

The Boer War

By Pru Cox and Dorothy Owen



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART93109

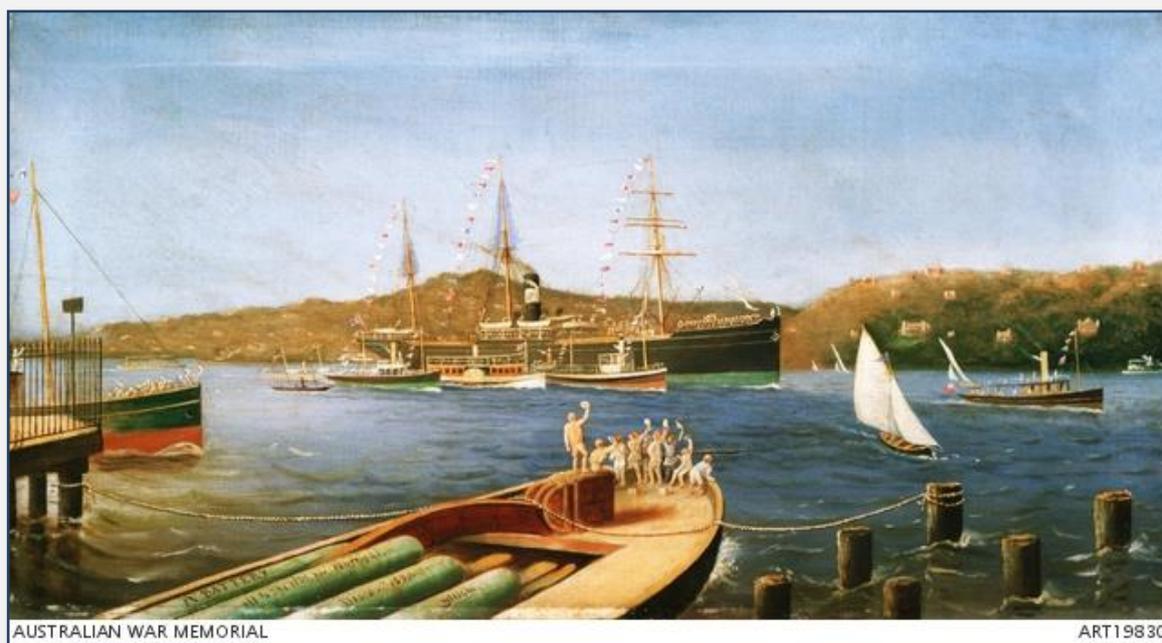
Picture represents soldiers from all the colonies standing before the flags of the British Empire. AWM ART93109

A small crowd on the wharf in Brisbane farewell the troopship SS Cornwall which took the first contingent to South Africa for the Boer War. Artist Ann (Annie) Midgley (1866-1943). The SS Cornwall left Sydney on 7 November 1899 with the Queensland contingent for the Boer War on board, along with 285 horses. It stopped at Albany, Western Australia on 16 November and arrived in Capetown, South Africa in December 1899. AWM Art 50111



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART50111



Transport ship, the New South Artillery, 'A' Battery SS Warrigal steaming down the harbour on departure from Sydney for the Boer War. William Jamieson Allom (1832-1902). AWM Art 19830

From the Australian perspective, life would have been easier if they had waited two years and let Federation happen before this war. In July 1899, sure that conflict was inevitable and imminent, Queensland had offered troops to Britain, their offer was refused, but in the same month Britain requested the participation of New South Wales and Victoria. After a long lead time war was finally declared in October 1899, and nothing was easy. At first no colonial nurses or medical services were allowed to go to South Africa. When requesting troops the British military authorities opposed nurses being included with the medical services. The colonies insisted so the British demanded that the nurses care exclusively for the men from their own contingents and they were expressly forbidden to look after British regular soldiers. In all forty-four military nurses went to the war and as many as thirty women paid their own way to South Africa as civilian nurses. Each of the colonies ultimately sent between four and six contingents.

Everything changed after the week of 10 December 1899, Britain suffered three disastrous defeats in what became known as 'Black Week' with 2,776 men killed, wounded and captured. The events were an eye opener to Britain, who had thought that the war would be easily and quickly won. Sounds familiar.

