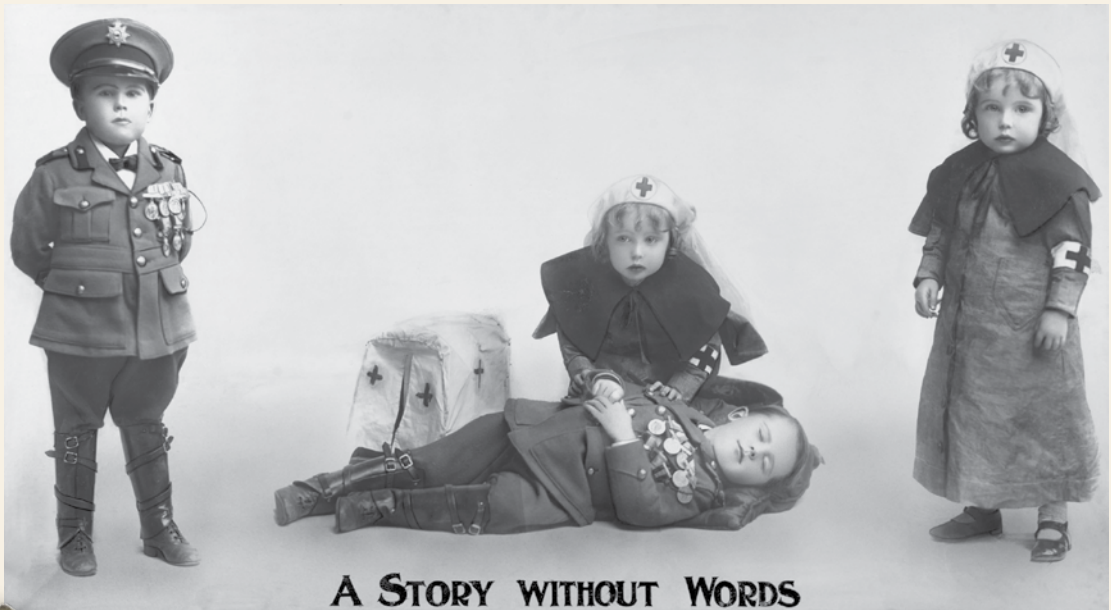
Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

## DID YOU KNOW?



**Children in Australia helped to raise funds for the war effort. Bertie Betts, dressed as Lord Kitchener, and his cousin, Eunice Bryant, dressed as a nurse, were winners of a Red Cross fancy dress competition in 1915. The children were photographed, and postcards were produced and sold to raise money for the Red Cross.**

AWM P08189.001



**A STORY WITHOUT WORDS**

Pearl's younger brother, Lieutenant Norman Corkhill (below), also joined up, at first in the 8th Machine Gun Company then as a member of the newly formed Australian Flying Corps. Pearl looked out for him whenever possible and gave news of him to her parents by letter. In one she wrote, "there is no need to go and worry yourself sick" about him.

AWM P00826.036



Staff Nurse Anne Hunter was posted to 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital in Dartford, England, in 1917. At this specialist hospital she cared for soldiers suffering from mental disorders such as shell shock. The back of her watch is engraved with "From Flying Twenty Dartford 16.2.18" and was probably a gift from some grateful patients.

**Why is a watch an important item for a nurse?**

AWM REL35756





## To stay or go:

# Matron Kathleen Best

Wherever Australian troops are fighting, there are nurses close by. However, this means that when situations get too dangerous, and the nurses' lives are at risk, they must be prepared to evacuate at short notice. Sometimes this may even mean leaving their patients.

During the Second World War, in April 1941, as the Germans advanced down the Greek peninsula, the fighting around the nurses stationed at 2/5th AGH increased. There were constant enemy air raids, and hospital supplies and food were running out. Matron Kathleen Best of New South Wales, often affectionately known as KB, was ordered to prepare her nurses for immediate evacuation on 23 April. Because transport was limited, not everyone could leave immediately. Kathleen was asked to choose 44 women to leave first. This meant 39 would have to remain behind with her. She came up with a plan to help her decide who would go and who would stay.



*I told the Sisters what was to happen, and also made it clear to them that those who volunteered would stay behind with the hospital and that they would in all possibility be captured. I asked them to write on a slip of paper their names and either "stay" or "go" and hand them to me ... Not one Sister wrote "go" on the paper. I then selected 39 sisters to remain [with me].*

With the railway line destroyed, the departing nurses piled into trucks and headed towards the harbour after dark. When they reached the Greek port of Navplion they discovered several ships on fire. Fishing boats ferried them out to a waiting ship. One nurse recalled, "We had to judge the gap, and leap to the **destroyer**, equipped with tin hat, **respirator**, great coat and a very tight mid-length skirt."

For her courage and efficiency throughout the evacuation, Matron (later Lieutenant Colonel) Kathleen Best was awarded the Royal Red Cross.

**Why do you think all the nurses wrote "stay" on their paper when they had the chance to be evacuated to safety?**

Nora Heysen, *Lieutenant Colonel Kathleen Best* (1944, oil on canvas, 76.6 x 57 cm, AWM ART22216)





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# THE SECOND WORLD WAR FAST FACTS

After the First World War, some service nurses married and left the workforce; others took over the care of family members recovering from the war. Some took up jobs away from nursing, but many continued to work in hospitals, often in senior positions.

When the Second World War broke out, the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) was the only service that women could join. As the navy and air force grew, more nurses were needed. This led to the formation of the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) in 1940 and the Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service (RANNS) in 1942.

More than 4,000 Australian nurses served in a variety of locations, including the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Britain, Asia, the Pacific, and Australia.

Seventy-eight nurses died, some through accident or illness, but most as a result of enemy action or while prisoners of war.

By 1945, all military nurses had been appointed as officers, although many still preferred to use their traditional titles of “sister” and “matron”. They were yet to be given the same status and pay as male officers.



The escaping nurses took shelter in a cemetery during an air raid.

AWM O87663



Sister Jane Tivey (standing): “On the destroyer it was the most marvellous feeling ... [even though] I hadn’t had a bath for five days and had slept in my clothing.”

AWM P06179.003





Despite attacks from enemy bombers, the nurses arrived on Crete and set to work immediately at a British tent hospital as wounded troops flooded in. Meanwhile, the group left behind in Greece with Matron Best struggled on despite the air raids. To make themselves easily recognisable as **non-combatants**, they wore their red capes and white caps. Kathleen recalled: "Even during the worst **barrages** there was no panic and no comments." Finally, in the early hours of 26 April, they too were safely evacuated to Crete, and then on to Egypt.

Kathleen remembered the nurses' sadness at leaving their patients so suddenly, and that "not one of the Sisters appeared to consider the personal risk that evacuation at that stage might entail".

AWM 52

Australian and New Zealand nurses arrive safely on Crete. Matron Best wrote: "We took one small suitcase each and a rug. Some nurses thought it a pity to leave their stockings, so they pinned them inside the sleeves of their coats."

**Why are many of the nurses wearing helmets?**

AWM 007614



AWM REL30326







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today



Gas masks drills were regularly carried out by nurses and soldiers alike.

**Why would this training be important?**

AWM 004106

2/5th AGH colour patch, worn on the tunic sleeve.

AWM REL/13906



Nurses of the 2/5th AGH on parade in Palestine, awaiting inspection by Matron Kathleen Best (at bottom right).

