

Nurses' uniforms and activities

Over the last 100 years, military nursing uniforms have changed significantly. From the white veils and red capes of the early 20th century to the camouflage uniforms of today, nursing uniforms have altered with the changing needs, expectations and status of military nursing.

1) Compare and contrast the following uniforms.



First World War AIF nurse's uniform, 1916.
AWM P07989.003

Camouflage uniform of the
Australian Medical Support
Force, 1994. AWM
MSU/94/0042/31



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2) Discuss how the image of military nursing has changed. What did the nurses think about the change?



Second World War malaria uniform, 1944. AWM 083325

Second World War

Most unsuitable uniform for New Guinea, large veils, starched collars and cuffs etc, had to be put aside. The climate was very hot and humid, no protection from mosquitoes to start with. Issued with army boiler suits and boots later, until Safari Suits could be manufactured and issued.

Matron Nell Williamson, 2/9th AGH. AWM S01819

Nurses in day (left) and night nursing uniforms, Vung Tau. AWM P04690.001



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Vietnam War

[The uniform] is totally inappropriate ... too hot and difficult to maintain, due to lack of starch and the wet. Still wearing veils!!??

Lieutenant Ann Hall RAANC

1) What do these opinions illustrate about women and their changing roles and attitudes?

Uniforms in another light

When 30 Australian nurses were shipwrecked and imprisoned by the Japanese at Banka Island and in Sumatra during the Second World War, they had only the uniforms on their backs. During their three and a half years in a prisoner of war camp, the nurses attributed special significance to these uniforms meant a lot to the nurses.

Though the nurses' uniform could not convince the Japanese that the nurses were servicewomen with rank, it helped to keep them united. They agreed that when they were set free they would wear their uniforms, so they looked after them, patching holes and shining buttons. As it turned out, the nurses wore their uniforms many times before this day came – to the funerals of their comrades.

By the time the nurses were rescued, their uniforms were almost in tatters, but the day they left the camp, they wore them proudly.

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.

Sister Veronica Clancy. AWM PR MSS1086

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Nurses from 2/10th, 2/11th AGH and one nurse from the 4th Casualty Clearing Station arrive at the airfield in Singapore for the journey home, September 1945. They wear their original oil-stained uniforms. AWM 044480

1. Examine the above photograph, which was taken by a *Sydney Morning Herald* photographer. What can you determine about these women by looking at it?

2. What significance do these uniforms have for these women? How can you tell?

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