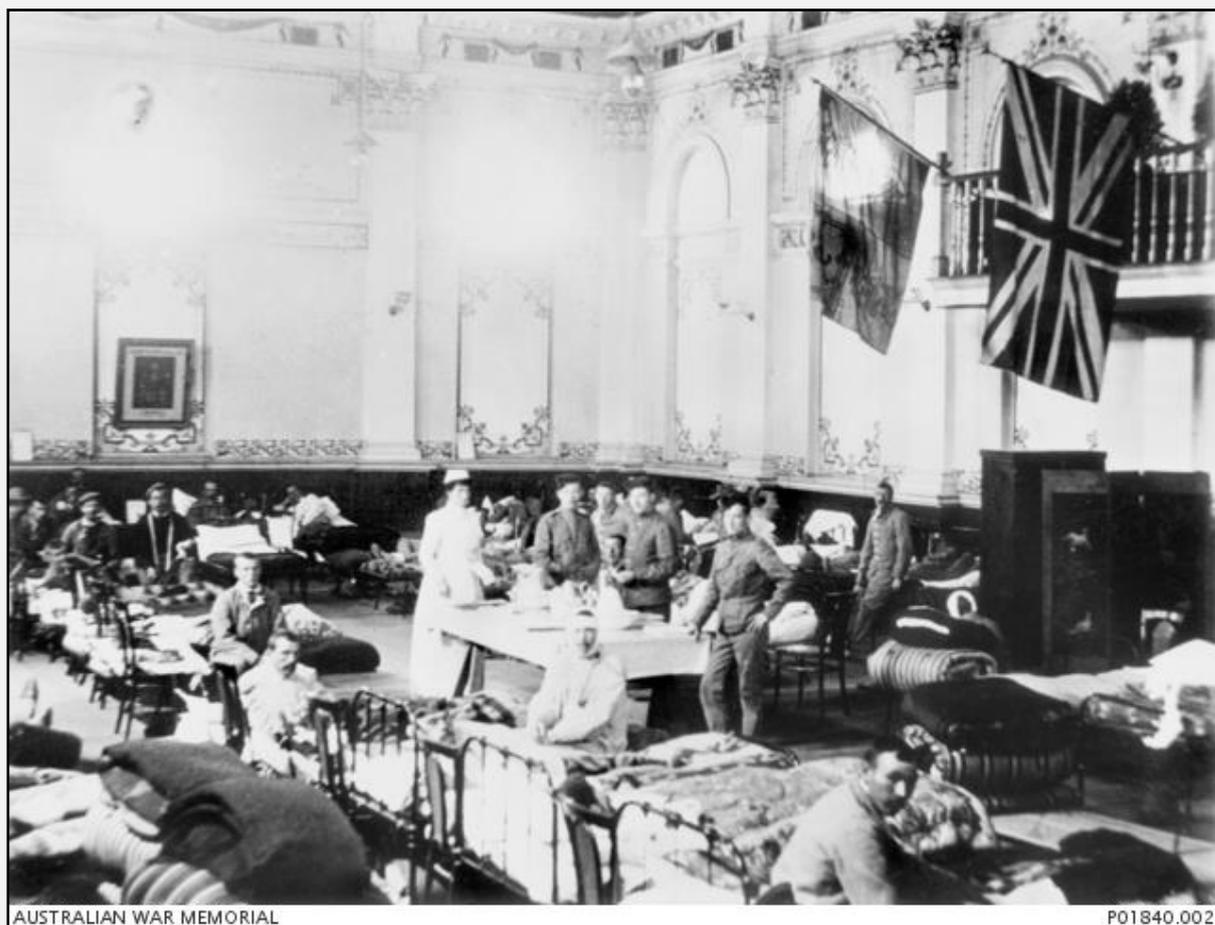


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A02766

New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve (NSWANSR). The New South Wales Government was the only one of the colonial governments to pay the fares and salaries of nurses for South Africa. Back row, left to right: Sister Annie Austin; Sister Elizabeth Ward Lister; Sister Mabel Steele; Sister Emily Hoadley; Sister Bessie Pocock; Sister Marion Martin. Middle row: Sister Annie Matchett; Sister I. Bligh Johnston; Sister Ellen I. (Nellie) Gould; Front row: Sister Nixon; Sister Penelope Frater; Sister Anna Garden; Sister Nancy Newton; Sister Therese Woodward. AWM A02766