**What difficulties would the nurses face working in a tent hospital in the desert?**

AWM P03725.008







# Nurses in captivity: Sister Betty Jeffrey and Sister Vivian Bullwinkel

Singapore was ablaze as Japanese bombing raids continued day and night in February 1942. Australian nurses were ordered to evacuate. Amid the noise and chaos, 72 nurses embarked with hundreds of patients and civilians aboard the *Empire Star* and the *Wah Sui*. They finally made it back to Australia, after suffering heavy bombardment on the way.

Not so fortunate were the last group of 65 nurses who, with many **civilian** women and children, were evacuated on the small and overcrowded ship *SS Vyner Brooke*. Twelve lost their lives when the ship was sunk two days after leaving Singapore. Sisters Vivian Bullwinkel and Betty Jeffrey survived the sinking, but their journey to safety took quite different paths.

Vivian was one of 22 nurses who eventually washed ashore on Radji Beach, Banka Island. Lacking food or shelter, they surrendered to a party of Japanese soldiers, believing they would be given protection and assistance. Instead the soldiers ordered them into the water and opened fire on them. Badly wounded, Vivian was the only one to survive. She later recalled that they “all knew what was going to happen to them, but no-one panicked: they just marched ahead with their chins up”.

Captain Vivian Bullwinkel, of South Australia, (left) and Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey, of Tasmania, in 1950. They worked together after the war to raise funds for a nurses' memorial centre in Melbourne.

AWM P04585.001







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today



Vivian Bullwinkel's uniform, worn during the escape from Singapore, still bears the hole made by the bullet which wounded her.

AWM REL/06376.001-003

## DID YOU KNOW?



The Geneva Convention is a set of international rules, which, many but not all, countries agree to follow during wartime. These were written to protect the rights of prisoners of war, the wounded, non-combatants, and civilians caught up in war zones. The nurses thought these rules would keep them safe, but the Japanese government did not agree to obey them.

*Personnel charged with the transportation and treatment of the wounded and sick shall be respected and protected under all circumstances. If they fall into the hands of the enemy they shall not be treated as prisoners of war.*

Geneva Convention Article Nine, 1929

Sisters Jenny Greer (left) and Betty Jeffrey recovering in hospital in 1945 after their release. Betty weighed just 32 kilograms. Despite suffering from severe malnutrition she kept her sense of humour, and wrote to her family: "You'll die laughing at me when you see my legs and arms. Cigarette legs have nothing on mine."

AWM 305369; AWM PR01780







Left for dead, but without food or protection, Vivian surrendered again to Japanese soldiers 12 days later. In a prison camp in Palembang, Sumatra, she was reunited with other survivors from the *Vyner Brooke*, including Sister Betty Jeffrey. As the nurses exchanged stories of survival, Vivian learned of Betty's 16-hour ordeal, clinging to a life raft drifting in the sea. She swam to shore, and spent the night up a tree, in a mosquito-infested swamp. The next day, after continuing downstream and sharing the water with sharks, Betty was rescued and cared for by some local villagers before surrendering to Japanese soldiers.

The captured women hoped their job as nurses, symbolised by their now tattered uniforms, would protect them. It did not. For the next three and a half years, they were kept as prisoners under appalling conditions. Friends and family back home in Australia had no idea of their whereabouts.

During the early days of their captivity, the women kept busy with educational activities and musical concerts. They helped each other to keep their spirits up. However, conditions worsened with each transfer to a new camp. Food and medical supplies were hopelessly inadequate. Betty's entry in her diary for 30 April 1944 read: "We're still here - and so the years roll on. Today I was so hungry that I could hardly walk - we had literally nothing." The nurses could no longer care for wounded soldiers, so they now devoted themselves to caring for each other, and the women and children in the camp.

By the time they were set free at the end of the war, eight nurses had died in captivity.

After the war, Vivian Bullwinkel and Betty Jeffrey devoted themselves to honouring those killed on Banka Island, raising funds for a memorial which was unveiled there in 1993. Vivian, aged 85, and Betty, aged 92, died within three months of each other in 2000.

AWM PR01780

After the war, just 24 of the original group of 65 nurses who boarded the *Vyner Brooke* returned to Australia. Sister Veronica Clancy wrote: "Those who had uniforms put them on ... this is the day they had been kept for ... we tried not to remember we'd worn them to our **cobbers'** funerals."

Betty Jeffrey is in the second row, far right, carrying her precious diaries in a bag over her right shoulder.

AWM 044480







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

Vivian Bullwinkel was wearing this Red Cross **brassard** on her uniform sleeve when she was captured by the Japanese.

AWM REL/06376.003



Wooden clogs, known as “trompers”, were worn by some of the women in the prisoner of war camps. This pair was handmade by Sister Wilma Oram.

**Why do you think the nurses had no shoes?**

AWM REL/12520

Betty Jeffrey managed to steal some exercise books and this pencil from the Japanese guard house. She secretly kept a record of her life in the camps in these books, as well as drawings, recipes, and music written for performances by the women’s choir, of which she was a member. Her diary was later published as a book, *White coolies*, which went on to form the basis for the film *Paradise Road*.

**Look closely to find the owner’s name scratched into the pencil.**

AWM REL28953



Pat Gunther, *The inside of our hut, Palembang* (c. 1943, pencil on paper, size 10.8 x 15.7 cm AWM ART29438)

• During her imprisonment, Sister Pat Gunther made a number of small drawings  
• depicting the nurses’ experiences in captivity, which she sold to buy food on the  
• **black market**. **Find the trompers under the sleeping platforms.**





# The sinking of the *Centaur*: Sister Ellen Savage

From October 1942, nurses were posted to military hospitals in New Guinea to treat hundreds of sick and wounded soldiers, many from the Kokoda and Buna campaigns against the Japanese. The tropical weather made life very stressful, and the work was constant. In some areas there was the threat of air raids. Among the wounded were many suffering from tropical illness, such as **scrub typhus**; these men were extremely ill and in need of constant nursing.

In May 1943 the hospital ship *Centaur* set out from Sydney for its second voyage to New Guinea, to drop off supplies and staff, and bring patients back to hospitals in Australia. Sister Ellen Savage was one of the 12 nurses on board, recently appointed to the ship's medical staff.

For her "conspicuous service, high courage and fortitude" throughout the ordeal, Sister Ellen Savage was awarded the **George Medal**.

AWM O61952



Ellen recalled details of this tragedy: "My cabin mate, Myrle Moston and myself, were awakened by two terrific explosions ... We rushed to the porthole, looked out, and saw the ship ablaze".

As the *Centaur* was sinking, Ellen and Myrle (left), still in their pyjamas, jumped overboard. Myrle was struck by a piece of falling timber and died in the water.

AWM P03730.001 AWM F00734





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

Just before dawn on 14 May, the *Centaur* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off the coast of Queensland, even though it had been lit up and clearly marked with large red crosses as a hospital ship. Many of the passengers were sound asleep in their bunks. The ship sank in minutes, and 266 lives were lost. Ellen was the only nurse among the 64 survivors.

With sharks circling around them, the survivors spent more than 30 hours on makeshift rafts. Some of the people were badly burned, and they had little food or fresh water. Although seriously injured herself when sucked down with the sinking ship, Ellen did what she could to treat their injuries and keep their spirits up, encouraging them to sing **hymns** and pray. Help eventually came and they were rescued by the American destroyer USS *Mugford*.

