

Eileen Bush

Born 1890. Volunteer nurse in the First World war.
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EILEEN BUSH

A
V.A.D.
remembers



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1914-1919

by
Eileen Bush

1971

August Bank Holiday

It was a lovely hot summer day. I had spent the day on the river with my brothers and friends. There was intense excitement everywhere, with rumours of war with Germany. We were all very anxious to be "in it". It was easy for the boys, as most of them had been in O.T.C. at school; they would be called up for the Army. But there was nothing the girls could do except nurse, and for that one had to be trained and there would not be time, as everyone knew the war would be over by Christmas.

Next day War was declared and before long most of the boys had left for training camps.

I was determined to be a nurse and was very pleased when Mother came home from a meeting at Hampton Court and said some of the ladies from the Palace, and friends living near by, had decided to turn the Orangery into a ward for convalescent officers. They were starting a Red Cross Training Class and had invited me to join them.

The First Aid Classes were held in the Scouts Hut in the Palace Grounds. A doctor from Molesy came to teach us. He started by hanging a large sheet of paper on the blackboard, displaying a diagram of a male figure, both back and front view, and began to draw lines in red ink, with the intention of teaching us the circulation of the blood.

The ladies took exception to this and hastened to tell the doctor that one of his class was a young girl (Me, I was 24) and

two others were spinsters, and in that case it would be better for the three ladies to be excused while these embarrassing details were discussed. To say the doctor was surprised was an understatement, but he agreed and we left the room. The two spinsters resigned from the class, but I did not and there were many occasions when I had to be excused. Luckily I had a Red Cross handbook in which I learned the anatomy, etc.

Another afternoon was given to Bandaging and we were very good at this, especially our head bandages. They were a work of art and took quite fifteen minutes to do. (I often thought of them later on when I hastily tied a three-corner bandage round a wounded head!).

A retired Sister Tutor gave us lectures in Sick Nursing. These were held in one of the "Grace and Favour" Homes in the Palace.

Sister started to tell us how to choose the sick room. It must be near a bathroom and not too far from a kitchen. The position of the bed was important. It must be in a good light and away from draughts, with plenty of room each side, etc., etc.

The ladies looked very puzzled at first and then one of them said,

"Excuse me, Sister. I don't think you quite understand. We are not **building** a hospital. We are going to use the Orangery, and whether it is near running water or a kitchen, we don't know. All that no doubt will be taken care of later on".

Sister was rather at a loss; she was not used to being interrupted when lecturing!

Another thing that worried her was the sudden darkness that fell upon the room. The Grace and Favour room was facing the Broad Walk. It had long narrow windows with a wide window-sill outside. Visitors to the gardens used to sit on the window-sills and so plunge the room into darkness.

We were taught Bed-making. We climbed to the servants' quarters for this exercise. I soon realised that if you could make beds in Hampton Court Palace you could make them anywhere!

The rooms were full of furniture which had been unwanted in the living rooms, and would have been an antique dealer's paradise.

There were two beds in each room, placed in the corners, and

apparently nailed to the floor, because it was impossible to move them.

I was generally the Patient, and sheets were changed under me I was rolled over and dusted and lifted and nearly smothered. I felt we had a lot to learn before we were let loose on wounded soldiers!

We attended Invalid Cookery Classes. These were held at Tiffins Girls' School in Kingston. Princess Duilp Singh was one of our team. She did not know much about cooking, but she loved washing-up.

For the examination I had to make an egg custard, a baked apple and a cup of cocoa. So nourishing!

Our next activity was Stretcher Drill. I don't know why we thought that was necessary. It was not likely that we should be picking up wounded from the battle field. However, every Saturday morning we met in Bushey Park. The locality was chosen with care: not too far into the park, because we didn't want to walk far; but not too near the railings because we didn't want people staring at us. A site was chosen near the Queen's river on the Hampton side of the Park.

A retired sergeant-major came to drill us. I am sure he never had such a bunch of raw recruits.

On the first morning he walked towards us and spoke for a while with some of the ladies, and then he asked if we were all present. On learning that everyone had arrived, he shouted in a voice like thunder "Fall in" — and no one stirred. There was a dead silence. We just stared at him; in fact some gave a startled look at the river, by which we were standing. Then one of the group said,

"Sergeant, you forget yourself. You are not on the barrack square now".