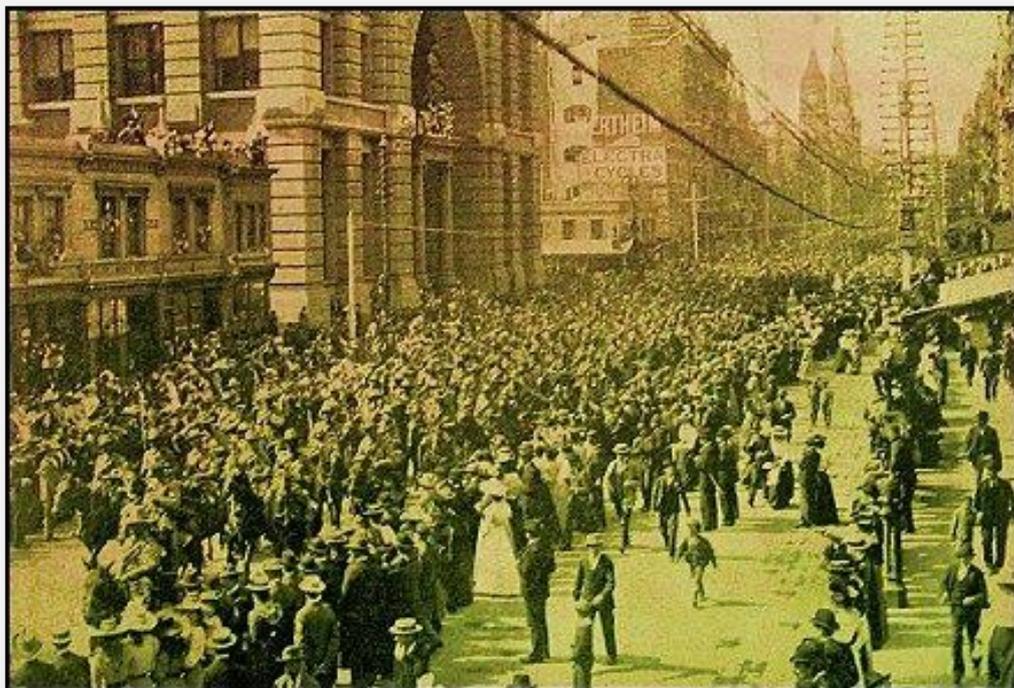
New South Wales. The NSW contingent left in January 1900 and after the July request had had to come up with an Army nurse's uniform in a hurry – luckily there were two senior doctors on hand who were able to decide to adopt the English uniform. NSW had a basic Army Nursing Reserve set up but hadn't got as far as formalising a uniform for the group. The fifteen nurses, members of the New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve were led by Sister Nellie Gould. After leaving Australia they worked for six months in Stormberg and Cronstadt before arriving in Johannesburg. Their welcome was not the warmest, the British Medical Officer in charge greeted them with the daunting words of '*...my God, Australian sisters, what shall we do?*' He was under the misapprehension that Australian and British nurses couldn't work together. Miss Gould met the British Superintendent Sister, Miss Oram and a bond of mutual respect quickly formed between the two women. This was fortunate as they worked together for eighteen months and worked hard; with thirty-five nurses for twelve hundred patients the nurses worked fourteen hour days, six days a week as a minimum



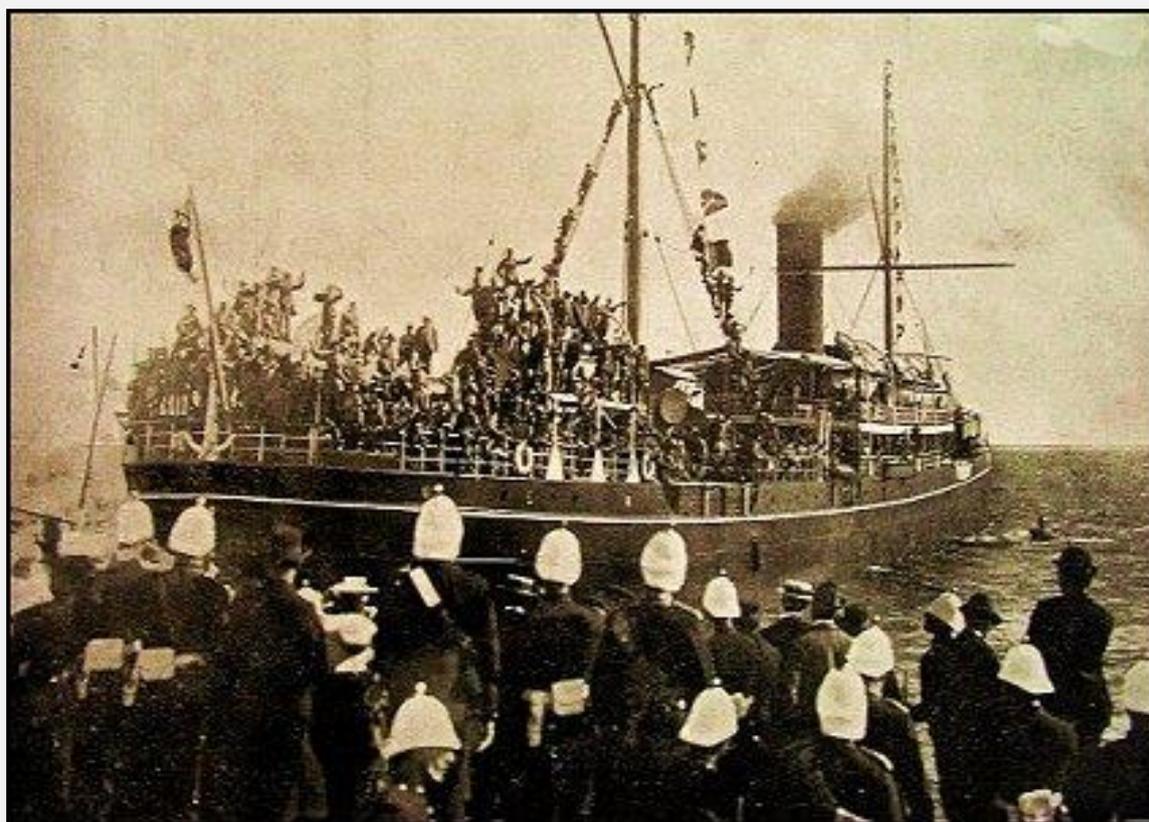
Johannesburg, South Africa, 1900. Interior view of the Masonic Hall used by No. 2 Stationary Hospital. AWM P01840_002

