

Australian Service Nurses with links to Bundaberg Region

Many nurses who went on to serve in the Australian Defence Forces spent considerable time in the Bundaberg area working and training at our hospitals.

Some who were born here or who spent much of their early life in our city are honoured by a plaque in the War Nurses Pavilion situated across from the Base Hospital.

The War Nurses Memorial Park and 'shelter shed' were officially opened in 1949 and apart for a period when the 'shed' became overgrown and dingy, it has provided a suitable place to relax for staff and visitors to the hospital. It is also the site of an annual ANZAC Day service which follows the Citizens' Service.

This memorial had been inspired by two Bundaberg Nurses who had given their lives during World War II, **Sister Joyce Wylie** who died in the sinking of the Hospital Ship *Centaur* and **Sister Pearl Mittelheuser** who lost her life as a Prisoner of War of the Japanese.

On VP Day 1995 the Bundaberg & District Ex Servicewomen's Association arranged a re-dedication of the facility which had been cleaned and beautified by the then Bundaberg City Council.

It was discovered that day, that a Bundaberg born and bred nursing sister was not included on the plaque – Lieutenant **Neita Lillian Morrison**.

Lt Morrison served in WWII spending her first 8 months in Lae, New Guinea before returning to work in Australian hospitals at Greenslopes, Charters Towers, Cairns and Heidelberg. Prior to joining the Australian Army Nursing Service Neita had worked also in a Bundaberg hospital.

Research undertaken by Leone Wilson with great assistance from Shirley McIvor, co-author of *Salute the Brave, A Pictorial History of Queensland War Memorials* revealed that many service nurses had spent time in the Bundaberg region. It was decided that recognition should be afforded beyond the Nursing Sisters named so that Neita and also many others with short or long links to Bundaberg could be included.

It was to take until 2013 to see a project begin with the aim of achieving this tribute. Bundaberg & District Ex Servicewomen are now well advanced in having a memorial wall positioned in the War Nurses Memorial Park.

The wall will honour all Australian Service Nurses from the Boer War to currently serving and is designed to enhance the existing pavilion as well as provide an appropriate venue for the laying of wreaths.

This memorial is to be dedicated on 24 September 2014.

100 years will be commemorated in Bundaberg in September 2014

Australia declared its involvement in World War One on 4th August 1914. Within a month the first AIF was preparing to join ships which would depart Australia in convoy.

On 24th September 2014 the War Nurses Memorial Park will be the location of one of the first 'ANZAC Centenary Commemoration' events based on the departure of a convoy of ships from Pinkenba, Brisbane on that day in 1914.

Four Nursing Sisters became the first official Queensland contingent of Nurses to depart for World War One. Unlike those to follow on a hospital ship, these boarded a troop ship.

They sailed aboard HMAT *Omrah* which headed south to link up with other ships eventually reaching Albany and departing Australian Waters, in convoy, on 1st November 1914.



Also embarking on HMAT *Omrah* was 9th Battalion 3rd Infantry Brigade, A Company, 32 officers & 977 other ranks including 5th Army Service Corps Company & Medical staff of 6, (4 being nurses).

The 8,291 gross ton twin screw steamship which had been built in 1899 first sailed to Australia on its maiden voyage in February 1899. In 1908 it carried the Australian Rugby Team, the first Wallabies to England for a tour of England and Wales. It was leased by the Commonwealth in 1914.

The journey from Queensland saw HMAT *Omrah* arrive at Port Melbourne on 28th September departing for Albany on 17th October 1914.



Local nurse is one of the four

Constance Mable Keys was born in Mount Perry on 30 October 1886. She trained at Brisbane General Hospital and enlisted as a staff nurse in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 21 September 1914, embarking just three days later.

Sister Keys was one of the most highly decorated nurses in the AANS. She was twice mentioned in dispatches, received the Royal Red Cross, second class and first class and was awarded the Médaille des Epidémies in recognition for work for French refugees. second class (ARRC) and first class (RRC) and was awarded the Médaille des Epidémies in recognition of work for French refugees.

A caption associated with a studio photo of the group names the three other nursing sisters.

Those photographed were left to right, seated:

Sister (Sr) Bertha Mary Williams; Sr Eunice Muriel Harriett Paten; standing: Sr Constance Mabel Keys; Sr Julia May Hart.

A plaque commemorating this anniversary is to be added to the new Australian Service Nurses Memorial Wall and also dedicated on 24th September.

Other WWI Nurses with Bundaberg district connections.

Matron Jane Bell OBE had been Matron of Bundaberg Cottage Hospital 1903-4; she sailed as Principal Matron on SS *Kyarra* in November 1914 and with her was **Anne Georgina Farquhar** of the Hummock, Bundaberg, and **Rose Jane Langford MID** who was a Matron at Mt Perry Hospital.

Beatrice Graham Cheesman MID was Matron of Lady Chelmsford Hospital, she like many other Australian nursing sisters joined the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service.

It can be expected that there are other WWI and WWII nurses who called Bundaberg home for a period of their life; and beyond the world wars....

Carolyn F Kennedy who is well known locally saw service in the RAAFNS during the Vietnam War spending time on evacuation aircraft. Carolyn is a regular attendee at the War Nurses ANZAC Day Service.

On 24th September 2014, all military nurses & sisters who have served from 1899 (Boer War) will be honoured with a small but fitting tribute for their care and dedication in bringing comfort to the victims of war.

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