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A general view of Mrs Chisholm’s canteen

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A general view of Mrs Chisholm’s canteen. A greatly appreciated canteen conducted by two Australian ladies, Mrs Alice Chisholm and Miss Verania (Rania) MacPhillamy, afforded the nearest home comforts available to the troops in Sinai and Palestine. This canteen was originally founded by Miss Rout, a New Zealander, who was forced through illness to relinquish it. Rania MacPhillamy, born in 1889, was the daughter of a wealthy squatter from Forbes NSW. In 1915 she trained as a VAD and went to Egypt to help nurse the wounded from Gallipoli. After the death of her sweetheart, Ronnie MacDonald of the 1st Light Horse Regiment, Rania stayed on in Egypt and formed a remarkable partnership with an older Australian, Mrs Alice Chisholm. Together they ran a canteen for the Light Horsemen at Port Said, and in early 1917 took over the running of another canteen at Kantara, a busy railway junction on the Suez Canal. Known as the ‘Empire Soldiers Club’, this became one of the best-known and best-loved institutions in Egypt. Thousands of soldiers were able to enjoy low-cost meals and friendly hospitality on their journeys to and from the front line: the club was open 24 hours a day and operated without a break from early 1917 until after demobilisation.

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