Victoria. According to the article ‘*Off To The War In South Africa 1899-1902*’ by Kingston City Historian Dr. Graham Whitehead, *Kingston historical website*:

The colony of Victoria offered to provide volunteers to support Britain’s campaign against the Boers in South Africa and by the end of September 1899, before hostilities had been declared, 1153 men had volunteered from Victoria. The first sailed on October 22, 1899, the second contingent quickly followed on January 13, 1900, with the third contingent known as the ‘Bushmen’s Contingent’ departing on March 10 in the same year. The ‘Imperial Contingent’, the fourth group, sailed from Melbourne for South Africa on May 1, 1900. This contingent was given the title ‘Imperial’ because the British Government accepted the responsibility for paying allowances and pensions.



Troops for the Boer War march down Collins St



SS Euryalus sails from Port Melbourne for the Boer War, March 1900

'5.30, Nurse!' *The Story of the Alfred Nurses (Paterson 1996)* covers the role of the Alfred nurses in some detail. We know of five Alfred nurses who served in the war:

- Annie Thomson - graduated 1886, sailed with the 3rd Contingent
- Amy Robinson Schutt - graduated 1887, was in England and served with the British Army
- Rosalind (Rose) Lena Shappere - graduated 1893, was in England when war was declared and made her own way to South Africa to offer her services.
- Janey Macrobie Lempriere - graduated 1896, at the Hospital for Sick Children and did her adult experience and was working at the Alfred when the war started. Janey sailed with the 2nd Contingent. Also served in WW1.
- Matilda (Mattie) MacNeill - graduated 1897, at this time we have no details of Mattie's service. Also served in WW1.

Janey Lempriere was born in 1872 in Melbourne, Victoria, attended Fairlight Private Girls in East St Kilda. She embarked from Australia to Cape Town on 13 January 1900 with the 2nd Contingent. Janey had an interesting war, she was posted to the School Hospital, Pretoria on 23 April 1900, the General Hospital Howick, *HS Montford* on 27 May 1901 and the General Hospital, Pretoria on 22 November 1901.



Stylised illustration of a fight between British soldiers (right) and Boer commandos Possibly Koegas area, Northern Cape Colony, part of a series of works that were found at Ipswich Railway station, very tentatively ascribed to Lieutenant H. St. J. Sweetland of "A" Battery Royal Australian Artillery. The sketches were reportedly stored in a drawer in the railway office from at least 1930. ART19537

A group of nine Victorian Nursing Sisters, including Annie Thomson, were organised to go in March 1900 aboard *SS Euryalus* with the 3rd Imperial Bushmen's Contingent. Information is scarce but the nurses were led by Marianne Rawson who was awarded the Royal Red Cross after the war.



