Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0491

Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD)

(1914 -)

Born	19140101
Occupation	Community organisation

Summary

Voluntary Aid Detachments were established during World War I by members of the Australian Red Cross and the Order of St John. Members received instruction in first aid and home nursing from the St John Ambulance Association. Initially they worked without pay in hospitals and convalescent homes alongside doctors and nurses. After the war the voluntary service continued. Recruits were drawn from the local area by invitation from a serving member. During the World War II Voluntary Aid Detachment members were given more medical training, but they were not fully qualified nurses. Voluntary Aides worked in convalescent hospitals, on hospital ships and in the blood bank, as well as on the home front.

In New South Wales Voluntary Aid Detachments are now part of the Voluntary Aid Service Corps (VASC). To become a member of the Corps, volunteers must hold a current Senior First Aid Certificate. Members provide free first aid at major sporting and cultural events as well as assistance in times of disaster.

Details

The Australian Red Cross began organising Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) nation-wide as part of Lady Helen Munro Ferguson’s appeal “to the women of Australia” at the onset of World War I. They soon came to be largely comprised of women. Their scheme followed the policy of the British War Office, and the British Red Cross Society, of which Australia was developing a branch. A number of women had also enrolled in a Voluntary Aid Detachment in 1914 as part of the formation of the New South Wales branch of the British Red Cross Society. By August 1915, the Australian branch of the British Red Cross reported that Victoria and Tasmania also had Voluntary Aid Detachments. In addition Special Voluntary Aid Detachment Committees had been formed in each State Division, and a Committee of the Central Council had been formed. Recognised by the Military, the Voluntary Aid Detachments were at their peak in World War I and World War II, providing first aid, nursing assistance, comforts, domestic assistance and other supports for returned and wounded soldiers. In between the two World Wars, they continued their care for ex-soldiers and their families, raised funds, and moved into civil hospitals, homes and health associations. In 1928, they became a technical reserve of the Army Medical Corps, administered under the Minister of Defence through a Joint Central Council. After World War II, they extended their civilian service, which included the assistance of new immigrants. In January 1948, direct control of the Voluntary Aid Detachments was returned to the Australian Red Cross and St John Ambulance Society. Yet many Voluntary Aid Detachments folded as time went on, States withdrew from this area, and staff worked in a range of other Australian Red Cross services. In New South Wales, however, the Voluntary Aid Detachments were renamed and revamped as the Voluntary Aid Service Corps in 1967, where they still remain active.

Events

1941 - 1941
200 Voluntary Aids embark for the Middle East.

1918 - 1939
After the war the voluntary service continued in hospitals throughout Australia, drawing recruits from local areas by invitation from a serving member

1941 - 1941
Approval granted for Voluntary Aids to serve overseas

1916 - 1918
Australian Government recognised the Voluntary Aid Detachments as auxiliaries to the Medical Service, and Voluntary Aids began working in military hospitals in Australia

1948 - 1948
Direct control of the Voluntary Aid Detchments was returned to the Australian Red Cross and St John Ambulance Society

1939 - 1940
Due to labour shortages Voluntary Aids once again began working in the military hospital system

1941 - 1941
During World War II Voluntary Aid Detachment members serve in Cairo, Gaza and Ceylon as well as on hospital ships

1942 - 1942
The Australian Army Medical Women's Service established to distinguish between full-time military Voluntary Aids and those attached on a voluntary basis to the aid organisations

1942 - 1942
The Military Board approved the call-up of Voluntary Aids, and the Voluntary Aid Detachment began to be administered as a service within the Army Medical Service

1941 - 1941
The role of Voluntary Aid Detachments expanded and they are now employed in a wide range of positions, including as clerks, ambulance drivers, seamstresses, storekeepers, radiographers, dental orderlies and laundry staff

1928 - 1948
Voluntary Aid Detachments became a technical reserve of the Army Medical Corps, administered under the Minister of Defence through a Joint Central Council