Poor man, he only wanted us to stand in a straight line, he said.

"If you want us to stand in a straight line, say so and we will. But don't shout at us", was the answer.

I think the sergeant deserved great credit, because he not only got us to march and Form Fours, but to carry stretchers. Boy Scouts were told to lie down in different parts of the Park. They wore labels saying where they were wounded. We marched out with our stretchers and, on finding a casualty, we carefully lifted him on to

our stretcher and marched back to the First Aid Post. There we rendered First Aid, under the direction of the doctor.

One morning when my partner and I were carrying our patient back to the Post, we came face to face with a deer. The ladies may not have been very clever at marching, but they knew what the deer were like in October. So my partner dropped her end of the stretcher and ran for her life. The Scout slid off the stretcher and chased the deer away. He then lay down again and my partner returned. We found that our patient was supposed to be suffering from a wounded leg, but he was shaking so much with laughter, that the doctor said we had better treat him for shock.

That was the end of my training. We sat for our examination. I passed with honours in Cookery.

The London General Hospital

In the Autumn 1915 the casualties in France were so great that more R.A.M.C., especially orderlies and stretcher bearers, were wanted at the front.

Someone had the bright idea to approach the Red Cross and ask for volunteers to work in the Military Hospitals at home to release more orderlies for the front.

I volunteered and was accepted.

I was sent a list of uniform I should need, and was told to hold myself in readiness for further instructions.

Some weeks later I had a telegram from the War Office saying "Proceed forthwith to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth".

I understood the "Proceed forthwith" to mean "Come at once". So I did: and so did twenty nine other V.A.D.'s. But we were not expected so soon. The huts we were to live in were not built, so we had to be billeted in Wandsworth.

Our Commandant had a house near the hospital and we gathered there in the first evening. We put on our indoor uniform, to be sure that it conformed with the regulations. We wore stiff collars and cuffs. Our dresses came to our ankles and our aprons had to be one inch shorter. Our caps were the most trouble because Matron

was very particular about these. We must wear them in such a way that no hair was showing.

Next morning we had to be at the Hospital at 9.30 a.m. to be interviewed by Matron.

I can never forget my first sight of Matron. She was a very big woman and her uniform fitted her like a glove. She was the type of nurse that Florence Nightingale must have had in mind, when she insisted on all Army Nurses wearing short capes to hide their figure. (Incidentally, the first thing the Sisters did when they came on duty, was to take two large safety pins and pin the corners of their capes up over their shoulders, and so defeated the whole object.)

Matron's cap was so far on the back of her head that it was in danger of falling off, and so showing a lot of ginger hair. Evidently it was only V.A.D.'s hair that had to be invisible.

I don't think Matron was overjoyed at the sight of us. We were all ages from twenty to forty-five. The majority of us had never done any work and so were not used to discipline. However, we were all she had so she had to make the best of us and she began by outlining our duties.

We were to take the place of the Male Orderlies. We would be in charge of the Linen, the Stores, and the Coke stove in the ward. She had been allowed to keep a few male orderlies, one between each four wards, and he would bring a sack of coke into the ward every morning, but it was our duty to keep the stoves alight.

We would be on duty from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m., with two hours off a day, a half day once a week, and a day off once a month. We were to obey Sister's orders and to attend to the patients' personal needs, etc., etc.

There was a Sister in charge of four wards of 30 beds each, one staff nurse in each ward and two orderlies. There were no probationers in Military Hospitals.

We were then sent to our wards. My partner was a V.A.D. called Williams and we made many mistakes that morning. Most of us had never been inside a Hospital before, not even as a visitor. We knew nothing about the discipline and were quite ready to chatter as we helped make the beds, which evidently was not allowed.

The beds were very important. We used to think they were more important than the patients. They all had white covers and

a scarlet triangle at the foot of the bed. These were called "Nightingales". They were made of flannel and were originally meant to put round the patients' shoulders. But I would pity anyone who put them to that use in the 3rd London. When Sister came into the ward she used to stand at the door and make sure that every Nightingale was exactly level.

