

What was it like in the Boer War?

Imagine being left alone on the veldt in a Boer farm with your patients, 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 at a refugee nursing camp in the Orange River Colony, South Africa, 1901–02. AWM P03558.001



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



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

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.

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 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.

Activities

Three Australian nurses were awarded the Royal Red Cross for their service in the Boer War. Who were they? What did

they do to earn this award? Present your findings to the class.

Look at the above photographs and quotes. What was it like for nurses in the Boer War? How did they cope with these conditions?