*Group portrait of General Sir Frederick Carrington and some of his medical staff in Rhodesia. Identified, back row, left to right: Dr Welsford, Dr Horan, Major Fosling, Dr Rowe, Sir Frederick Carrington, Dr Bond, Captain de Rengi and Mr Ferguson. Front row: Sister (Sr) **Frances Emma (Fanny) Hines**, Sr Julia B Anderson, Sr Marianne Rawson, Sr Ellen Walker and Sr **Annie Eliza Helen Thomson**. AWM P04544.003*

A significant part of the Victorian story is the story of Frances “Fanny” Hines. Born 1864 at Apsley, Victoria, Fanny embarked for Cape Town 10 March 1900 with the 3rd Bushman’s Contingent.



The grave of Sister Frances Emma (Fanny) Hines, who died of pneumonia in South Africa on 7th August 1900 (grave number 541). She was buried with full military honours. AWM P04544.004



In *Veiled Lives – threading Australian nursing history into the fabric of the First World War*, Ruth Rae tells the story. Fanny went to Fairlight Private Girls School in East St Kilda and trained at the Melbourne Hospital for Sick Children. Fanny had been in sole charge of the sick at Enkeldoorn when she died of Pneumonia on 7 August 1900 at Bulawayo Memorial Hospital. Fellow nurse, Sister Julia Anderson, remembered Fanny in her diary:

"She died of an attack of pneumonia contracted in devotion to duty. She was quite alone, with as many as twenty-six patients at one time, no possibility of assistance, or relief and without sufficient nourishment."

In contrast to this is the letter written by Marianne Rawson after Fannies' death.

Sister Rawson, writing to Dr. R. H. Fetherston, says:

"Since my letter to Colonel Fetherston, written at Zeerust, you would have heard of the death of Sister Hines. This news was a terrible shock to us and I had received such good reports of her that I was not at all anxious, nor would I have left her if I thought that there was any danger. Then the lines of communication were somewhat interfered with, and it took some time to get a message through



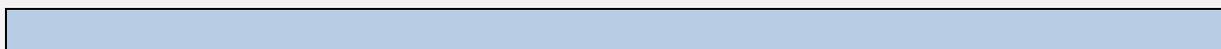
Sr. Marianne Rawson

to Zeerust. It was only the matter of a brief period sister's illness (pneumonia) and when the sad news reached me I could not believe it. I miss her dreadfully; she was so good and so unselfish. When I was leaving Bulawayo she said, "Sister, do get me on with you," and I promised to arrange it when I got things settled. Fortunately, we were not all scattered. Five of the 'sisters' were at Bulawayo, and they alternately, day and night, nursed her. Nothing could exceed the kindness of the house surgeon and the matron, also the staff of the Bulawayo (Memorial) Hospital. They could not have done more had Sister Hines been their relation. Dr Strong, of Bulawayo, sent a wreath, and also sent one for the 'sisters' on the day of the funeral. Everybody has been so kind and thoughtful. Sister had a military funeral. Sisters B Smith and Langlands, who had come on from Umtali a few days previously were present, also Sisters Thomson and Anderson, also Tiddy. Sisters Ivey and Dorothy Smith will by this

time have reached Victoria, in Matabeleland, where they will be looking after the Yeomanry principally, as they are stationed there, and Sister Walter is with me. I believe that all particulars have been sent on to Mrs Hines from Bulawayo, both by the matron of that hospital and by our own sisters.'

The Ballarat Star Wednesday 03 October 1900 page 4

Fanny has the dubious honour of being the first Victorian nurse to die on active service: she was not classified an Australian as she died before Federation in 1901.





Informal group portrait of medical staff and patients in a hospital ward, possibly in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe]. The ward is decorated with flowers in jars of water, pretty Japanese fans and framed portraits in an attempt to brighten up the primitive conditions as indicated by the bare earth floor. AWM P04544.011

Information about the war is scattered and requires a bit of piecing together, but you do get the feeling that the officers' lot was much better than that of the ordinary soldier, 'Tommies' as they were known. In a letter from two West Australian nurses in *The Inquirer & Commercial News* Perth, 24 August 1900:

No. 7 General Hospital, Field Force, Estcourt, Natal, July 4, 1900. I fully intended to write to you sooner, but we three — Sister Milne, Nurse Emmens, and I — who are at No. 7, have, up till now, been exceptionally busy. At present we are on night duty, so we have an odd night's time to sit down for an hour or two. I just wish those people who said we were not wanted here could see how much they are in need of trained nurses, particularly those whose friends and relations are only privates in the army. Of course, the officers fare all right; it is not one sister and two or three orderlies to 56 or 60 of them. I am afraid we are stuck here.



