

Ethel Bleach (1887 – 1970)

Ethel Bleach enlisted early and served with the No.1 Australian General Hospital in Egypt, treating casualties from Gallipoli, and in France, near the Somme. In September 1917 she was invalided back to Australia because of the lingering effects of trench fever.

Ethel Bleach, born in Collingwood, was the elder of two children. Her father worked in the printing trade at *The Australasian* and *The Argus* newspapers.

Ethel was educated at St Columba's College in Essendon, where she excelled in music.

Following the completion of her nurse training, she continued to work at St Vincent's Hospital and had broad experience by the time she enlisted for overseas service.

Ethel embarked for Egypt in December 1914 and was assigned to the No. 1 Australian General Hospital. This hospital was initially accommodated in a converted hotel building and tents in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis but soon expanded to additional buildings. The hospital treated troops serving in Egypt and casualties from Gallipoli. After months of this intensive nursing Ethel was promoted to the rank of Sister.

Ethel continued to work with this hospital in 1916 when, with its 117 nursing staff, it was transferred to Rouen in France, treating casualties from the Somme offensive of 1916 as well as numerous cases of disease including pneumonia. For a short time Ethel also relieved at the No. 5 British General Hospital, also based in Rouen.

After fifteen months, Ethel was transferred to the No. 2 Australian Auxiliary Hospital in Southall in London which specialised in fitting artificial limbs.

Ethel's service however had taken its toll on her. Just after arriving in London, she was sent to Mrs T. S. Hall's Hospital for Australian Sisters in South Kensington and then invalided back to Australia. She was suffering from trench fever, likely the result of nursing the wounded from the trenches at the Somme.

Ethel continued her nursing career on her return to Australia though where she worked is not known. In 1925 she registered with the Nurses' Registration Board of Victoria, and she recorded her occupation as nurse in electoral rolls up to the 1960s.

Ethel retired to St Kilda House, Rest Home for War Nurses, in Balaclava.



Where served: 1 AGH (Heliopolis, Egypt; Rouen, France); 5 BGH (Rouen, France); 2 AAH (Southall, England).

Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne: 1911

Enlistment: 1914

Final rank: Sister

Medals: 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal

Image source: *Table Talk*, 9.12.1909, p. 22.

Story: SVHM Archives, December 2024