

What was it like in the First World War?

Salonica

[Sister Gertrude Munro] was put straight into hospital for sick sisters. She had a bad combination, pneumonia and M.T. [malignant tertiary] Malaria which is very hard to fight. Being a strong healthy woman, we hoped against hope she might win through, but alas it was not to be.

Jessie McHardie White, 2 December 1918, Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry files, AWM 2 DRL 0509



Washing day at the nurses' quarters at the 60th Australian General Hospital, near Salonica, Greece, 1917. AWM C04337



A nurse with the 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital in the carriage of a hospital train, Denham, Buckinghamshire, 1916. AWM P02402.004

Hospital train, France

Patients lying everywhere in the grounds of the clearing station, the walking wounded were in hundreds and were fighting to get on the train, they had to be kept back by a Guard to enable the [stretcher] bearers to get the more serious cases on the train.

Sister Leila Smith speaks of her experience on No. 15 Ambulance Train, 1916. AWM 41 6/49



Matron Margaret Grace Wilson “does a round” in Lemnos, Greece, 1915. AWM A05332

Lemnos

Had a desperately hard time at Lemnos with food, tents, mud and sickness, as well as great troubles with Colonel Fiaschi, who treated Nurses shamefully – No consideration whatever ... I believe the Hospital would have collapsed but for the Nurses. They all worked like demons.

Lieutenant General R.H.J. Fetherston, AWM 3DRL 251

France

I arrived at the C.C.S. [casualty clearing station] about 10 am. The next few days was a continuous stream of wounded each one seemingly as bad as could be. Eight theatre teams working day and night yet it seemed impossible to cope with things; and the men were such bricks, lying on their stretchers waiting for their turn on the operating table. One realised this was war indeed. If one had time to think we would have just been weeping hysterical women but we'd only time to do.

Sister Belstead in A.G. Butler (ed.) *The Australian Army Nursing Service*, Vol. 3: Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914–1918, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1940, p. 557.



Sister Mary Jane Derrer of the 2nd Australian Casualty Clearing Station, France, 1917. She was one of eight Australian nurses awarded the Military Medal during the war. AWM P00156.071



Patients and nurses at Colaba War Hospital make Christmas decorations on the verandah of the ward. Members of the AANS served at the hospital mainly treating patients from the British garrisons in Bombay [Mumbai], India, 1917. AWM P07133.006

India

Here I am on duty, and Sister-in-Charge of two wards. Oh, these poor men from Mesopotamia! They are only skin and bone ... most of the poor men are not long for this world. Why are men allowed to suffer like this? I suppose stone monuments will be erected to their memory "of our glorious dead". What about the living? The blind, crippled, disfigured and those poor mad men and women.

Matron "Babs" Moberly speaking of her work in the dysentery and malaria wards in Cumballa hospital in Bombay, today known as Mumbai (quoted in Oppenheimer, *Australian women and war*, p. 30).

Activity

Examine the above photographs and quotes, which illustrate the conditions nurses faced during the First World War. Imagine you are a nurse in one of these environments. Write a journal entry or letter describing your experiences.