

Boer War Conditions

Medical staff at a refugee nursing camp in the Orange River Colony, South Africa, 1901–02. AWM [P03558.001](#)



Imagine being left alone on the veldt in a Boer farm with your patient[s], far from assistance, hearing no news, and knowing nothing of what was happening ... My hut was built of clay ...with a...roof of reeds...There were no drugs other than [those] I had with me and no medical aid available... All treatment was left entirely in my hands... Altogether I had thirty patients...and thirteen at one time. Seven in one small tent on the ground with a macintosh sheet underneath...

Julia Anderson in Jan Bassett, *Guns and brooches*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 20–21



Medical staff and patients in a hospital ward, possibly in Bulawayo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), c. 1900. The ward, with its bare earth floor is decorated with flowers and framed portraits in an attempt to brighten up the primitive conditions. AWM [P04544.011](#)

Our nursing sisters were the only sisters who ventured into these districts, and they have indeed done more than their share of work. At times one, sometimes two, would be trekked off on a week's coaching journey to some fever bed where the troops are

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falling ill, with possibly no accommodation but a deserted public house. I have seen two sisters on their knees scrubbing and cleaning such a place to receive their patients, and in the middle of their work 10 or 12 sick and dying men dumped down from an ox wagon ... The nurses would be obliged to take off some of their own clothing to make pillows for sick men, and then go outside to cook food under a blazing sun.

R.L. Wallace, *The Australians at the Boer War*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1976, pp. 249–50.

Medical staff in Rhodesia, c.1900. Sister Fanny Hines is seated far left. She died in 1900 and was buried with full military honours in Bulawayo cemetery. AWM [P04544.003](https://www.awm.gov.au/record/P04544.003)



The health of some was affected. One of the Victorians, Fanny Hines...‘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’.

Julia Anderson in Bassett, *Guns and brooches*, p. 24

Activities

1. On the basis of the above evidence, what would you conclude about the experience of Australian nurses during the Boer War? Give reasons for your answers.
2. Note the ways in which the nurses coped with these conditions/experiences.

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