This tragedy touched Australians deeply and caused a public outcry. Prime Minister John Curtin referred to the sinking as “an entirely inexcusable act”.



Bob Whitmore, *Work, save, fight, and so avenge the nurses!* (c. 1943–45, photolithograph, coloured inks on paper, 50.2 x 63 cm, AWM ARTV09088)

· In 1943, the sinking of the *Centaur* became a symbol of Australian determination  
· to win the war. **Propaganda** posters called on Australians to invest in **war loans** to  
· “**avenge** the nurses”. The *Centaur* Memorial Fund in Queensland raised £50,000 to  
· fund activities in memory of the nurses who lost their lives.

· **Why do you think there was such anger in Australia about this disaster?**

· The wreck of the *Centaur* was found in December 2009, about 60 kilometres off  
· Moreton Island.





# “Flying Angel”: Sister Beryl Chandler

Sister Beryl Chandler, a Queensland nurse, joined the **RAAFNS** in May 1942. She kept a diary during her years of service in which she wrote of her initial training as she adapted to taking cold showers, sleeping on a **paillasse**, and the **camaraderie** of life in the RAAF.

During the Second World War, air evacuation became a quick and effective way to transport seriously wounded troops from the front line in New Guinea and the surrounding islands, where the terrain was too rugged for land travel and the coastline was controlled by enemy ships. In early 1944, Beryl was one of 15 nurses recruited from the RAAFNS to the newly formed No. 1 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit (1 MAETU). The nurses' rigorous preparation included training in in-flight medicine and care, emergency jungle and ocean survival procedures, and weapons handling: “On inter-island flights I was never without my pistol. Come what may I could look after myself.”

Known as “The Flying Angels”, flight teams made up of a sister and an orderly flew in and out of combat zones, taking in supplies and bringing patients back to base hospitals in Australia. In 1945, 2 MAETU was formed with ten new nurses.

This work brought these women ever closer to the front line and introduced a new series of challenges. Apart from their regular nursing duties, Beryl and her colleagues had to contend with airsickness, altitudes of up to 18,000 feet, and **anoxia**. “Sometimes the destination we set out for was never reached. The elements [weather] might force one down anywhere ... sometimes an engine developed a malfunction.”

Flying Officer Chandler shares a moment with a patient and Josie the wallaby, **mascot** at the medical receiving station in Northern Australia.

AWM NEA0058







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975

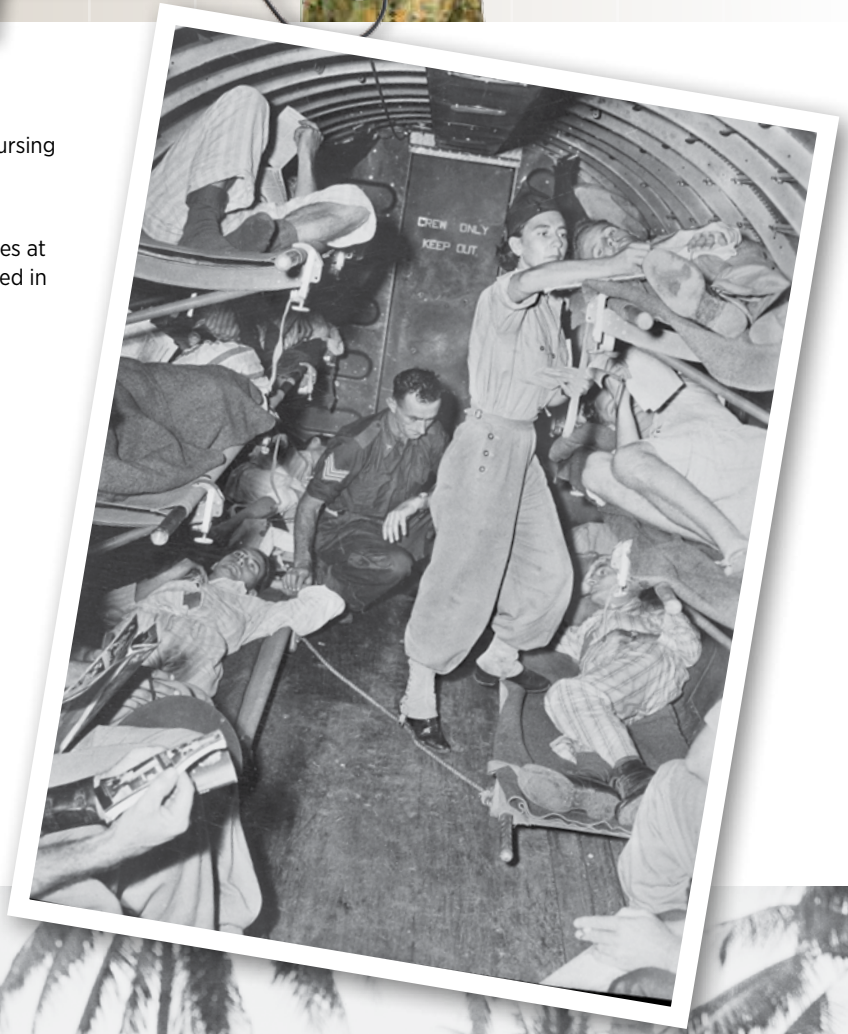


Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

Sister Elizabeth Bray and Sergeant Dawson, a nursing orderly, attend to their patients during a flight between New Guinea and Australia in 1944.

In **Douglas C47s**, carrying up to 18 stretcher cases at a time, more than 14,000 patients were evacuated in the first year of operations by 1 MAETU.

AWM OG3345



Mosquitoes were prolific in the tropics, so a new uniform, to be worn from sunset to sunrise, was issued to RAAFNS sisters in New Guinea.

**How would this uniform have helped in the fight against malaria?**

AWM OG3354







Boer War 1899–1902



First World War 1914–1918



Second World War 1939–1945



Beryl recorded her many adventures with 1 MAETU, including caring for one badly wounded patient who chewed through the electric wiring of the plane while in flight, and nights stranded with her crew in thick jungle. She nursed soldiers suffering burns, gunshot wounds, and terrible shock.

At the end of her **memoirs**, Beryl summed up her wartime service: "We who have had the privilege of serving with the RAAF feel a great deal of pride."

AWM PR89/023

4472-201					Time carried forward — 145   9	
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Place	Duty	Flying Times	
					Day	Night
1-9-45	0645	C47A-UH-CTB	1/14 Kain	Medical	4	55
"	1245	C47A-UH-CTK	1/14 Heath	"	2	35
3-9-45	0710	C47A-UH-CTH	1/14 Melen	"	2	20
"	1110			"	4	20
10-9-45	0620	C47B-UH-RFA	1/14 Chau	Medical	5	25
"	1300			"	4	30
11-9-45	0900	C47B-UH-RFA	1/14 A. Biran	Medical	6	10
12-9-45	1030	C47B-UH-RGA		"	6	30
15-9-45	0815	C47B-UH-RFU	Sister Madden	Medical	2	10
16-9-45	1500		<b>RESCUE OF NURSES</b>			
"	1630					
18-9-45	0930	C47A-UH-CTX	1/14 Heath	Medical	2	0
"	0915	C47A-UH-CTX		"	2	15
19-9-45	0610	C47A-UH-CTX	1/14 Heath	Medical	5	30
"	1115			"	5	45
23-9-45	0710	C47A-UH-CTD	P/O Kerr	Medical	6	20
24-9-45	0945			"	6	55
25-9-45	0700	C47B-UH-CTG	1/14 Chau	Medical	5	45
26-9-45	0845			"	5	45
27-9-45	0705	C47A-UH-CTX	W/O Russell	Medical	2	40
			<b>FORCED LANDING</b>			
			<b>BAD WEATHER SUNDAY</b>			
			<b>WORST ENCOUNTER YET</b>			

After the war Beryl assisted with the repatriation of thousands of prisoners of war. They included the group of missing nurses, some of whom Beryl had trained with before the war. It was an emotional reunion.

