

## In the beginning: Florence Nightingale

When Florence Nightingale was a young woman, she longed to be a nurse, but her parents refused to give their permission. In early nineteenth-century Britain, hospitals were seen as filthy, dangerous places, and nurses as people you wouldn't want to know as unsavoury characters. Florence was determined to change this perception.

In 1853, as British military medicine was proving inadequate in the fighting at the Crimean War, Florence volunteered her services. Over the four-year course of the war, Florence led hospital staff in caring for thousands of wounded and sick soldiers.

When Florence and 38 British nurses arrived in the Crimea, conditions were much worse than they had expected. Infection was rife and stores had either not arrived or had been lost at sea. Florence immediately recognised that the hospitals needed to be properly managed, and she often worked 20-hour days to achieve this. At night Florence would walk the hospital corridors, caring for her patients. She was given the affectionate nickname, "The Lady with the Lamp".

After returning to Britain, Florence demanded an investigation into the military hospitals and the health of the army. Money donated by the general

### Activity

More than 40 nurses have been awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal. Go to the Australian War Memorial website: [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au).

Research one of the following nurses: **Olive Paschke**, **Evelyn Conyers** or **Vivian Bullwinkel**. What did they do to earn the Florence Nightingale medal?

If you would like to know more about Florence Nightingale, go to:

<http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk/cms/>

public was used to establish the first organised training school for nurses, the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas' Hospital, London.

In her later life Florence researched and campaigned about health problems. She wrote over 200 reports, pamphlets, and books on nursing and hospital organisation, which had a profound effect in Britain and across the world.

Florence's ideas on nursing were ahead of her time and changed society's approach to nursing for ever. Perhaps her greatest achievement was to take the first step in making nursing a respectable profession for women.

Florence Nightingale Medal posthumously awarded to Matron Olive Paschke, 2/10th Australian General Hospital. Matron Paschke drowned, along with 32 other Australian nurses, when the SS *Vyner Brooke* was sunk by Japanese bombers in the Banka Strait on 14 February 1942. AWM REL25108.006



In 1907 the Hungarian Red Cross Society proposed that a world-wide tribute be paid to Florence Nightingale in the form of a special medal for women who had distinguished themselves in the noble mission of caring for the sick and wounded.

In 1992, the International Committee of the Red Cross changed the criteria for awarding the Florence Nightingale Medal so that both male and female nurses could receive it.

This document is available on the Australian War Memorial's website at <http://www.awm.gov.au/education/resources/nurses>

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