

# THE ANZAC LEGEND : WHAT ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND NURSES?

6 July 2015

U3A Brisbane .

Philip Castle, academic, journalist,  
historian, writer and served in Vietnam.

# Who are these women?



## AUSTRALIAN HEROINES OF WORLD WAR ONE



Gallipoli, Lemnos and the Western Front

**SUSANNA DE VRIES**



The Australian Army rejected Dr Lillian Cooper's offer to work as an Army surgeon telling her women were unsuited to warfare; it did not want female doctors and preferred male orderlies to nurses. She served with a Scottish field hospital and won a Serbian medal for saving hundreds of lives.





More than 3,000 Australian nurses (sisters) served overseas. More than 23 died on active service while others had their health ruined by their harsh working conditions. Friendships and a good Aussie sense of humour helped them survive in a war that killed over two million. The nurses were highly trained, paid low wages ((equivalent to Army corporals) and expected to buy their own uniforms, nursing equipment and camping gear.



# Why aren't they part of the Anzac legend?



We do have the iconic legends of such as Simpson and ....?



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A05332



# Matron Grace Wilson's medals

Matron Grace Wilson's medals





# Matron Eunice Paten



Eunice Muriel Harriett Hunt Paten MBE  
1883-1973

Awards and Decorations  
(left to right)

1. Member of the British Empire (MBE)
2. Royal Red Cross
3. 1914-1915 Star
4. British War Medal
5. Victory Medal
6. George V Jubilee Medal
7. George VI Coronation Medal
8. War Service Medal 1939-1945



*Eunice Paten*

1883-1973

Eunice was born on 13 June 1883 at the Cliff Hotel, Sydney. She trained at the Red Cross Hospital and served in the Red Cross during the First World War. Her choice to be a nurse was against the parent's wishes. She had just finished her matriculation training when she was declared and volunteered for active service overseas. She sailed on the *Orinda* with three other Red Cross nurses, including Christa Seppensen, and the *Orinda* in Butson. During a voyage from Australia, the *Orinda* took on board a German crew who were held in the Sydney dock the German sailor Ender. Eunice and the other staff nursed some of the crew who were injured and committed to their country. She worked in Cairo during the Gallipoli campaign and in September 1915 was sent to England to establish 13 AGH where she was to be Senior Sister in charge. Circumstances changed and she was sent to Queen Mary's Military Hospital in Lancashire. Whilst there she was surprised to find the British sisters were untrained in dressings. She wrote to her family: "I asked one doctor to let me do them and teach the sisters. He looked surprised but said he would come and see me do the dressings, after that I taught the sisters and the dressings were done as we did them in our hospital". She served in France in 1918 and returned to Australia in 1919. In 1920 she established Holmwood Private Hospital on Gregory Terrace with her Army colleague Tessie Watson. The hospital closed in 1936. Eunice would go on to serve during the Second World War.



# And these women?



Piping the Australian nurses ashore at Lemnos



# And this 20-year-old in Saigon South Vietnam in 1970?





# Casualties from the eight month Gallipoli campaign.

- ▣ Australian : 362 officers and 7,689 other ranks totally 8,051. (NZ : 2,779 dead. About 6,500 wounded)
- ▣ Australian wounded : 19,441 of whom 1,985 later died.
- ▣ Medical staff cared for 69,969 sick of whom 569 died. (Not including Turks?)
- ▣ Cared for by 270 doctors and between 250 -300 sisters (nurses).
- ▣ Total allied dead was 33,532, wounded 78,518 with 7,689 missing. (Likeman: Gallipoli Doctors)



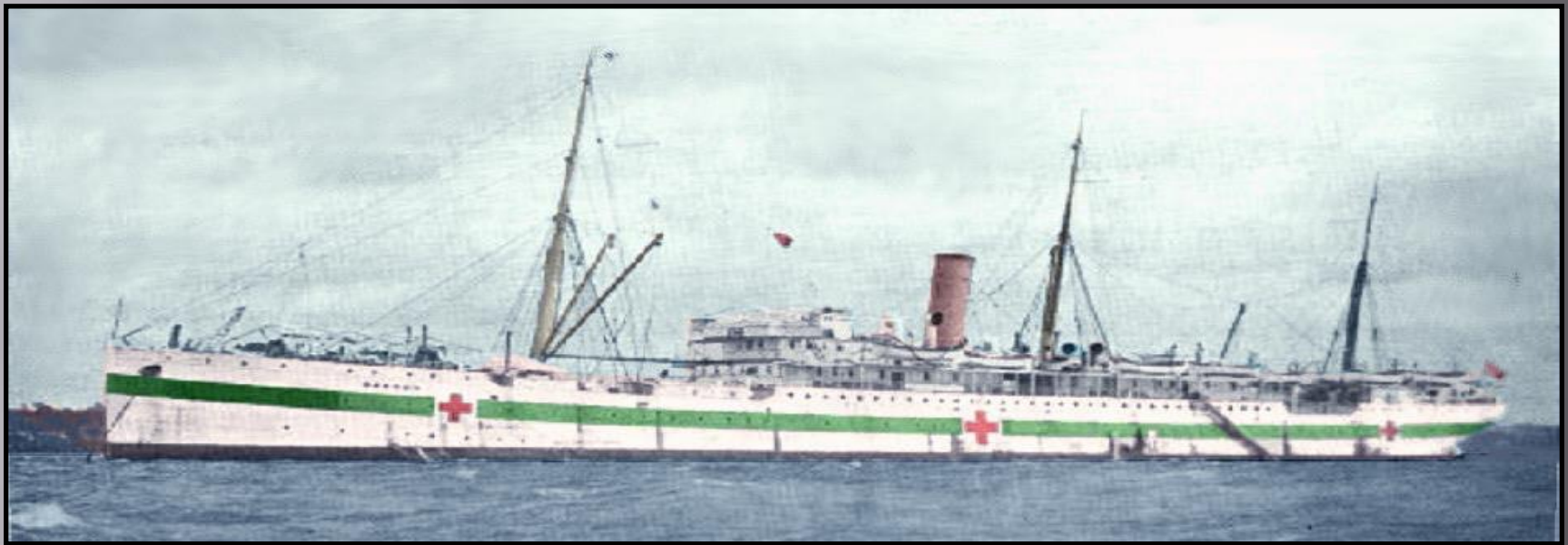
Sisters Wakeford, Kitchen, Samsing and Gibson aboard HMHS Gascon at ANZAC Cove on the day of the landing. Sister Muriel Wakeford wrote home urging more nurses to enlist as they were short handed. The Gascon operated from April to December and saved over 11,700 lives.