**Find the entry in her flying log book which simply reads RESCUE OF NURSES. On what day did this happen?**

AWM PR89/023

To combat the cold when flying at high altitudes, MAETU sisters were issued with fur-lined flying jackets. Beryl wrote of being very glad of hers and of "guarding it closely". Veronica Harbour worked with Beryl in 1 MAETU.

Nora Heysen, *Sister Veronica Harbour* (1945, oil on canvas, 60.8 x 49 cm, AWM ART24377)







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

## DID YOU KNOW?



While serving in areas close to the front line in New Guinea, RAAFNS nurses were instructed to dye their white ward dresses with strong tea. It was feared that white uniforms made them too visible from the air and they could become enemy targets.

AWM P02720.003



A MAETU sister farewells former Australian prisoners of war after their release and flight to safety in Singapore after the war.

AWM 119706







# Nurse in Japan, Korea, Malaya, and Vietnam: Colonel Nell Espie

Nell Espie was still in school at Hobart High when the Second World War began. Inspired by the nurses who left hospitals to join up, she began her nursing training as soon as she left school in the hope that she too could join the army one day. Her opportunity came in 1951 when, in response to an advertisement calling for nurses to be part of **BCOF**, Nell signed up for five years. After some training in military hospitals in Australia, she was on her way to the British Commonwealth General Hospital in Kure, Japan. As well as caring for sick Australian troops, the nurses also looked after soldiers' wives and children who had accompanied them on overseas service.

From 1952, Nell was one of around thirty of the RAANC nurses based in Japan who also served in South Korea. They were sent in small groups for a few months at a time and worked in harsh conditions at the British Commonwealth Zone Medical Unit in Seoul, set up in an old school building. Nell recalled that "there was no running water, and no sheets for the patients' beds". The nurses had to be accompanied by soldiers whenever they left the hospital compound, but Nell remembered feeling safe "as long as I could see a **digger's** hat".

Almost every night North Korean aircraft came on bombing raids over South Korea. The nurses were prepared for evacuation at any time, and were issued with shirts and trousers to pull on over their pyjamas if the siren sounded during the night. Nell remembered: "One night there was no light of course and I stepped straight into my slacks, but got them on back to front."

Nurses provided emergency treatment for wounded soldiers prior to evacuation by RAAF medical crews to Japan, or on to Australia. Severe burns cases were frequent in the winter, caused by exploding makeshift heaters that the men had built in the freezing trenches.

From Korea, Nell returned to BCOF in Japan, and then on to British military hospitals in Malaya for two years starting from 1958. Ten years later she was sent to the 1st Australian Field Hospital (IAFH) in Vung Tau, South Vietnam, as the matron. As in earlier wars, Nell and the nurses had to quickly get used to working in a new environment with limited preparation.

Matron Espie catches up on paperwork at her desk at the IAFH in Vietnam. In 1978 she was awarded the Royal Red Cross in recognition of her service to army nursing.

AWM COM/69/0524/VN







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR FAST FACTS

For 30 years after the Second World War, Australian troops fought in campaigns against the spread of **communism** in Korea, Malaya, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Most women’s services were reduced or disbanded after the Second World War, but **AANS** nurses continued to serve overseas. From 1946 to 1956, some 140 were posted to Japan to care for Australian servicemen and their families as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) and later with British Commonwealth Forces Korea.

The AANS was granted the title “Royal” in 1948, and three years later became an army **corps** with the new title “Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps” (RAANC).

A peacetime **RAAFNS** was reinstated in 1948 and its members were largely involved in aero-medical evacuations.

The development of new medical technology saved many more lives. In Vietnam, “**dust-off**” helicopters lifted the wounded from the battlefield, often getting the men to hospital within an hour.

Between 1967 and 1971, 150 military and 200 volunteer civilian nurses served in South Vietnam. Their tour of duty ranged from three to thirteen months, but most stayed about a year.

In the 1970s, the first male nursing officers entered the services, and female and male nursing officers of the same rank were finally given equal pay. Women could now also continue to serve after they married or had children.

Australian army nurses based in Japan with BCOF visit the ruins of **Hiroshima** in 1955. Captain Barbara Probyn-Smith recalled: “We often visited the very sick Japanese in Hiroshima and surrounds, taking food, clothing ... and giving them what little comfort we could”.

AWM HOBJ5720

Overseas service sometimes allowed time for sightseeing and souvenir hunting. Army nurses Captain Perditta McCarthy (left) and Lieutenant Nell Espie explored the markets in Seoul during their posting to Korea.

