Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5403

Steel, Ruth Allardyce

(1882 - 1971)

Born	18820718, Bungendore New South Wales Australia
Died	19710927, Neutral Bay New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Army Nurse, Nurse

Summary

Ruth Allardyce Steel enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service in 1917 for service in World War I and was sent with a group of Australian nurses to Salonika. She became ill almost immediately with malaria and in 1918 returned to Australia. She had trained at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney and was a nursing sister there both before and after her enlistment in the military.

Details

Ruth Allardyce Steel was born in 1882, the third daughter of Reverend Robert Alexander Steel and his wife Amy (nee Barnet) at Bungendore, NSW, where the Steels were living while they waited for a manse to be built at Queanbeyan. Her father was a son of Reverend Robert Steel, minister of St Stephen's Church Sydney and a moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Her mother was a daughter of the Colonial Architect James Barnet who was responsible for the design and construction of many public buildings in Sydney including the GPO, Customs House, Public Library and the International Exhibition building. He designed the Queanbeyan manse which became home for the Steel family of five girls and three boys.

Ruth Steel's connection with Canberra was through her father's position as minister of St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Queanbeyan, whose far-flung parish included what became the site of the National Capital. During seventeen years at Queanbeyan Rev. Steel preached wherever services were required. This included monthly services at St Ninian's Church on the Yass Road north of the Molonglo River (now in the Canberra suburb of Lyneham), at John McInnes's farm at Kowen, at Richard Vest's overseer's cottage at Yarralumla, at Majura, Lanyon, Gudgenby and Booroomba, all now in the ACT. He also held an annual March tea followed by one in May with outdoor log fires in Canberra.

After Amy Steel's death in 1897, the Steel family moved to a new parish at Campbelltown. Later one of the Steel daughters, Ruby, married Rev E. Sydney Henderson who had been appointed minister at Queanbeyan and the family continued its association with St Stephen's, Queanbeyan and with also with St Stephen's Presbyterian Church Forrest ACT after it opened in 1934. Ruth Steel endowed a pew in St Andrew's Warriors' Chapel.

In 1909, when she was 27, Ruth began training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney. In old age she recalled that nurses received no pay in their first year and only a nominal amount in the second year. Ruth was registered as a nurse on 4 August 1911 and continued nursing at the hospital. She wished to enlist early in the First World War but was dissuaded by the Matron who told her she was needed at the hospital. (English-born Matron Mabel Newill enlisted herself in 1917 and served at hospitals in England and at Wimereux in France before being discharged medically unfit. She remained in England after the War.)

On 21 May 1917 Ruth Steel volunteered in Sydney in the Australian Army Nursing Service. On her enlistment papers she was described as 34 years 9 months, and a Presbyterian. Within a few weeks she embarked on the Mooltan in Sydney expecting to nurse in France but landed at Suez and was sent to Egypt and then on the Huntsgreen to Salonika.

When she arrived in Salonika on 12 August 1917 she was assigned to the 60th General Hospital (BGH), a British tent hospital at Hortiach about 20 km from the city, high in the hills towards Bulgaria, but a month later was admitted to the 43 BGH with a serious attack of malaria. In 10 November, after treatment in hospital and at a Sisters" convalescent home, she rejoined 60 BGH. Just two weeks later, she was back in 43 BGH as a patient with recurrent malaria.

On 26 November 1917 a Medical Board decided that she would be unfit for duty for at least six months and should be invalided back to Australia. She left for Australia from Egypt on the Ulysses on 15 February 1918. She recovered in Sydney and worked for a short time in the military hospital at Randwick before being discharged on 30 November 1918. She received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and is commemorated on the City of Queanbeyan Roll of Remembrance in Queanbeyan and Bungendore and District War Memorial.

Ruth Steel returned to Royal Prince Hospital as sister in charge of a ward, her service at the hospital both before and after the First World War totaling 28 years. Later she did private nursing. In her late eighties while living with her youngest sister Mary in Neutral Bay she still attended ANZAC Day services although blind. She died in Sydney in 1971 at the age of 89.

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

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Mettle and Steel: the AANS in Salonika, Wadman, Ashleigh, 2015, https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2015/01/13/mettle-and-steel-aans-salonika/

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

Guns and brooches : Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War, Bassett, Jan, 1992

And this Stone: The Story of St Stephen's Presbyterian Church Queanbeyan, Armour, Jan, 1974

Resource Section
Barnet, James Johnstone (1827 - 1904), McDonald, D.I., 1969, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/barnet-james-johnstone-2939/text4257

Steel, Ruth Allardyce, 2013, http://nurses.ww1anzac.com/st.html

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
STEEL Ruth Allardyce : Service Number - Staff Nurse : Place of Birth - Bungendore NSW : Place of Enlistment - N/A : Next of Kin - (Sister) STEEL Amy Roberta

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Digital resources



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