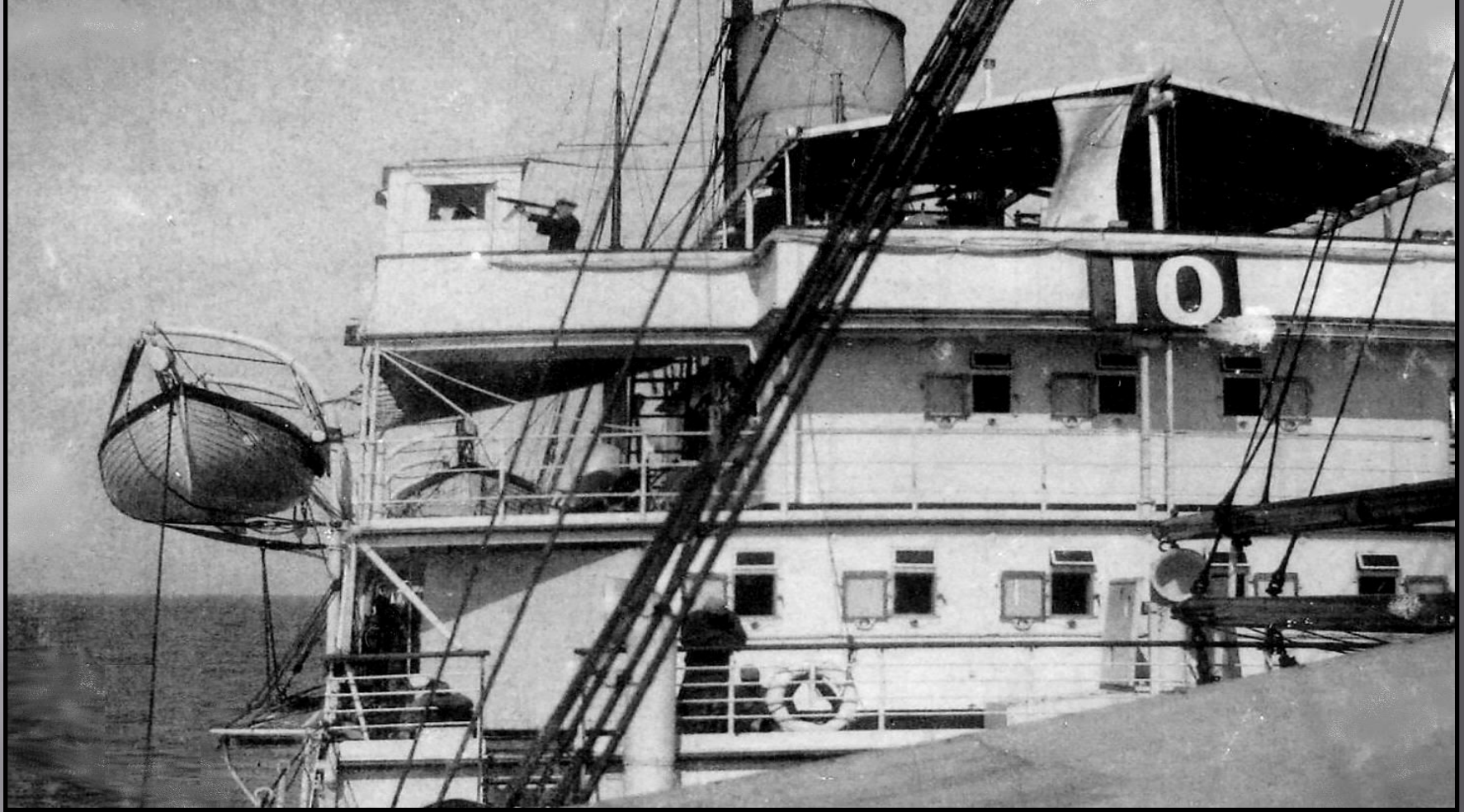
The convoy preparing at Dumros Island. The HMHS Gascon was the only hospital ship sent to fetch the wounded from Anzac Cove. Sister Muriel Wakeford saw the Allied fleet leave Lemnos and sailed on the Gascon. From its deck she watched through binoculars the ANZACs land on Gallipoli. She said the sea turned red with their blood as so many were wounded or killed.