AWM HOBJ4459







Boer War 1899–1902



First World War 1914–1918

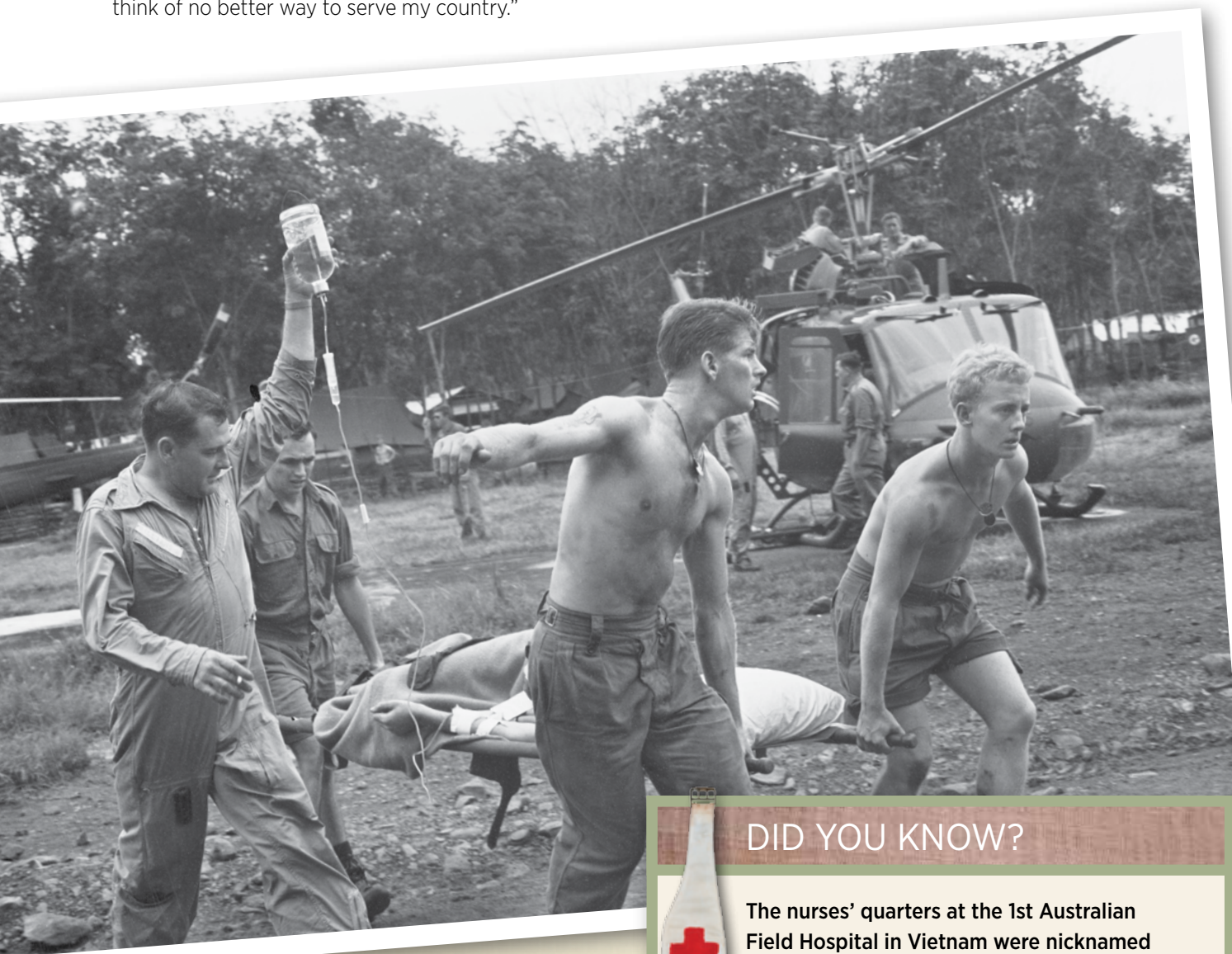


Second World War 1939–1945



In Vietnam, nurses were usually rostered to work 12-hour shifts, six days a week, but when the need arose they just kept working. An outbreak of malaria in 1968 doubled the number of patients in the hospital, but there was no increase in staff. Sometimes the operating theatre would work around the clock for days at a time. Helicopters brought patients in quickly from the field. This allowed wounds to be treated before they worsened, helping more soldiers to survive than in earlier wars, but the nurses often had to deal with more and more patients.

Nell's initial five-year enlistment stretched into almost 30 years. She retired from the Army as Matron in Chief of the RAANC. After her return from Vietnam in 1969, and having seen service in three conflicts, Colonel Espie summed up her contribution to military nursing: "I joined the Army to nurse sick and wounded soldiers. I can think of no better way to serve my country."



A wounded soldier is unloaded from an RAAF Iroquois helicopter which has brought him out of the jungle in Vietnam. After receiving radio messages about incoming casualties, the whole hospital was alerted by a shrill blast of the siren. Staff then quickly assembled near the helipad to receive new patients.

AWM VN/67/0104/20

### DID YOU KNOW?



The nurses' quarters at the 1st Australian Field Hospital in Vietnam were nicknamed "Fort Petticoat". They were long wooden buildings with metal roofs, cement floors, and **louvre** windows. To keep cool, each nurse was given a small electric fan for her room. Outside there was thick sand everywhere, which often blew in and settled on the beds. The buildings were surrounded by a wall of sandbags to absorb the impact of an artillery or bombing attack.





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

## DID YOU KNOW?



Included on this hat badge is the motto of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps *pro humanitate*. These **Latin** words mean “for humanity” and reflect the care and dedication shown by service nurses to all the wounded and sick.



(Left to right) Lieutenants Colleen Mealy and Margaret Ahern, Captain Amy Pittendreich, and Lieutenant Terri Roche made up the first group of Australian army nurses to arrive in Vietnam, in May 1967. For the next four years, forty-three RAANC nurses served in Vung Tau, in groups of six to ten.

**How are the “jungle greens”, (in the photographs above and below) worn on night duty more practical than the traditional grey dress, stockings and white starched veil?**

AWM P00582.045



In Vietnam, the nurses’ quarters were built on sand dunes close to the beaches of the South China Sea. In the steamy tropical climate, the surf provided welcome relief for off-duty nurses.

Red Cross nurse Margaret Young (left) and Lieutenant Jan McCarthy hang out their washing before heading off to the beach.

AWM P02017.022

Lieutenant Pam Matthews treats a local child. Whenever they could, Australian nurses gave medical assistance to the South Vietnamese people.

**Why do you think this activity was important to the nurses?**

AWM EKN/68/0116/VN







# Aero-medical evacuation nurse: Squadron Leader Patricia Furbank

Unlike the army nurses, air force nurses were not posted to Vietnam itself, but to the RAAF base at Butterworth in Malaysia. Section Officer Pat Furbank was one of 106 nursing officers who served on aero-medical evacuations (AME) between Vietnam, Malaysia, and Australia during the Vietnam War. Because of these flights, many wounded soldiers were able to get the expert medical care they needed to survive.

Pat Furbank grew up in Lithgow, New South Wales, and completed her nursing training at the local hospital in 1963. She had always been interested in flying, so in 1968 joined the RAAFNS and began training to become part of an AME team in Vietnam.

Pat carried out 84 AME trips in one year, evacuating the wounded from Vung Tau to Butterworth, where they were assessed and treated before the long flight home to Australia. Not many flights carried doctors, so the nurses and orderlies carried the full responsibility for the care of patients.



Flight Officer Furbank (right) during a “wet ditching” exercise in 1969. The nurses learnt how to survive in water.

### Why was this training important?

AWM P10261.001

In 1970 Pat was attached for two months to the US Air Force Aero Medical Evacuation Squadron, based at the Clark Air Base in the Philippines. Compared with Butterworth, this was a massive base, almost like a small city, with more than 30,000 workers. Day and night, there were many aircraft coming and going. Pat’s American workmates were fascinated by the Aussies’ accents, often stopping the nurses to listen to them speak.

In this unit Pat gained valuable nursing experience working on much bigger aircraft. On an American **Hercules**, stretchers could be hooked onto the walls of the plane, as many as five high, allowing up to 74 patients to be carried per flight, along with two flight nurses and up to three medical orderlies. In an emergency, crews could fly at short notice, or when they were already overtired and rostered to go off duty. The flights, which sometimes passed over

battlefields, were not always smooth. Pat recalled how “in-flight nursing had its own particular dangers and stresses ... sometimes medevac aircraft took constant pounding and landings at times were bone jarring.”

After her service in Vietnam, Pat held a variety of positions in RAAF hospitals in Australia and was promoted to the rank of squadron leader in 1976. For her devotion to nursing, she was awarded the Associate Royal Red Cross in 1980.





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today



Australian soldiers lie strapped to their stretchers inside a Hercules aircraft, while two RAAF nurses check on them before take-off from Vung Tau in Vietnam.

AWM VN/66/0120/15



An Australian soldier is unloaded from an ambulance onto an aircraft for the trip from Vietnam to Butterworth.

**Why have the orderlies taken off their shirts?**

AWM VN/66/0120/01

Flying boots, gloves, jacket, and cap worn by Flying Officer Furbank during her service in AME. The eagle and crown badges on her cap indicate that she is an officer in the RAAF.

AWM REL36529.001-002;  
AWM REL36529.006; AWM REL36533







# Caring for children: Commander Terrence Slader

On Boxing Day in 2004, while many Australian families were enjoying the holiday together, a series of tsunamis were sweeping along the coasts of several countries not far away. A huge undersea earthquake had caused waves as high as 30 metres. The Indonesian province of Aceh, on the island of Sumatra, was closest to the earthquake's **epicentre**, and large areas of the capital, Banda Aceh, and its surrounding districts, were destroyed. Within days, Australian military units in Operation Sumatra Assist arrived to provide aid and medical care to the thousands of wounded and homeless people.