Nurses and a local man relaxing amongst a number of tents in a Field Hospital at Mafeking, South Africa. AWM P04544.007

Rose Shappere in contrast had a very well documented and exciting war. The extract below is from the Sydney based publication *The Newsletter* dated 28 June 1902. All the information about the nurses (through to World War 2) has been in the ladies' section of the paper. The article before this one in the paper tells us that gloves are being worn loose this year, and tightly fitting gloves are now considered vulgar...

Miss Rosalind Shappere, who has been for the past two and a-half years nursing the sick and wounded British and Boer soldiers in South Africa, returned to Sydney last week. Her experiences in that country have been many and varied, and from her modest remarks one gathers something of the heroic work done by the noble women who sacrificed health and comfort to help the suffering. Sister Rosalind was the only Australian nurse at the siege of Ladysmith. She tells us that the colonial nurses are far more efficient and experienced than the English nurses, who show their jealousy towards the former in a very marked manner. Miss Shappere met many distinguished soldiers during her stay in South Africa, and obtained autographed photographs of Lord Roberts, Sir George Grey, General Knox, and Baden-Powell. Sir George Grey gazetted her to receive her Royal Red Cross honour and she also received a command from the King to receive a medal in recognition of the services she had rendered. Unfortunately Miss Shappere was at sea when the command reached South Africa, so could not obey it. However, she is to have conferred upon her four clasps in recognition of having nursed the sick and wounded in four separate States in South Africa. Sister Rosalind Shappere returns to Johannesburg after a few days' sojourn in Sydney.

The Sydney Morning Herald on 29 December 1899 ran the following article:

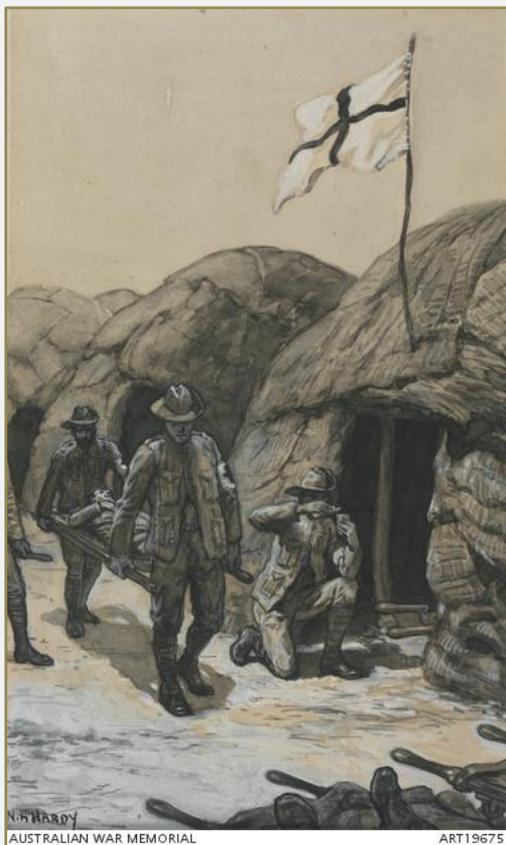
AN AUSTRALIAN NURSE IN LADYSMITH.

EXCITING EXPERIENCES IN THE HOSPITAL.

Amongst the nurses (says the Melbourne "Argus") now at the front at Ladysmith is Miss Rose Shappere, of Melbourne, who was trained at the Alfred Hospital. No letters have been received from the young lady herself, but Dr Crogan, of Johannesburg, writing to her mother in Melbourne, gives interesting particulars of her movements He writes -