HMHS GASCON was a former passenger liner with beds for 400 patients but at Anzac Cove took on board 175 extra patients as casualties were much higher than expected. Red crosses on the hull were to stop the Turks shelling the ship but a deck steward standing near Sister Wakeford was hit.

The hospital ship HMHS *Llandoverly Castle* was sunk by a torpedo and 14 New Zealand nurses died at sea.



Army nurses were forbidden to take photos but Muriel photographed her naval officer boyfriend on the bridge shown using a telescope. The sign shows HMHS Gascon lying No 10 in the Allied fleet ; the only hospital ship to take the wounded from Anzac Cove on the day of the landing, when over 2,500 wounded men were shipped to Egypt.



# Gallipoli landing and Imbros





This shows the towering cliffs of ANZAC Cove with HMHS Gascon at anchor. Sister Wakeford on deck watched the dawn landing and was told there would be very few casualties. She watched with horror as hundreds of ANZAC's were gunned down by Turks waiting behind the crest of the hills. The Gascon had to sail away leaving hundreds of wounded Anzacs behind on the narrow beach.



The landing attack quickly developed into deadly hand-to-hand fighting over rough terrain.







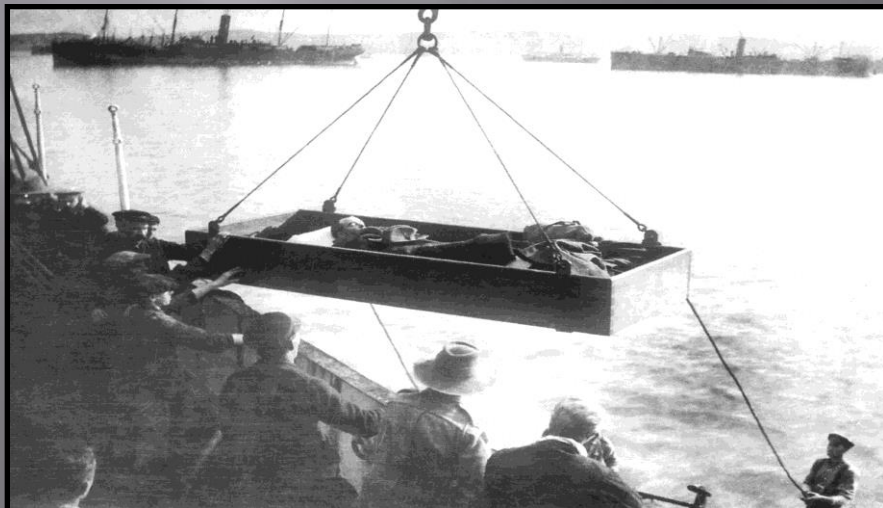
Through borrowed binoculars loaned by her naval officer boyfriend Sister Wakeford saw wounded men lying in gullies and prayed stretcher bearers would arrive before the wounded bled to death. Survivors were carried down to the beach on donkeys or mules awaiting barges to bring them out to the Gascon.





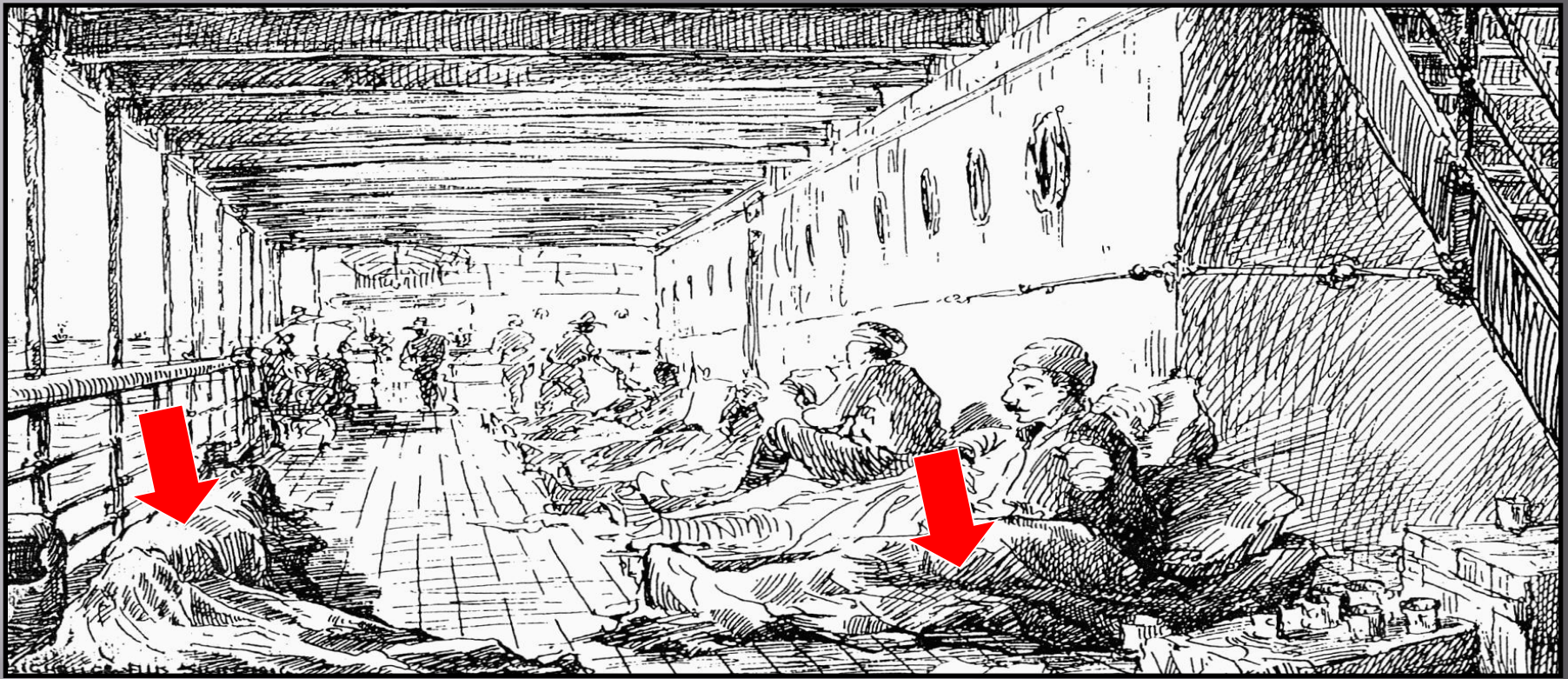
Stretcher cases lay under the blazing sun on the beach which was subject to shellfire, was crowded with tents, crates of food and ammunition. Often their wounds festered, became infected and some died because of the slow evacuation.