Every time we did something that Sister thought was wrong, she said she would report us to Matron. There were nearly as many V.A.D.'s outside Matron's office on the second day as there had been on the first. Williams and I were both there. Sister had called Williams to come to her and Williams had said, "In a minute Sister. I'm busy". Sister said, "When I call you, you leave everything and come at once". So Williams came at once and left a tap running and nearly flooded the sluice room. Sister reported her to Matron.

I did not understand that Doctors were treated as Royalty, so when a Captain came into the ward I got on with my work. I was very surprised when Sister called me to open the door for the Captain. When I opened the door, I asked the Captain, very kindly if he had hurt his hands. He laughed and went out: Sister looked as if she was about to have a fit. She said she had never heard such gross impertinence and she would report me to Matron. Williams and I wondered how the ward would get on without us. Next morning when we saw the V.A.D.'s outside the Matron's office, we decided to go in last, so to be as long as possible away from the ward.

Matron was no fool and she made us all come in at once. As we had all been reported more or less for the same thing, we were given a short lecture on our behaviour and we promised to behave and try to conform to the Hospital etiquette. Then Matron said to me,

"I understand from Sister Bentley that you were impertinent to Captain Gould".

I explained I did not mean to be impertinent, I only asked him if he had hurt his hands.

"And why did you think that he had hurt his hands?", said Matron.

"Because he was standing by the door and I thought he must have hurt his hands, or he would have opened it himself".

Matron then said, "If the male orderly had been on duty he would have been waiting at the door ready to open it and the

officers expect that. However, as there are no male orderlies on duty, I will look into the matter and change it”.

Williams and I worked together very well. We were kept very busy. One thing we had to do in those days was to wash soiled bandages and scrub lockers. We spent a lot of time cleaning the sluice room, etc. There was a “cleaning woman” who came every morning called Mrs. Brown. She did the kitchen work, but never came into the ward.

Our biggest worry was the Linen Cupboard. Every morning we made a list of the soiled linen and took the bundle to the soiled linen store where it was checked. We then took our list to the clean linen store and drew out the same number of clean linen. It seemed quite simple, but every week when Sister checked the linen cupboard we were short — and “that never happened when the male orderlies were in charge”. I really think Sister thought we sold them. The only thing to do was to ask the male orderly how he managed and was he ever short?

“Oh, yes”, he said. “But we soon put that right. What you want to do is this. If you take, say, twenty sheets and so many towels and pillow cases, etc. to the Dirty Linen Store, they are checked in by the sergeant. You then take your list and on the way to draw your clean linen, you alter your numbers (20 to 29, and 11 to 19etc.) You will soon get the hang of it. You always draw out more than you take in.

“But what happens to the linen? Someone must take it”, I said.

“I expect they do”, he said “But that’s not our worry. You just keep Sister happy”.

So we did.

There was one exercise that the Hospital was very fond of and that was “Rounds”. We were always cleaning, tidying and preparing for a “Round” and the person doing the round always had to be accompanied by someone else. It started early with Sister’s Round. Sister came on duty an hour after we did, and the beds had to be made and the patients clean and tidy and fed before she came into the ward, accompanied by the Staff Nurse. They went from bed to bed talking to the patients and getting reports.

Soon after that came “Matron’s Round” and Matron had both the Sister and the Staff Nurse following her. The patients had to have treatment and washing and the beds made and the “Night-ingales” all in position. So when we heard that Matron was on her way, we had to make a mad rush to get everything out of sight.

The patients were very helpful. They took kidney trays, odd pieces of dressings, dusters, ash trays, into bed with them. In fact one patient, in an emergency, managed to conceal a mop beside him in bed. He frightened the life out of us when he thought Matron was not looking, by uncovering the mop head and cuddling his face into it. He looked most peculiar.

The next Round was the Doctors. That consisted of a Sergeant with his usual cry, "Shun Orderly Officer".

Then in marched the Captain and Lieutenant, Sister and Staff Nurse and the Male Orderly to open the door. The patients pretended to be asleep. They said they always did that at the sight of Authority: it kept them out of trouble.

The last Round came after the Men's dinner, when the Sergeant burst open the door and shouted, "Shun Orderly Officer".

