



THE WAR THROUGH NURSES' EYES

Letters from nurses and soldiers found their way into local newspapers, passed on by family members and friends. Although sanitised by the soldier or nurse and censored by the army, the accounts provide first hand accounts of conditions at and near the front.

They take on even greater poignancy when linked to contemporary photographs.

Here are accounts from two East Melbourne nurses, with photographs of just what they were describing.

May Hall

Trained Nurses Home Winfield at 340 Albert Street, East Melbourne as her enlistment address

Served on Lemnos, nursing sick and wounded from the Dardanelles campaign in harsh and primitive conditions

Wrote to family and friends in Bendigo asking for basic necessities for her patients

It is comforting to be doing something for the brave wounded, though at times it is heartbreaking work. You asked me to tell you what I think we need most. Pyjamas, as many as possible ... any amount of washers, not knitted ones ... toothbrushes and soap are very acceptable, but pyjamas by the thousand ... Books and magazines are of the greatest comfort to the wounded men as the poor fellows require something to take their thoughts off their awful experiences, and they talk and think of them when they have nothing to read.

(Bendigo Advertiser, 8.10.1915)



'Getting order out of chaos' on Lemnos, Sister Beryl Henson's album, (AWM PO5952.004.001)



May Hall's first patients from the Gallipoli campaign lacked basic necessities, (AWM J01440)

Muriel Thompson

Attended St Peter's Church, Eastern Hill where her cousin Edward Hughes was vicar

Enlisted and embarked for overseas with several nurses from the parish

Served in Egypt, England and the Western Front

Was mentioned in despatches for 'conspicuous services' in Egypt

Nursed at 2 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Southall (near London) which specialised in fitting artificial limbs to amputee soldiers; wrote to a friend

In this hospital (Southall), we have all our amputation boys. It is so sad seeing them minus limbs but they keep wonderfully bright and cheerful. They are just splendid when they get their new limbs. They practice until they walk perfectly ... The arm cases are not quite so successful, although the boys who have their arms off below the elbow can do everything for themselves. Our orderlies here are mostly men who have done their bit. A great many have one eye out but they get on splendidly with the work.

(Huron Times, 12.3.1918)



Nursing Sister Thompson, (Archives of Tasmania)



Muriel Thompson (seated) in her ward at 2AAH Southall, (AWM D00545)



Muriel Thompson's patients at 2 AAH Southall included multiple amputees, (AWM P10776.014.001)



Many of Muriel Thompson's patients were fitted with artificial limbs, (AWM D00572)