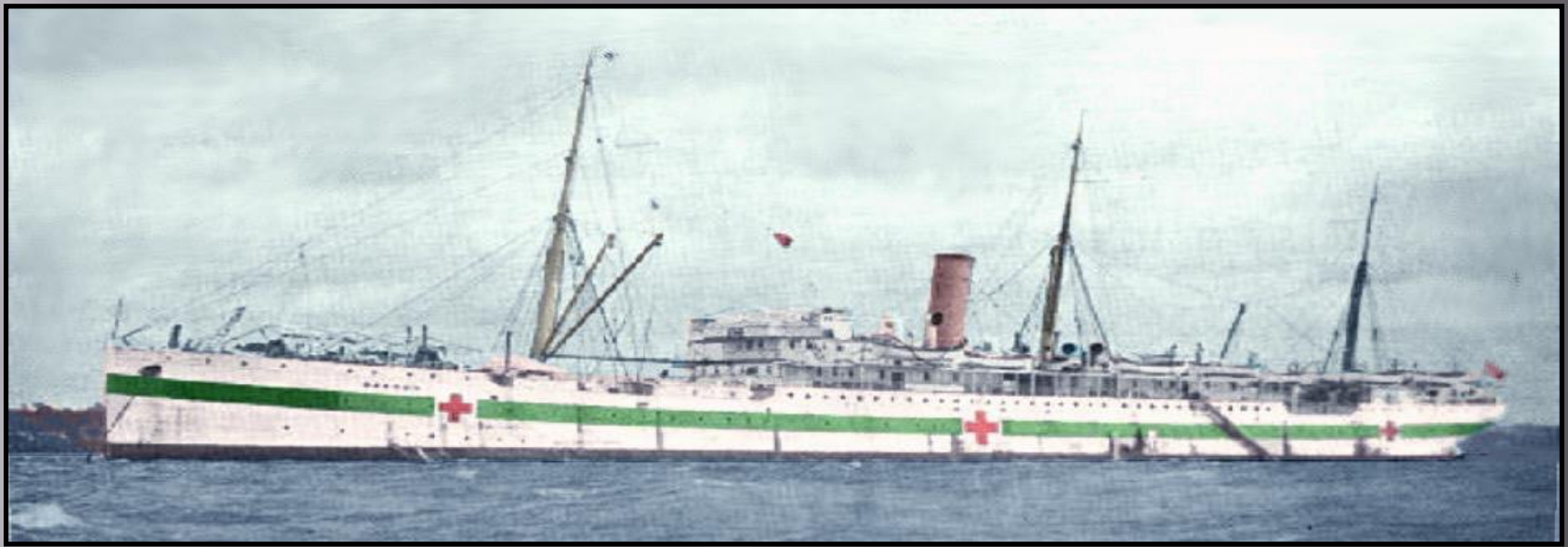


Naval barges took the wounded to the HMHS Gascon. Those men able to walk climbed rope ladders, while stretcher cases were hoisted aboard by this box crane.





Muriel's secret diary recorded; 'By 3 pm we had 600 wounded men on board, many more than predicted. For humanitarian reasons we took on more wounded until the foredeck was filled with rows of soldiers, all desperately thirsty as water was in short supply.' Anzacs who died aboard the barges were covered with blankets (see red arrows) and buried at sea the following morning.