**Paediatric** specialist nurse Terry Slader of Queensland has been nursing for more than 35 years. He grew up with stories of a grandfather who served on Gallipoli during the First World War, and of uncles who survived bombing raids over Germany and the fighting in New Guinea during the Second World War. Terry was keen to use his nursing skills in the military, and has been a reserve in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) since 1988.

With only a few days of preparation, Terry left Australia in early January 2005, with many other doctors and nurses. Unsure how long they would be away, they travelled aboard HMAS *Kanimbla* and were bound for the Anzac Field Hospital, which was at first housed in tents in Aceh.



Conditions were very difficult. There was mud and debris everywhere, fresh water was limited, and it was very hot, with regular heavy downpours of rain. Like many of the nurses who had served in years gone by, Terry and the team had to “make do” the best they could with the resources available: “You have to be prepared for anything, and be as fit and healthy as possible before you go.” Terry recalled a typical working day:

*I spent most of my time in Aceh, only occasionally returning to my ship for a hot meal, shower and change of clothing before going back in. The days were very long, 18–20 hours, and I regularly slept on the floor beside my patients, especially when there were a lot of after-shocks and I thought the roof may collapse on them. Most of our young patients were orphaned by the tsunami and many were very sick.*

Despite the challenges, Terry was glad to be there, working as part of a team. There was great cooperation between the people from many countries who came to help. Now, as he thinks back to the time he spent in Banda Aceh, Terry remains hopeful that the children he nursed will continue to grow up strong and healthy.

Commander Terrence Slader checks the pulse of a patient in Banda Aceh hospital after the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004.

Image copyright the Department of Defence 20050125ran8097690\_003





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

# RECENT CONFLICTS, PEACEKEEPING, AND HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS FAST FACTS

Both men and women can now be nurses in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). They serve in the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Army, and the Royal Australian Air Force, but often work together on tri-service missions.

Nurses complete their training at university and must have at least two years of nursing experience before joining the ADF as officers.

They provide care for service men and women who are sick or wounded in war, and for the local

people in countries affected by war or natural disasters.

About half of the current serving nurses are **reserves**, who work in Australian hospitals until they are needed on a military operation overseas.

Technology has improved, and destinations have changed, but providing care and comfort to their patients, despite unfamiliar and often difficult surroundings, is still the top priority for Australia's military nurses.

Members of the **ADF** clean away mud and rubbish in and around the hospital at Banda Aceh. Everyone pitched in to get the hospital back in working order.

Image copyright the Department of Defence  
JPAU12JAN05PC009

HMAS *Kanimbla* remained anchored off the coast of Sumatra, and provided a support base for the ADF members involved with Operation Sumatra Assist.

**Can you see the two amphibious landing craft on the ship's forward deck? What would they be used for?**

Image copyright the Department of Defence  
20050114ran8097690\_124



***At the end of the day, it's about touch: holding a patient's hand. It's personal. That hasn't changed.***

Lieutenant Colonel Kim Sullivan RAANC, 2011







# Emergency nurse: Captain Roneel Chandra

After he left high school, Roneel Chandra of New South Wales went to university to study nursing. As a little boy, he had often accompanied his mum to work in a nursing home. He would help her feed and care for the elderly patients, so nursing seemed like an obvious career choice for him. However, his love of adventure motivated him to join the Australian Army a few years later; he served first as an **infantry** soldier, and then as a nursing officer in the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC).

During the six months he spent in Afghanistan in 2008, Roneel was regularly called on to assist with aero-medical evacuations using helicopters. He described it as “flying around over the desert picking up casualties, doing my job”. One night, a trip out into the field to pick up some wounded soldiers did not go according to plan.

Coming in to land in the dark, and with poor visibility owing to the dust, the US **Black Hawk** pilot misjudged the landing zone, and the helicopter tipped over. Roneel and the two American medics with him were thrown around in the back of the helicopter. Despite their own injuries, Roneel remembered that “our priority was to look for casualties, and we made sure that the two waiting soldiers were OK and stabilised ... Their families put a lot of trust in you, they rely on you to do the best job you can.”

Because the helicopter was so badly damaged, all the men had to wait overnight in the desert. Roneel gave the wounded soldiers whatever treatment he could, and made sure they were comfortable. They were all picked up by a new helicopter the next morning and airlifted safely back to the Australian base at Tarin Kowt.

Captain Roneel Chandra.

**Can you see at least three ways the army nurse’s uniform has changed since the First World War? (look back at pages 9 and 12)**

**Find the RAANC badge on Roneel’s hatband. (See page 37)**

Photograph courtesy of Roneel Chandra







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

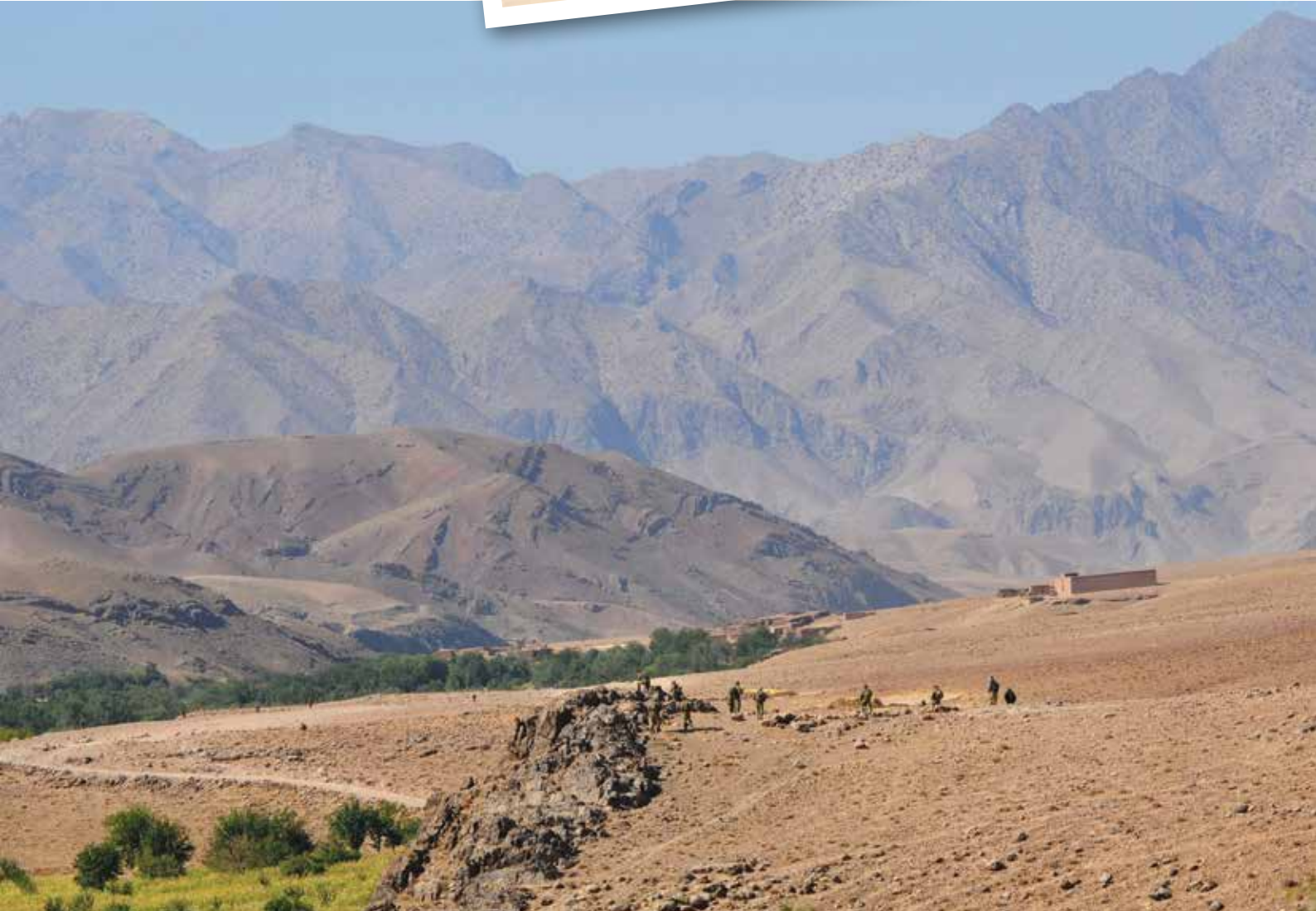
A Black Hawk helicopter lands in the desert in Afghanistan.