And the Officer stepped forward and said, "Any complaints?"

And the men with one voice said, "No, Sir!"

I was amazed.

"No complaints?", I said. "What about the remarks you passed when I gave you your dinner? 'I can't eat this, Nurse, it's not dead yet!' 'Have they been stealing the pig swill again?' 'Look what the cat's brought in' and a lot more. Why didn't you tell the Captain that?"

"It wouldn't make any difference", they said.

A few days later Sister said she didn't like the look of the fish and when the Orderly Officer came round she would complain. She put some of the fish on a plate and I took it into the kitchen and asked Mrs. Brown to keep it. When the Officer came with his "Any complaints?" Sister said,

"Yes, I think the fish we had today was very far from fresh and I don't want any of my patients to suffer from food poisoning".

The Officer said, "Can I see the fish?"

I said it was in the kitchen and they followed me out. But when I got to the kitchen I could not find the fish and I asked Mrs. Brown what she had done with it.

"Oh", she said, "I ate it. It was very nice".

Captain looked at Sister and said, "Let me know when she develops food poisoning".

Luckily they all laughed. As the patients said, it was no use

complaining. I think I came off the worst because I had to go to the kitchen for more fish.

Night Duty

After a few months of orderly work we were promoted. Another detachment of V.A.D.'s came to the hospital and took over the orderly work and we helped with the nursing.

I was among the first of the V.A.D.'s to go on night duty. The list was on the notice board one morning when we came to breakfast. Some of the names were marked "Special" and I was surprised to find mine was one of them. I felt very honoured, but I was curious to know who had been clever enough to discover anything special in my work.

We had a day off before we started night duty (from noon until noon next day). We had to move our belongings into the night nurses' corridor and then go to bed until we were called at 6 p.m. Breakfast was at 6.30 p.m. It seemed an odd time to be sitting down to bacon and bread and marmalade. When we came off at 7.00 a.m. we had dinner — meat and vegetables, and that took some time to get used to. We had a meal in the middle of the night. That was supplied by the dining room staff but had to be cooked by us in the Ward kitchen, and we could help ourselves to bread and butter and tea, etc. The first night we were given one egg. It was on a large dinner plate. It was quite a balancing trick to reach the ward with the egg still on the plate, as we also had to carry a small case with a clean apron and some other odds and ends which we might want in the night.

I soon found out what was meant by "Special". At the end of some of the wards there was a balcony. It was really a sun lounge, because it had large windows each side and a glass door in front leading to steps into the grounds. Patients needing constant attention and treatment during the night were placed in these side wards with a nurse in attendance.

The balcony was all blacked out except the door in front. I only had a lantern with a red cloth over it, so it was difficult to see anything clearly.

The first night that I was on duty "specialling", I had three patients, two Australians and a London boy. They all three had lost a leg and had been operated on that afternoon and were still unconscious.

Some time after I came on duty, the Air Raid warning sounded and the sky was alight with searchlights. There was a sound of engines throbbing. The London boy stirred and opened his eyes. He looked at the searchlights.

"It's a *Zepp, isn't it? I can see it", he said.

I went to his side and we could see through the glass door the Zeppelin in the sky with the searchlights right on it. And then the guns started up. As we watched, we saw the Zepp burst into flames. It was like a huge bonfire in the sky. The whole countryside seemed to be alight. It was fantastic. We could hear the people cheering as objects fell to the ground.

I was holding the boy's hand because I thought the excitement would do him harm, but he said when the blaze died down,

"I enjoyed that",

and he closed his eyes and went to sleep. When he awoke in the morning he thought he had been dreaming. The Australians didn't stir until after the excitement was over. We heard in the morning that the Zeppelin had been brought down at Cuffley.

I spent a fortnight going from ward to ward sitting with seriously ill and dying patients, also ones under observation. The first time I ever saw anyone die I had to help a Nurse with the laying out. First I had to go for a shroud. These, for some reason, were kept in the Chapel. The Chapel door used to creak like a banshee when I opened it and one time the clock struck two a.m. and nearly frightened me out of my life.

We were never kept on Special duty longer than a fortnight and I was not sorry to get into a ward.