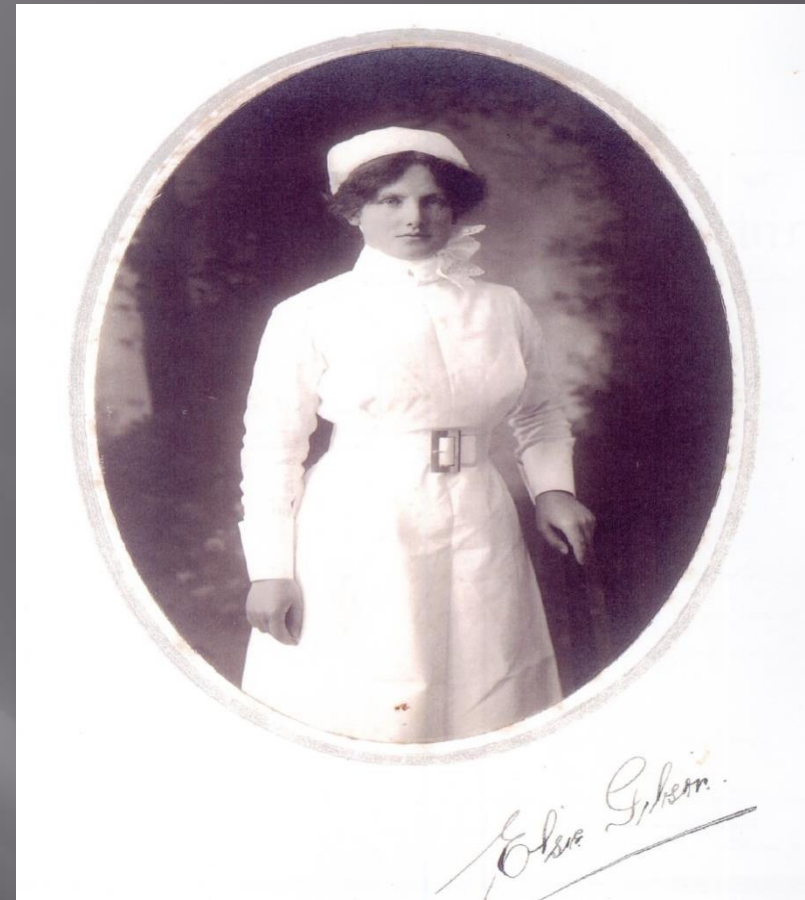


The War Office expected only 400 casualties on 25 April 1915, so only engaged 7 nurses and 2 doctors for the HMHS *Gascon*. It sent medicines by ss *Hindu* which went to the wrong map reference. By 3pm 600 badly wounded men were aboard for the three-day nightmare voyage to Alexandria. After working 10 hours shifts in stifling heat below decks, the nurses gave up their bunks to badly wounded men and slept in deck chairs. They had never seen such terrible wounds with flesh shredded by shrapnel.





Sister Elsie Gibson, one of the heroines of the hospital ship Gascon, later married an Army doctor.



Elsie Gibson worked 12 hour shifts both on the ward and in this operating theatre assisting with amputations which in the days before antibiotics had to be done quickly to prevent gangrene setting in as this could be lethal.





Burials took place at sea every morning but were not meant to be photographed in order not to lower morale. Sisters Alice Kitchen and Hilda Samsing were critical of War Office blunders and described how 'the floor of the Aegean is strewn with our Anzac dead'. They were banned from taking photographs or keeping diaries under the Official Secrets Act. The nurses had to keep their secret diaries and photographs hidden.



Young Sister Gibson was aboard for all the mercy voyages made by the Gascon between Anzac Cove and Alexandria in 1915. During her stop-overs in Egypt she did manage to see some of the ancient sites





15<sup>th</sup> July.  
We got rid today for Malta, Egypt is full  
of sick & wounded, from Go Hellos. The Salvage  
Work over a Thousand. We hear that Sir  
Sam Hamilton has been recalled & Smith-  
Doreau is coming out to take command.  
It's time something was done, to alter  
things. I hope there will be a stir  
and some of the unhuman British  
Command who control that Department will  
be shifted, it's dreadful the want of  
consideration that's shown for sick &  
wounded men. We have 465 cases on  
board, quite 50 entries, and no means  
of isolation, I've spent some of the  
wounded, who are banded together with the  
will get infected. It was dreadfully hot at  
Mudros today, it's still very hot, but the air  
feels fresher at sea.

