

# NURSING IN WW1

## NURSE TRAINING

Florence Nightingale is regarded as the founder of modern nursing profession. Her training in Germany and her experiences in the Crimean War led to the establishment, at St Thomas' Hospital in London in 1860, of the first school designed primarily to train nurses rather than to provide nursing service for the hospital. By 1882, Nightingale nurses had become matrons at several leading hospitals, including Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

By the mid 1880's the Hospitals Association was committed to the principle of registration for nurses. The Nursing Registration Act of 1919 allowed formal nurse registration resulting in the founding of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN).

## MILITARY NURSING

Florence Nightingale's highly publicised exposure of the abysmal care afforded to sick and wounded soldiers energised reformers. Queen Victoria in 1860 ordered a hospital to be built to train Army nurses and surgeons. The Royal Victoria Hospital, opened in 1863, admitted and cared for military patients. From 1866, nurses were formally appointed to Military General Hospitals.

## THE ARMY NURSING SERVICE (ANS)

From 1881, the ANS oversaw the work of the nurses. These military nurses were sent overseas. Almost 2000 nurses served during the second Boer War, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, alongside nurses who were part of the colonial armies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. They served in tented field hospitals. 23 Army Nursing sisters from Britain lost their lives from **disease outbreaks**.

## PRINCESS MARY'S ROYAL AIR FORCE NURSING SERVICE (PMRAFNS)

PMRAFNS is the nursing branch of the Royal Air Force. It was established as the **Royal Air Force Temporary Nursing Service (RAFTNS)** in 1918, and became part of the permanent establishment as the **Royal Air Force Nursing Service** on 27 January 1921. The service was a women-only branch until 1980, when men were also permitted to join. At the time of World War One it was only open to unmarried women, or childless widows. There was also a **Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service (Reserve) (PMRAFNS(R))** to supplement the regular service during times of war or emergencies.

By the beginning of the First World War in 1914, military nursing still had only a small role for women in Britain ; Approximately 10,500 nurses enrolled in **Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) & Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service (PMRAFNS)**.

# QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S IMPERIAL MILITARY NURSING SERVICE

In March 1902, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) was established. In 1949, the QAIMNS became a corps in the British Army and was renamed as the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps. Since 1950 the organisation has trained nurses, and in 1992 men were allowed to join.

## VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT (VAD)

VAD were nurses who had been enrolled as volunteers to provide field nursing services, mainly in hospitals, in the United Kingdom and various other countries in the British Empire. Founded in 1909 with the help of the Red Cross and the Order of St. John, by the summer of 1914 74,000 members serving in over 2,500 Voluntary Aid Detachments in Britain. The British Red Cross was reluctant to allow civilian women a role in overseas hospitals: most volunteers were of the middle and upper classes and unaccustomed to hardship and traditional hospital discipline. Military authorities would not accept VADs at the front line. At first they were restricted to serving as canteen workers and cooks however the growing shortage of trained nurses opened the door for VADs in overseas military hospitals.. Female volunteers over the age of twenty-three and with more than three months' hospital experience were accepted for overseas service.

VADs lacked the advanced skill and discipline of professional trained nurses and were often critical of the nursing profession. As the war stretched on, VAD members increased their skill and efficiency and trained nurses were more accepting of the VADs' contributions. During four years of war 38,000 VADs worked in hospitals and served as ambulance drivers and cooks. VADs served near the Western Front and in Mesopotamia and Gallipoli. VAD hospitals were also opened in most large towns in Britain. Later, VADs were also sent to the Eastern Front. Many were decorated for distinguished service.

## FIRST AID NURSING YEOMANRY (FANY)

The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) was founded in 1907 as an all-female mounted charity to be a first aid link between the field hospitals and the front line, giving first aid and rescuing the wounded. The women were also trained in signalling and provided an intelligence role. In August 1914, many in the Military took the simple view that women had no part to play in the War. War, for them, was a man's territory. As a result, recruits into FANY went to Belgium where they did sterling work in helping casualties in the Belgium Army. Such was their success, they were given a hospital to run and between 1914 and 1916, the hospital treated over 4000 patients. As well as treating wounded soldiers, FANY drove ambulances and set up soup kitchens and general canteens. A lot of their work put them in touch with the frontline and danger.

Slowly but surely, the members of FANY broke down basic prejudices that were held in certain sections of society – a society that was still dominated by men and one where some women – (the Suffragettes) – had done a lot to turn many against women's rights.