We did a great deal more nursing on night duty, as there was only a staff nurse and a V.A.D. in a ward at night. We had a visit from Night Sister and there was an orderly on duty.

I had to help with dressings and fomentations etc. Any patient who was due for an operation next morning had to be prepared

* It was wrongly reported as a Zepp. It was the first German Airship to be brought down on English soil.

by the night staff. In those days every patient had to have an enema before an operation and that was my job, or the male orderly's, but as had four wards to look after it was nearly always mine. The part to be operated had to be shaved. I felt sorry for the first patient I shaved. We used a cut throat razor. He didn't know how nearly he had his operation in bed.

One night the Night Sister came on her rounds and as the staff nurse was busy with a patient, I was told to do the round with the Sister. She was carrying her lantern and inspecting all the beds as she passed. One patient was lying on his back with his arms over his head. Sister asked me what was the matter with him. I said I wasn't sure, I thought heart trouble. She told me that she could tell by the way he was lying. All heart patients tend to sleep with their arms in that position. After she had gone I thought I would check up on what was really wrong with the patient. He had "Trench Feet". If we had looked more closely we would have seen the "cradle" over his feet

After my turn of night duty I went to a ward in the old building. The Third London had been an orphanage. When the Army took it over they built rows of wooden wards in the grounds. The original buildings were used for Recreation rooms and offices, except for a few that had been used for wards. These were on the second floor with stone steps leading to them.

The orderly on duty was a man called Nevinson. He was unfit for active service, and unused to manual labour. I felt very sorry for him when I saw him struggling up the stone steps with a sack of coke. Later he went sick with rheumatic fever and came as a patient into the ward. I can't say he was a good patient, but he recovered and was eventually discharged from the Army.

All men discharged from the Army were presented with a "Civvy suit". They were dark blue with a white stripe. Nevinson would not wear one, so his wife, who was a very pretty and cheerful woman, brought him some of his own clothes from home, but she forgot his hat. He looked very smart in his morning suit, white collar and cuffs, with shining black shoes, but he was afraid to go out without a hat in case he caught cold. Suggestions from the patients, which ranged from, towel, worn turban-wise, sister's cap or an enamel dressing bowl (which they assured him looked quite smart if it was worn at an angle) were met with scorn, and Nevinson had to leave us, wearing the cap that was issued with the civvy suit.

Nevinson was a well known artist. My father, who was Deputy Controller of the Stationery Office met him later when he was engaged to draw war pictures for the government.

After my spell of Night Duty, I was glad to get back on day duty and be able to spend time again with Williams.

Williams had a friend in the Hospital, a V.A.D. called "George" and when we could, we three used to spend our off duty time together. George came from the same Welsh village as Williams, but her family had moved to London, so George used to go home at night. Some of the V.A.D.'s who lived near used to do the same and we were often invited to their homes for a meal, which made a nice change. George invited us to lunch and I was surprised to find myself at No. 10 Downing Street. "George" was Lloyd George's daughter. Lloyd George was at lunch and I thought he was a fascinating man. George did not stay long at the Hospital. She married Dr. Carey Evans.

Mrs. George was a very nice person. Williams and I caught tonsillitis and were isolated together and Mrs. George used to come and visit us. She often talked about No. 10 and told us when she first came to live there she had bathrooms installed. She said it was a very difficult house to run, especially in war time.

The Hospital had many famous visitors. For a while the Queen of the Belgians worked at odd times in the Wards. Matron gave orders that anyone meeting the Queen in the corridors was to curtsy. We took great care never to meet her in the corridors. Not because we disliked her, but few of us had been taught curtsying at school. We loved to see Matron performing. Poor lady, she was not really built for it.

The Queen was very understanding and asked us to treat her as just another V.A.D. King George visited the Hospital and brought many V.I.P.s. We had a lot of Australians and New Zealanders as patients and their officers and statesmen often came to visit them. The Australians were very popular, but not good patients. They were not used to discipline and the wards never seemed to be tidy when they were in them. One awful day, just before Matron's "round", an Australian was seen with one of the "Nightingales" rolled up and tied round his waist to keep up his trousers.

We used to take our patients to the operating theatre and were sometimes allowed to watch the operation. After seeing one

or two, I was able to watch the surgeon at work with interest. I think it is the heat in the theatre that makes some people faint.