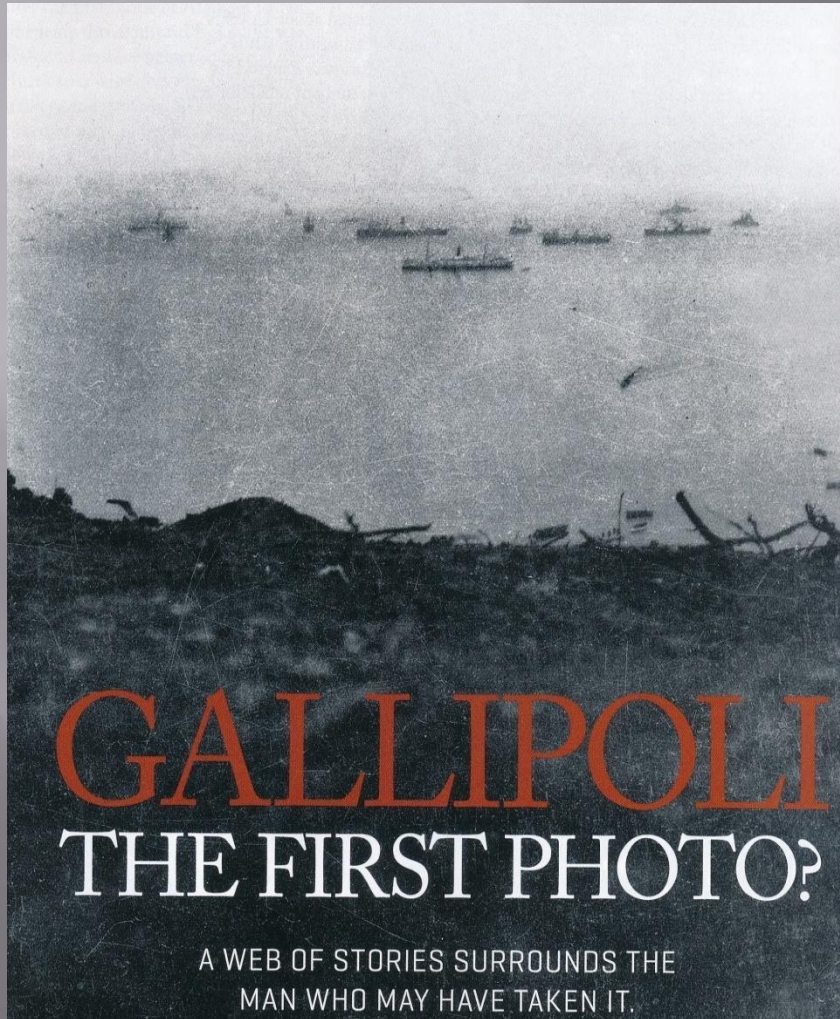
Heroic Hilda Samsing migrated from Norway & trained at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, became matron of a private clinic in Lansdowne Street and defied authority to keep a very a detailed diary. She told of the bungled evacuation of Anzacs by the British due to lack of sufficient hospital ships as a result many hundreds of them died needlessly from infected wounds and diseases.

# Their initial conditions at Lemnos were horrendous





# The planners completely failed to assess the Turkish resistance and casualties



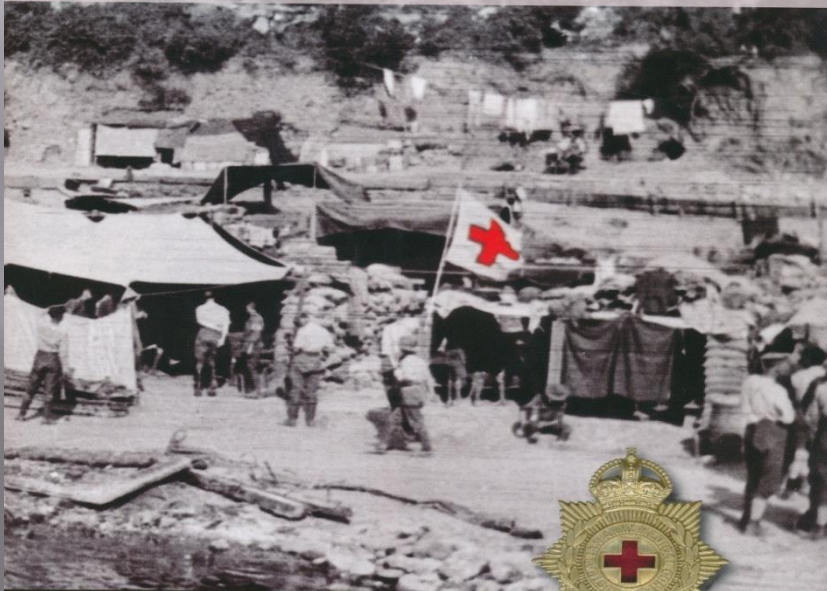


Many of the sick, wounded and dying had been lying in squalor and blood on the beaches for days before evacuation.

# GALLIPOLI DOCTORS

LTCOL Robert Likeman, CSM

THE AUSTRALIAN DOCTORS AT WAR SERIES VOLUME 1  
Series Editor – Ron Austin, RFD, ED

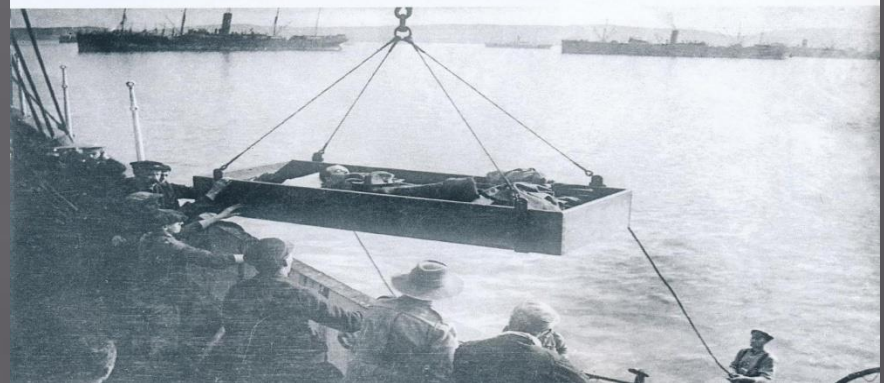


A SLOUGH HAT PUBLICATION



Wounded soldiers were moved by flat-bottomed barges from Gallipoli to hospital ships waiting off Anzac Cove. (Photo courtesy of the Australian War Memorial A02740)

They were then hoisted on board in a specially made wooden cradle. (Photo courtesy of the Australian War Memorial C02277)





# Lemnos Island, a Greek island, lay 90kms south-west of Gallipoli and was a primitive tent hospital with a lack of medical supplies and water, hot and dry in summer, windy, wet and freezing in winter.