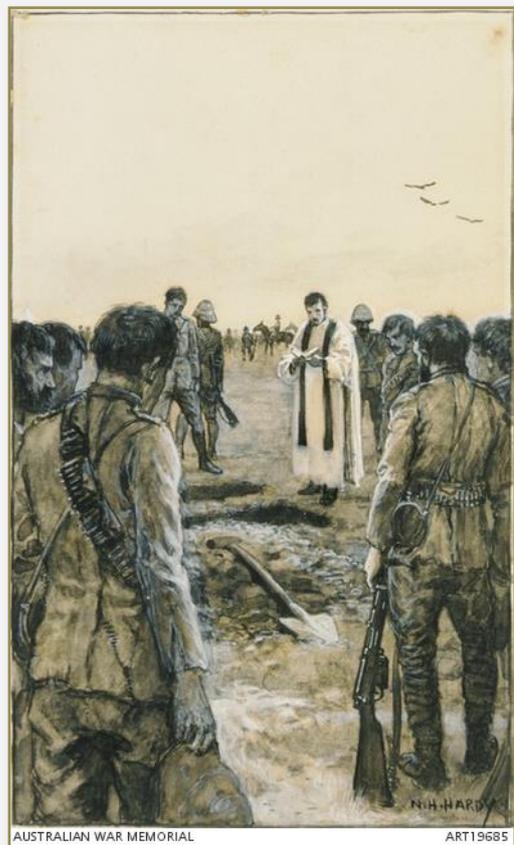
JOHANNESBURG, Oct 4

"You will be pleased to hear that your daughter, Nurse Rose, was the first British nurse who went forward to the border with the Dutch commando. She volunteered her services, and as I had the selection of nurses in my hands, I gave her the very first chance, and she took it. She left here a few days ago, and is now at a place called Standerton. Other nurses will join her very soon. She is making a great name for herself, and the doctors for whom she has nursed in Johannesburg, as well as her patients, speak in the highest terms of her ability and her cheerful kindly disposition."



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ART19675



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART19685

ABOVE: a native kraal used as temporary medical post, Burial on the veldt of Privates Biddle and Bennett, chaplain Father Patrick (wearing surplice and stole) officiating, from a series of illustrations reproduced in a book by Frank Wilkinson. AWM Art 19675 / 19685

MARITZBURG, Nov 6

"Your daughter returned to Johannesburg after a somewhat eventful and exciting experience with the Boers at the border. After a few days she left to join the English at the front. She went to Delagoa by train, thence to Durban by steamer, thence to Ladysmith by rail, arriving just as the bombardment of that town by the Dutch was going on. Her services were immediately accepted by the British, and she is now in the Volunteer Military Hospital, Ladysmith. She is nursing British only, and I need scarcely say has lots of hard work. Her colleagues are Netley Hospital trained sisters, and a very high honour has been conferred upon Rose in accepting her services in that hospital. She is quite well, strong, happy, and cheerful."

DURBAN, Nov 11

"Rose is having rather a rough time in Ladysmith. You will see by the paper I sent you by this mail that that town is besieged by the Boers. A shell actually dropped into the hospital in which she is, another into the dining-room of the principal hotel. The general (Joubert) of the Boer commando at first refused to allow non-combatants to get out of Ladysmith, but afterwards consented to the neutrals and wounded, and women and children being removed about four miles out - out of direct range of artillery. As all communication is cut off I have no word as regards Rose's safety. Probably she is, so far, safe."

*Informal portrait of two nursing sisters enjoying a cup of tea, probably in a sitting room of the hospital where they worked, possibly in Bulowayo, South Africa. Identified, left to right: Sister Marianne Rawson; unidentified (obscured by plant); Sister Annie Thomson.
AWM P04544.012*



Rose later described her diet during that time (*'5.30, Nurse!'* p.50): *'Breakfast at 7.30 - black tea and bread. Dinner at 1pm - meat and a little rice, 4pm - black tea and at 7pm - soup.'* Not a lot when doing 14 hour days *'...working in wards like a Trojan...'*

Another issue during the Boer War and again during WW1 was women flocking to the war zones and claiming to be nurses, some of these women being of ill repute, others just felt that they could do everything trained nurses could do – they were women after all. Rose was asked about this in an interview on her return to Australia:

"Society women!!! Oh, yes!" said Miss Shappere, speaking very grimly and deliberately. "Dr. Treves was perfectly right there. I don't think I've ever seen a more unedifying spectacle than these ladies coming out, in quite a holiday spirit, with a wardrobe of new dresses, and thoroughly prepared to have a downright good time. What I can't make out is why they were allowed to come at all, hindering good work, and getting terribly in the way. I daren't tell you some of the things I've heard about them. I can say this, however, that they think the duty of nursing, or rather fashionable nursing as it should be styled, consists in smoothing the sufferers' pillows and bathing his forehead with a little scent."

Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser Saturday 21 July 1900 page 4



NSW troops advancing on Boer positions on the Vet River. A series of illustrations by Norman H Hardy, reproduced in a book by Frank Wilkinson, 'Australia at the front: A colonial view of the Boer War', John Long, London, 1901. ART19674

Lord Kitchener is credited with setting up the first ever concentration camps during the Boer War. This was mainly to prevent the Boers being able to seek food and help from remote farms and, in some part, he was trying to protect the Boer women and children who did not agree with the war – most of them were on farms, isolated and vulnerable to abuse from both sides. Horror stories I'm sure abound but I haven't been able to find them – just oblique references to them. However this massing of humanity did have horrendous side effects – the mortality rates, this time reported in *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 17 December 1901, are horrific:

'Official returns regarding the concentration camps in South Africa state that the mortality during the two months, October and November, was:- Men, 298; women, 761; children, 4904.'



