Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5402

Robinson, Frances Alice (Alice)

(1882 - 1973)

Born	18820801, Pompapiel, near Bendigo Victoria Australia
Died	19730317, Kew Victoria Australia
Occupation	Army Nurse, Nurse

Summary

Frances Alice Robinson served in Egypt, France and England and on hospital transports nursing soldiers being repatriated to Australia during her service with the Australian Army Nursing Service in World War I. Before enlisting she had been matron at Jerilderie and Queanbeyan hospitals in NSW and at Duntroon Military Hospital, ACT.

Details

Frances Alice Robinson (known as Alice) was born at Pompapiel north of Bendigo on 1 August 1882, daughter of William and Catherine Robinson. She trained at Bendigo Hospital and was registered as a trained nurse on 2 July 1909. She had been matron at Jerilderie Hospital for about four years when, in 1913, she beat six other nurses for appointment as matron of Queanbeyan Hospital. In Jerilderie she had cared for a young nephew following the death of his mother but this arrangement appears to have ceased by the time she reached Queanbeyan. Obviously a countrywoman, she was described as ‘a good shot with a rifle’ when she offered to join the AIF as a field nurse in 1914.

She resigned as Queanbeyan Hospital matron in April 1915 to enlist in the Australian Army Nursing Service and, while waiting to be called up, nursed at Royal Military College from 8 May to 30 July 1915. While still waiting she returned briefly as matron of Queanbeyan Hospital as her replacement had been unsatisfactory. Her enlistment as a staff nurse in the Australian Army Nursing Service dated from 13 October 1915. She was farewelled at the Protestant Hall Queanbeyan and presented with a gold watch and later with £13/8/6 to purchase a uniform.

When Frances Alice Robinson enlisted she was 33 years, her religion was Church of England and she named her father William Robinson, ‘Birthday Villa’ of Malmsbury Victoria, as her next of kin. Birthday Villa is now a boutique winery in the Macedon Ranges, named after a nearby mine discovered on Queen Victoria’s birthday.

Frances Alice Robinson left Sydney on HMAT Orsova on 10 November 1915 bound for Egypt. Her first posting was to 2nd Australian General Hospital (AGH) at Ghezireh Palace Hotel outside Cairo which had been taken over to add to the accommodation at Mena House when it was overwhelmed by the great numbers of sick and wounded being evacuated from Gallipoli. The two hospitals comprising 2 AGH had a total of 1500 beds. In January 1916 she travelled to Lemnos to nurse Gallipoli patients being evacuated by ship from 3rd AGH during its closure and relocation to Egypt.

For the following seven months she nursed at the British Choubra Military Hospital, Cairo, an infectious diseases hospital at that time specialising in enteric (typhoid) cases, and then briefly at 3rd AGH at Abbassia on the outskirts of Cairo. At the beginning of September 1916, Robinson joined HMAT Ascanius, a hospital transport ship, at Suez to nurse patients on the return trip to Australia. Hospital transports took ‘non-cot patients’ and were fitted with hammocks and double-tier bunks. After leave in Sydney, she nursed briefly at the Garrison Hospital before returning to London on HMAT Benalla.

During the first half of 1917 she was attached to 2nd Australian Auxiliary Hospital (AAH) in Southall near London which specialised in the fitting of artificial limbs and then at 3rd AAH, Dartford, Kent, where war neuroses and nerve cases were treated. On 20 July 1917 she was again posted to a hospital transport, joining HMAT Euripides to make another trip back to Australia nursing returning soldiers. She had leave in Sydney then worked briefly at the 4 AGH Randwick before returning to Britain on HMAT Demosthenes. After landing at Glasgow at the end of 1917, she was attached briefly to the 2 AAH Southall but became ill with cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder). Alice Robinson returned to Australia on HMAT Euripides arriving on 21 March 1918. She was discharged medically unfit on 21 September 1918 with the rank of Staff Nurse.

Alice Robinson did not return to nursing after the war. After working as a knitting manufacturer she ran a haberdashery and manchester shop at Belgrave in the Dandenong Ranges east of Melbourne. On 18 June 1930 while living at Belgrave she married Harvey Alexander White of nearby Upwey. Her husband died about seven years later and she had three other long-term relationships. During the latter years of World War II she had a confectionery and grocery shop in Brisbane where she had relatives then returned to live in the Melbourne suburb of Canterbury. She died in an aged care home in Kew on 17 March 1973 at the age of 90 years 7 months.

Frances Alice Robinson was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and is commemorated on the ACT Memorial and listed on the Queanbeyan World War I Roll of Honour.

Published resources

Site Exhibition
Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1

Book
History of the RMC Hospital, 5 Camp Hospital and 21 Dental Unit, Howarth, Ross, 2007

More than Bombs and Bandages: Australian Army Nurses at work in World War I, Harris, Kirsty, 2011

Book Section
Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services 1914-18. Vol. III: Problems and Services, Butler, A.G., 1943

Resource Section
Robinson, Frances Alice, 2103,
http://nurses.ww1anzac.com/ro.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
Robinson Frances Alice : SERN S/NURSE : POB Bendigo VIC : POE N/A : NOK F Robinson William

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Digital resources



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