'A DISCONNECTED BODY'



Sister Evelyn (Tevie) Davies looking 'tragic' in winter gear, Lemnos, 1915. (AWM A5374)



Australian Army nurses from No. 3 AGH beside their tent after strong winds, Lemnos, 1915. (Perdita McCarthy)



Erected on sand, the hospital tents in Mena were open to the elements. (Photo Kath King, courtesy of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Museum)

Kath King (second from left) with doctors and fellow nurses on board the *Sicilia*. It was from here that she watched the battle for Gallipoli. (Photo courtesy of John Carter)



Even in Cairo the main hospital was a converted roller skating rink and fun park where the beds were filthy





# Nurses and Red Cross VADs in Cairo Ward (2 AGH).





# Conditions did improve but with little recognition of the heroic efforts of the 200 ANZAC nurses.



## 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 P901670)*

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



Wounded soldiers were then either transported to Army hospitals on Lemnos or in Egypt. Here a nurse supervises the unloading of wounded soldiers from a hospital ship docked at Alexandria. (Photo courtesy of the Australian War Memorial H00828)

Australian hospitals in Egypt weren't prepared for the rush of wounded from Gallipoli. Here, at No. 2 Australian General Hospital at Mena House, Olive Haynes photographed the wounded sleeping on the roof on 1 May 1915. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Young)





# Matron-in-chief Maude McCarthy.





**Some national recognition has been forthcoming, but it's slow.**





# Royal Brisbane Hospital Display



# Royal Brisbane Hospital



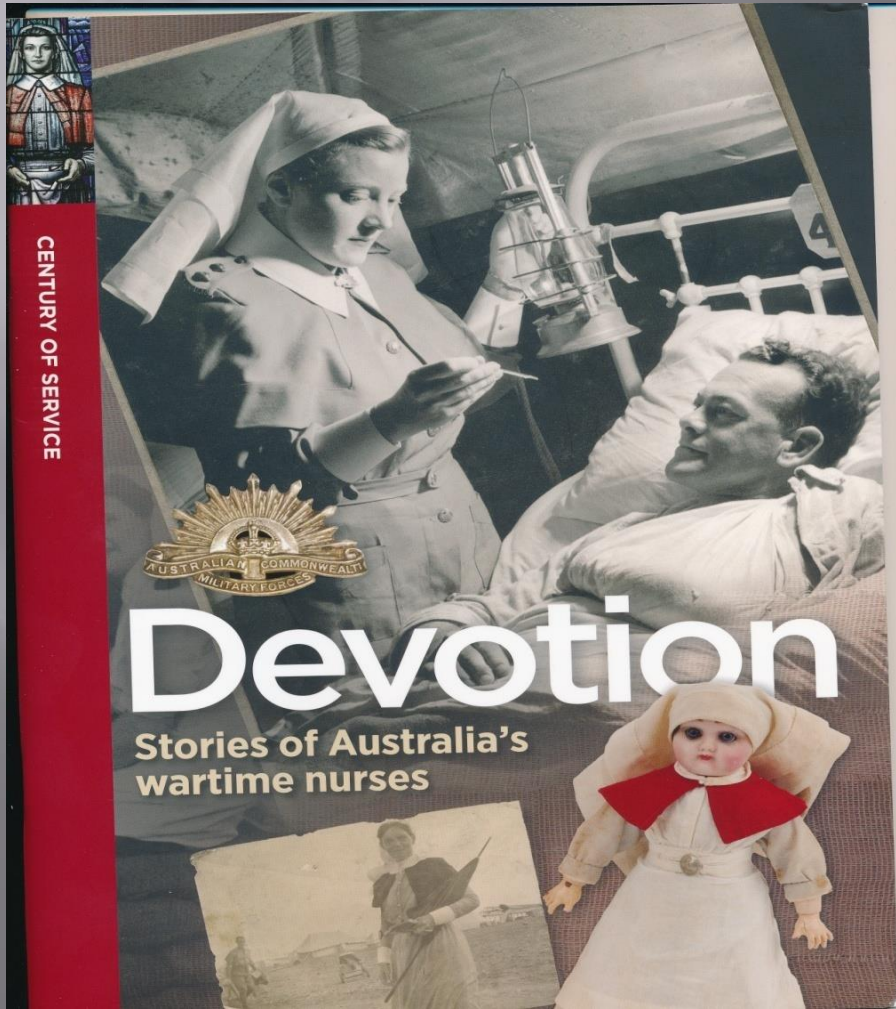


# The National Nurses Memorial in Anzac Parade, Canberra.





more than 25 gave their lives during WWI, many suffered illness, PTSD and with few post war benefits. Eight were awarded MCs. They received two medals.