Cape Town, South Africa, 1900. 'Concentration Camp, Cape Town, troop ships in distance, Boer prisoners in enclosure, also in smaller enclosure. AWM P01115.009

The camps were beset with enteritis, as was everyone else. According to Stephen Fry on QI, in the history of warfare, more soldiers have died due to enteritis than by any other cause. One of the concentration camps also had a measles epidemic and all of this was compounded by the Boer women's mistrust of the British medical staff – each camp had medical staff on site. A Swiss reporter, Leopold Perrin, visited a camp and was reported in the *West Gippsland Gazette* on 17 June 1902 as giving an unbiased account:

The camp contained 4000 Boer men, women, and children, and he questioned many of them. The Boer families were rather cramped for room, but were comfortable enough. "I specially remarked," he says, "that the hospitals were supplied with every comfort and furnished with the latest medical appliances. The Boer patients who were dangerously ill were supplied with every delicacy, such as milk, eggs, brandy, port, and even champagne. A son of Louis Bothra who was recovering from typhoid fever received two bottles of champagne every day.

Young Mr Bothra did better than Fanny Hines. The Boer War did start the Federated Australia thinking about all things military and how they should be organised. The experiences of the Boer War gave many nurses a good insight into the requirements of army nurses and the structures necessary, so by the time war was declared in August 1914 a small but formally structured nursing service did exist. As with the Army, the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) was a volunteer corps. After joining nurses were expected to attend four lectures a year to be classed as an 'efficient'. Each District had its own appointed Matron – Melbourne was the 3rd Military District and Jane Bell was Matron of the 3rd Military District at the start of WW1.

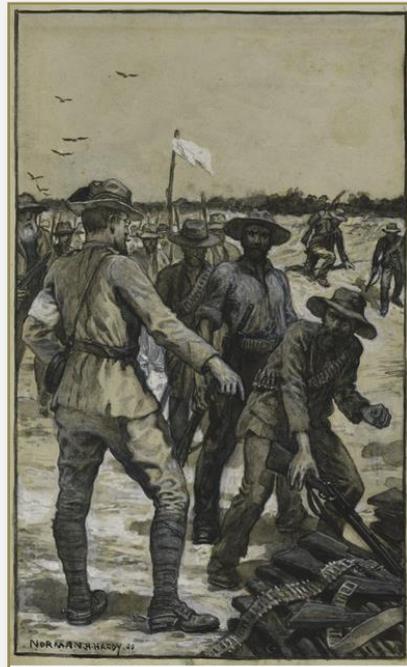
During the Boer War it finally came about that Army nurses were entitled to medals; it took the Empire a while to come around to granting this privilege, talk of the Colonies seeking permission to strike medals of their own to present to their nurses no doubt enhanced their decision making processes.



*Studio portrait of Sister Annie
Eliza Helen Thomson.
AWM P04544.001*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL ART19672



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL ART19671



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL ART19683

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Horse guardsman on service. Major T H Fiaschi, NSW Medical Corps, directing surrendering Boers to place rifles and ammunition in a pile. Two Types: Imperial and Colonial Intelligence officer. A series of illustrations by Norman H Hardy, reproduced in a book by Frank Wilkinson, 'Australia at the front: A colonial view of the Boer War', John Long, London, 1901. AWM Art 19672 / 19671 / 19683

For women in 1900 going to war was an incredible, previously unbelievable opportunity. Women, in particular single women, rarely went anywhere - that was the province of the very wealthy. In 1900 women still couldn't vote, in Australia that happened in 1902. Nursing liberated women in a way never possible before – it was a respectable, even laudable thing to do and they did it well. Caring for the men in a way never seen before in military history, clean beds and pleasant surrounds as seen on page 9. Proper food – invalid cooking was a major part of nurse training at that time. They were stoic, self-sacrificing and coped with everything thrown at them. How Fanny Hines came to be on her own coping with such impossible circumstances that she ultimately died in the execution of her duty seems outrageous even in those far off, difficult days. These women were true pioneers and set the stage for the next generation to step up in WW1 and consolidate the role of women and nurses, arguably doing more for equal rights for women than anyone before or since.



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P00573.027

Three nurses who accompanied the second contingent to the Boer War as members of the NSW Army Medical Corps. Left to right: Matron Ellen Julia (Nellie) Gould, Sister Penelope Frater and Sister Julia Bligh Johnston, all wearing their medals. The dog Buller was brought back from South Africa. AWM P00573.027

Bloemfontein, South Africa, 1900. Medical staff and nursing sisters at No. 10 General Hospital. AWM P00295.660



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P00295.660