**What dangers do the pilot and the Australians on board face?**

Image copyright the Department of Defence 20100924adf8266070\_0312

Australian soldiers out on patrol in the Afghanistan countryside. If any were wounded Roneel could get a radio call for help: “Chansy, grab your gear and head out to the chopper that’s about to leave.”

Image copyright the Department of Defence 20091002adf8251931\_125







Even though Roneel was not badly injured in the accident, he still spent some time in hospital under observation. Sometimes even nurses need nursing, and he gained a better appreciation of the care provided by the Australian medical team.

Like many Australian service nurses before him, Roneel is motivated by a keen sense of loyalty to his mates, but also by his devotion to saving the life of anyone who needs treatment, including enemy soldiers and local people. "We're there for the soldiers, to make sure they get first-class treatment and come home safely to their loved ones. But as a nurse you don't discriminate; they're all casualties of war."

Captain Roneel Chandra out on patrol aboard an armoured vehicle in Afghanistan. He has his **trauma shears** (scissors) handy in the front of his jacket.

**What might the trauma shears be used for?**

**Why do you think he has his mouth and nose covered?**

AWM P10171.001







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

This T-shirt was worn by Lieutenant Kristy Sturtevant when she worked as part of the Peace Monitoring Group in Loloho, Bougainville in 1998.

**Why do you think the Australian peacekeepers' uniforms were bright yellow?**

AWM REL33257.002



**DID YOU KNOW?**

Since 1990, Australian service nurses have worked on military and humanitarian operations across the world: for example, in Iraq, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, Bougainville, East Timor, the Solomon Islands, and Afghanistan.

**How has the role of nurses changed since the Boer War?**



Captain Kristy Sturtevant (centre) arrived in East Timor in September 1999. For six months she worked at the 1st Australian Field Hospital in Dili. The United Nations authorised an Australian-led multinational peacekeeping mission, International Force East Timor, to restore peace and security to the local people.

AWM P04643.006

Lieutenant Meg Frugtniet with staff of the local hospital in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Aboard **USNS Mercy**, Meg worked as part of a medical team in Banda Aceh in 2006 and East Timor in 2008. In 2010, aboard HMAS *Tobruk*, she sailed to New Guinea and East New Britain.

As a specialist theatre nurse, most of her time was spent with surgical cases, often children: "It was so gratifying to assist with procedures like repairing cleft palates; giving people back their smiles."

AWM P10242.001

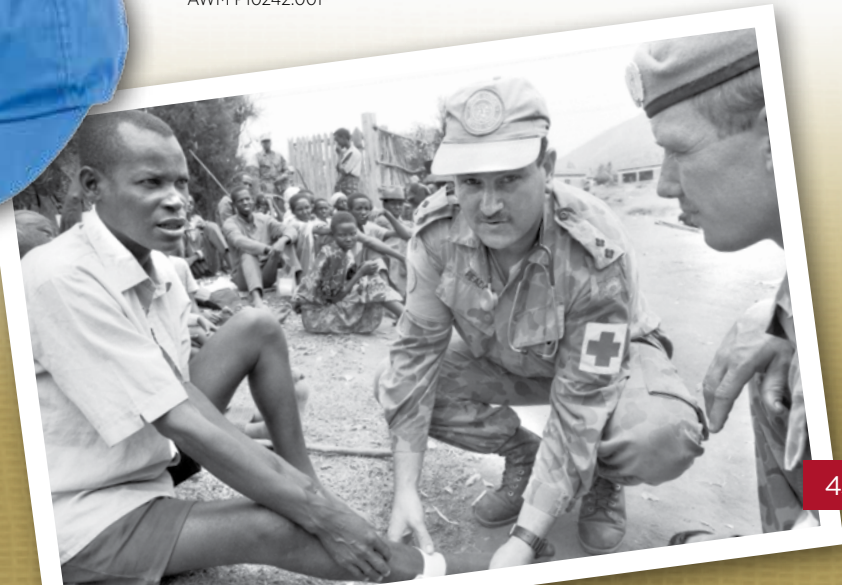
Cap worn by members of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) team in Rwanda.

AWM REL34250



Lieutenant Rodney Peadon (centre), bandages the ankle of a Rwandan man. Rodney was a member of the Australian Medical Support Force, working as part of UNAMIR in 1994.

AWM MSU/94/0009/03







Boer War 1899-1902

First World War 1914-1918

Second World War 1939-1945

# Where did they serve overseas?

The stories in this book took place in the locations given on the map.







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today







# Glossary

<b>AANS</b>	Australian Army Nursing Service
<b>ADF</b>	Australian Defence Force
<b>AGH</b>	Australian General Hospital
<b>AWM</b>	Australian War Memorial
<b>allies</b>	countries that work together towards a common goal
<b>amphibious</b>	able to be used on land or water, or the landing of a military force by sea
<b>anoxia</b>	a loss of oxygen, often at high altitude, which can lead to confusion or unconsciousness
<b>avenge</b>	to punish or pay back
<b>barrage</b>	a thick burst of gun fire used as a barrier to protect advancing soldiers
<b>bayonet</b>	a stabbing weapon designed to fit on the end of a rifle
<b>BCOF</b>	British Commonwealth Occupation Force
<b>Black Hawk</b>	a four-bladed, twin-engine transport helicopter first manufactured in America
<b>black market</b>	an unofficial or illegal source of products or services
<b>Boer</b>	the Afrikaans word for farmer, representing descendants of the Dutch settlers in South Africa during the 1600s and 1700s
<b>brassard</b>	a band worn around the upper arm over the uniform sleeve, to display badges
<b>camaraderie</b>	friendship
<b>casualty</b>	a sick or wounded person
<b>casualty clearing station</b>	a medical facility close to the front line
<b>chatelaine</b>	a small pouch worn on the belt to carry tools or equipment
<b>civilian</b>	a person who is not a member of the military
<b>cobber</b>	a friend or mate
<b>Communism</b>	a system of government where one political party controls a society operating under the theory that all property is part of the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs
<b>condensed milk</b>	long-lasting, thick, sweet milk often kept in tins
<b>convoy</b>	an organised group of vehicles travelling together for protection
<b>coolie</b>	an Asian person forced to do hard physical work by a supervisor
<b>corps</b>	a large group of military personnel with a specific job
<b>Dardanelles</b>	a narrow body of water in Turkey, beside the Gallipoli peninsula; the battles fought on the peninsula also came to be known as the Dardanelles campaign
<b>destroyer</b>	a medium-sized, fast warship which provides protection for larger ships in a naval fleet
<b>digger</b>	a slang term for soldiers from Australia and New Zealand, which came into use during the First World War
<b>Douglas C47</b>	an aircraft used to transport troops and supplies first used during the Second World War





Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



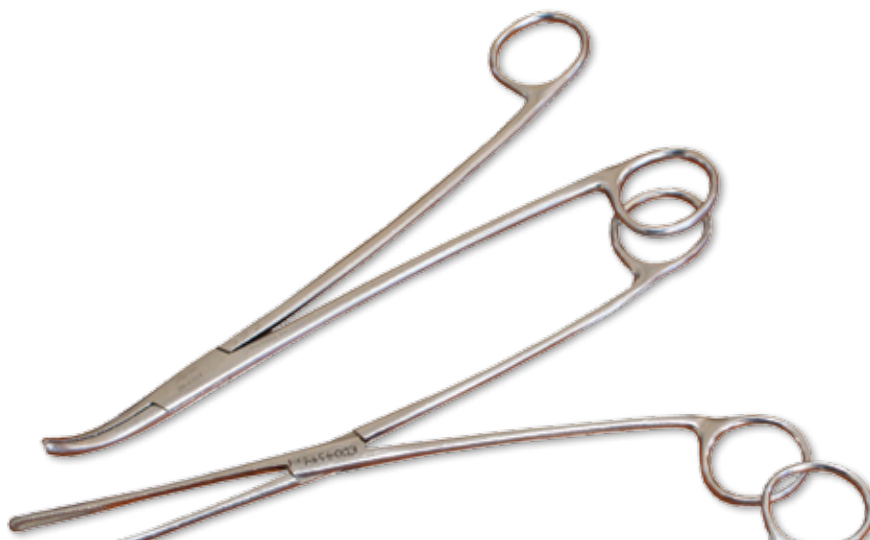
Recent conflicts and peacekeeping 1990–today

<b>‘dust-off’</b>	the emergency evacuation of casualties from a combat zone. (DUSTOFF was originally the radio call sign for US Army air evacuation units.)
<b>dysentery</b>	a disease of the intestines that causes severe cramps and diarrhoea
<b>empire</b>	a group of countries ruled over by a king or queen (e.g., the British empire)
<b>epicentre</b>	the point on the earth’s surface directly above an earthquake or underground explosion
<b>Federation of Australia</b>	the process by which, on 1 January 1901, the six separate British colonies in Australia formed one nation and became states of the Commonwealth of Australia
<b>felucca</b>	traditional wooden sailboat used on the River Nile in Egypt
<b>front line</b>	the line of battle and scene of actual fighting (see also Western Front)
<b>frost-bite</b>	serious damage caused to parts of the body when skin freezes
<b>Gallipoli</b>	a peninsula located in Turkey; Australian soldiers landed there on 25 April 1915 as part of a British and French invasion
<b>gangrene</b>	a condition which occurs when the blood supply to a limb is severely reduced and the cells die
<b>George Medal</b>	a military medal awarded to civilians and members of the military for acts of bravery in a non-war setting
<b>guy ropes</b>	tightened ropes used to hold up a tent, extending from the tent to a peg in the ground
<b>Hercules</b>	a large aircraft first used in the 1950s to transport troops and cargo
<b>Hiroshima</b>	a Japanese city destroyed by an atomic bomb dropped by the United States Air Force in August 1945
<b>HMAT</b>	His (Her) Majesty’s Australian Transport (ship)
<b>hymn</b>	a religious song
<b>infantry</b>	the land-based section of an army that fights on foot
<b>Latin</b>	an ancient Italian language
<b>louvre</b>	a window with strips of glass that can be moved to adjust air flow
<b>malaria</b>	a mosquito-borne infectious disease which causes high temperatures and severe headaches
<b>mascot</b>	a person, animal, or object which represents a group, or is thought to bring good luck
<b>matron</b>	a senior nurse in a hospital responsible for staff, patient care, and the smooth running of hospital wards
<b>memoir</b>	a personal record of events, like a diary
<b>midwifery</b>	medical care given to women during pregnancy and child birth
<b>Military Medal</b>	a British medal introduced during the First World War, awarded for bravery and devotion to duty under fire to military personnel who were not officers
<b>non-combatant</b>	someone involved in the military but not with a fighting role
<b>officer</b>	a member of the military who has authority to take command over others
<b>orderly</b>	a medical assistant in a hospital
<b>paediatric</b>	the area of medicine that deals with the care of babies, children, and teenagers
<b>paillasse</b>	a thin mattress filled with straw or saw dust
<b>petticoat</b>	an underskirt worn by women
<b>PR</b>	Private Record, held as part of the Memorial’s collection





<b>propaganda</b>	the communication of a message to an audience to promote a particular point of view
<b>RAAFNS</b>	Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service
<b>RAANC</b>	Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps
<b>RANNS</b>	Royal Australian Navy Nursing Service
<b>rank</b>	levels of authority achieved by members of the military (e.g., lieutenant, major, admiral)
<b>Red Cross</b>	an international humanitarian organisation, founded in 1863, which provides relief to victims of war or natural disasters
<b>REL</b>	shortened form of “relic”, denoting an object from the Memorial’s collection
<b>repatriate</b>	to bring back home
<b>reserves</b>	part-time members of the military
<b>respirator</b>	equipment worn on the face to assist with breathing
<b>Sahhar [Sakkara]</b>	a large burial ground in Egypt featuring many pyramids
<b>sanitation</b>	the hygienic disposal of waste water and sewage to limit the spread of disease
<b>scrub typhus</b>	a bacterial disease carried by mites found in areas of thick vegetation
<b>Sister</b>	the traditional title for a female nurse
<b>sjambok</b>	a thick leather whip made in South Africa
<b>sniper</b>	a highly skilled gunman
<b>souvenir</b>	a memento or keepsake
<b>staff nurse</b>	a junior military nurse during the First World War
<b>sterilising</b>	a process which kills bacteria and germs, originally using boiling water
<b>tetanus</b>	a disease which affects the muscles, caused when a wound gets infected
<b>trauma shears</b>	strong scissors with blunt ends, used in an emergency to cut quickly through clothing
<b>tunic</b>	a long-sleeved uniform jacket buttoned down the front
<b>typhoid</b>	a disease caught by drinking water contaminated by human waste
<b>USNS</b>	United States Naval Ship
<b>vermin</b>	animals that are pests and which often carry disease
<b>war loan</b>	money lent to the government by citizens of a country to help the war effort
<b>Western Front</b>	the main area of operations for allied forces during the First World War; it ran from the English Channel in Belgium to Belfort on the Swiss border, a distance of some 750 kilometres







Korean War 1950–1953



Vietnam War 1962–1975



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Sergeant Norma Hinchcliffe helped care for some street kids during her time serving as a nurse in Cambodia in 1993.

AWM P10191.002







*Someone must care for the casualties of conflict, and that was our mission: to care for whoever needed us, in spite of the circumstances.*

CAPTAIN GARY STEER  
RAANC, Iraq War 2003



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs



AUSTRALIAN  
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