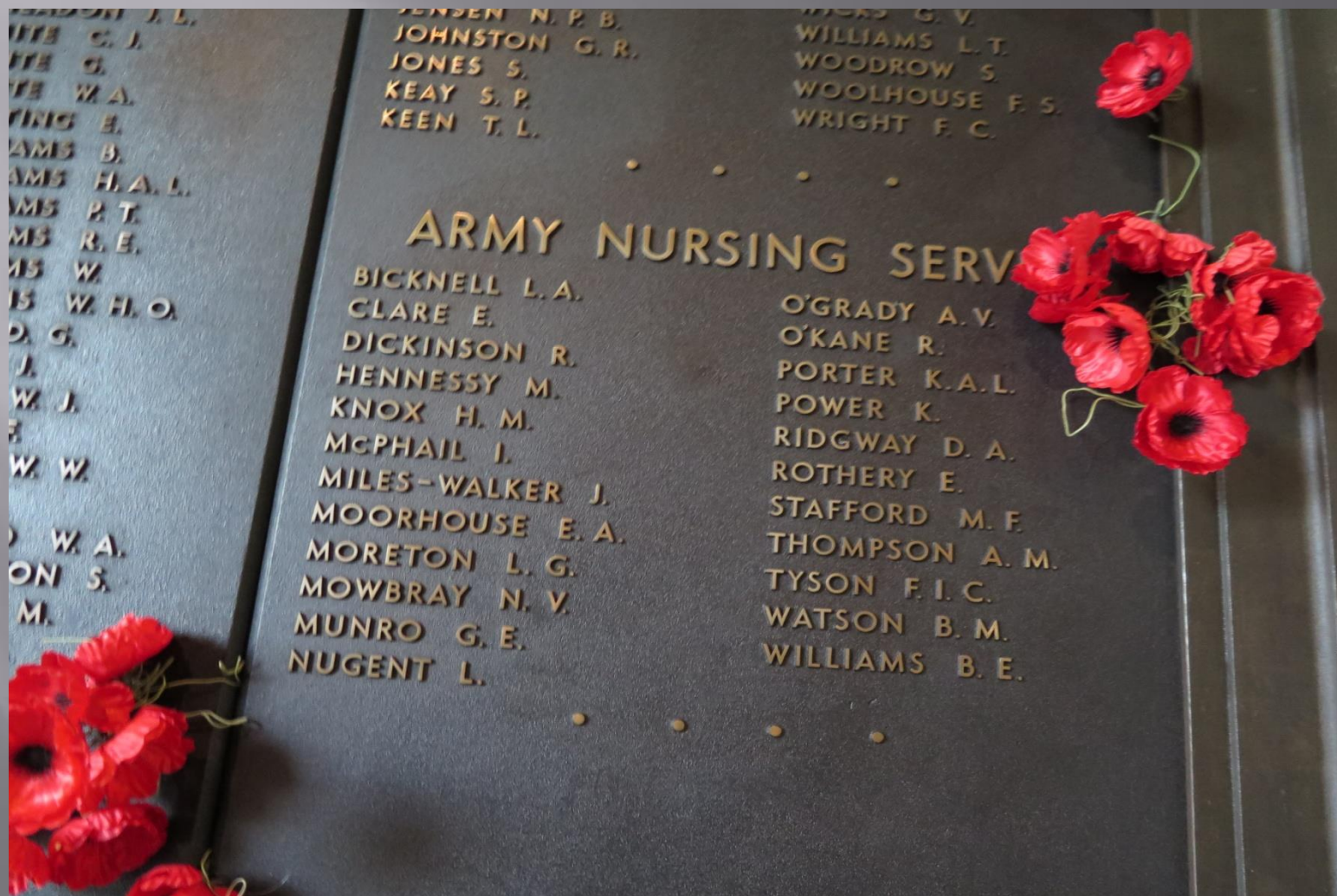
In the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, there are 15 stained-glass windows. Each shows a figure dressed in military uniform, and under each figure is a word which describes a quality displayed by Australians during wartime. One window features a nurse. She represents all military 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



# Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour for nurses in WWI



The exact number of nurses who died is a little unclear; the Maryborough memorial has a WWI nurse statue (actually a nun) but the plaque makes them invisible. Why?

ROLL OF HONOUR

*lian Army Nursing Service—AANS*

War

Frances Emma	HINES
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War I

Louisa Annie	BICKNELL
Emily	CLARE
Ruby	DICKINSON
May	HENNESSY
Hilda Mary	KNOX
Irene	McPHAIL
Edith Ann	MOORHOUSE
Letetia Gladys	MORETON
Norma Violet	MOWBRAY
Gertrude Evelyn	MUNRO
Lily	NUGENT
Amy Veda	O'GRADY
Rosa	O'KANE
Katherine Agnes Lawrence	PORTER
Kathleen	POWER
Doris Alice	RIDGEWAY
Elizabeth	ROTHERY
Mary Florence	STAFFORD
Ada Mildred	THOMPSON
Fanny Isobel Catherine	TYSON
Jean Miles	WALKER
Beatrice Middleton	WATSON
Blodwyn Elizabeth	WILLIAMS

Roll of honour - 117





# ANZAC DAY Canberra 2015



# AUSTRALIAN HEROINES OF WORLD WAR ONE



**Gallipoli, Lemnos and the Western Front**

**SUSANNA DE VRIES**

These are the stories of eight brave ANZAC nurses who performed magnificently under terrible conditions. Their diaries and photos bring to life their stories. Two had their health irreparably damaged; one never married and another died in poverty. They are only a few of the many others who have been largely forgotten since the end of WWI. They have been ignored for years. We must never forget their devotion, compassion, skill, care, dedication and heroism.

**Lest we forget....?**



Questions?

How should they be  
remembered?