1967 - 1967
Voluntary Aid Detachments were renamed and revamped as the Voluntary Aid Service Corps

1940 - 1940
Voluntary Aids began receiving payment for their duties

Published resources

Book
VAD's in peace and war : the history of Voluntary Aid Detachments in Australia during the 20th century, Goodman, R D, 1991

Nightingales in the mud : the digger sisters of the Great War 1914 - 1918, Barker, Marianne, 1989

50 years service to humanity, Australian Red Cross Society, [1964]

The Red Cross, 1914-1975 : years of change, Minogue, Noreen, 1976

Red Cross VAs: A history of the VAD movement in New South Wales, Oppenheimer, Melanie, 1999

From blue to khaki: The enlisted voluntary aids and others who became members of the Australian Army Medical Women's Service and served from 1941-1951, Mount-Batten, Betty J, 1995

Just wanted to be there : Australian Service Nurses 1899-1999, Reid, Richard, 1999

Australian women at war, Adam-Smith, Patsy, 1984

Look what you started Henry! A history of the Australian Red Cross 1914-1991., Stubbings, Leon, 1992

Journal Article
The Best P.M. for the Empire'? Lady Helen Munro Ferguson and the Australian Red Cross Society, 1914-1920, Oppenheimer, Melanie, 2002

Resource Section
Voluntary Aid Detachments, Australian War Memorial,
http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/vad.htm

Unsung heroes : Australia's military medical personnel, Australian War Memorial,
http://www.awm.gov.au/1918/medical/

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office
Correspondence files, multiple number series

Change of title from VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] to AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] [Box 69]

Joint State Council VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachments]

Services Personnel - Basis of issues (Including Australian Women's Land Army, Red Cross, VAD'S [Voluntary Aid Detachments], and St John's Ambulance Brigade)

Army Medical & Dental Corps. Nurses and Specialists [Applications for a Commission in the A.A.M.C. Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.)] - J M Snelling [Box 69]

Army Medical & Dental Corps. Nurses and Specialists [Applications for a Commission in the A.A.M.C. Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.)] - J L Christie [Box 69]

Voluntary Aid Detachments - Registration

Organisation of VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment]

Voluntary Aid Detachments [Grants]

[Uniforms for VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and AWLA [Australian Women's Land Army]

Army Medical & Dental Corps. Nurses and Specialists [Applications for a Commission in the A.A.M.C. Voluntary Aid Detachments (V.A.D.)] - A R Appleford [Box 69]

National Archives of Australia, Sydney Office
Registration of Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachments [VADs]

Change of name of voluntary aid detachment [feminist club Wakehurst VAD]

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
Scheme for the Organisation of Voluntary Aid in Australia; Also Handbook for Voluntary Aid Detachments in Australia

Subsidies - Australian Red Cross Society. Voluntary aid detachments.

Australian War Memorial, Research Centre
Lila Stocks (née McKenzie), Voluntary Aid Detachment and Private Australian Army Medical Women's Service, interviewed by Angie Michaelis for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45

Jill Edith Linton (née Oliver), as a Private, Australian Army Medical Women's Service, interviewed by Angie Michaelis for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archives of Australia in the War of 1939-45

Medical kit : Voluntary Aid Detachment

The services on parade in Melbourne and Sydney (News From Home. No. 65)

Interview with Patsy Adam-Smith (When the war came to Australia)

The leaders of the Australian Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)

Group portrait of members of the first VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) contingent to travel overseas.

[Voluntary Organizations and Women's Services:] Correspondence concerning design of Voluntary Aid Detachment certificates and use of the Red Cross symbol

[Voluntary Organizations and Women's Services:] Voluntary Aid Detachments

[Voluntary Organizations - Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD):] Memoranda, Summaries and handbooks concerning the enrolment and training of women for national emergency

Ladies of Voluntary Aid Detachments marching past Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the Governor General, in front of Government House.

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection
TR 1772 Women in War - Personal Reminiscences 1995

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