I never could get used to the "etiquette" of the hospital. The soldiers must have felt the same when they first joined the Army. For instance, we were never allowed to leave the ward without wearing our cuffs and of course we had to take them off when we were working, so wasted a lot of time looking for them if we had to go to the dispensary or linen store.

One day a patient had a haemorrhage. Sister told me to run to the 'phone in the corridor and ring the orderly officer. "You will just catch him before he leaves his office if you are quick". So I ran and met Matron just outside the ward door. She stopped me and started to give me a lecture about my appearance. "No cuffs; and actually running", etc. I explained about the haemorrhage and left her talking to herself and was just in time to get in touch with the officer. Matron was waiting for me and read me a lecture. A nurse should always keep calm and never show any alarm, etc., etc. I thought if I was a patient I would rather see a nurse running for help than see her stop and look for her cuffs and then walk slowly to the door. But I had to admit she was probably right in most situations — but not haemorrhage

There were times when I felt really sorry for Matron. When we first appeared at the Third London we must have given her a snock. Some of us did not stay the course, but the ones who did were able to be helpful. Thanks to her.

France

One day Matron put up a notice saying that a hospital was to be opened in France and volunteers from the Third London Hospital and the Fourth London at Denmark Hill were wanted to "man" it.

Several of us volunteered from the Third London. We had to pass a medical test and also be passed by Matron as suitable. We were vaccinated and inoculated and sent home to wait instructions. We had to get additions to our uniform, and also camp outfit; bed table, chair and a trunk. We had to get these at Harrods and they were paid for by the W.O.

At last the usual W.O. telegram arrived. Report forthwith at the Third London. We were inspected and our uniform checked. We then left for Boulogne. I don't remember much about the crossing, so I suppose it was uneventful.

The Quay at Boulogne seemed to be made up of a lot of sheds with notices on the doors. "Troops out for the first time Report Here". "Troops back from leave Report here". "Troops back from Sick leave report here". Etc., etc. We reported at the "Troops out for the first time" and were sent to an office marked "Embarkation Sister". She told us that the Hospital we had come to "man" was not quite ready. As a matter of fact all that was ready was the site. However, we were badly needed. We would have to be split up and sent to various hospitals to relieve the nurses who were badly in need of help. I was sent with a party consisting of eight V.A.D.s, four staff nurses and two sisters, to an isolation hospital, the 24th General at Etaples. There was a Transit Hut just opposite where officers going up the line or coming down would spend a night. It was called the Murray Hut.

The work at the 24th General was very different from the work at the Third London. There were no distinctions: everyone was the same. There was no opening of doors for people. No rounds. No white covers to the beds—only brown blankets. Of course the Sisters and Doctors were in charge.

I went on night duty soon after I arrived. I was sent to a ward full of soldiers suffering from "Spotted Fever". They were all very ill. I had never seen the disease before and wondered what I could do to help. There was only an orderly with me on duty. The orderly officer came round at intervals during the night and gave some of the patients lumbric punctures.

The orderly was a tower of strength. He could quieten the patients when they were delirious and comfort them in many ways. He was always cheerful.

Every night he used to prepare some coffee for the morning drink. He put a large iron cauldron on the stove and poured in one pint of milk for every patient and one each for us. When the milk boiled he added several tins of cafe au lait and it was the best drink I ever tasted. When we had finished our drink we had to feed the patients. They had to be fed, using feeding cups and some could not take much, but the orderly coaxed them and helped them. It

took a long time, but we managed to get most of them to swallow a little.

One night the Murray Hut opposite had a direct hit and part of the Hospital was struck. Everyone turned out to help. A Scottish Regiment came to help evacuate the patients. Our ward was not hit but was in danger of fire. We were thankful to get all our patients safely away and then went to the help of the wounded from the Murray Hut. One small incident stays in my mind. I was kneeling on the ground helping a doctor from the Murray Hut to bandage a wounded soldier when I came to the end of the bandage. I did not know how to secure it as I had no safety pins or scissors to split the bandage to make two ends to tie. The doctor showed me how to tie a knot or bow with only one end. I use that method to this day.

It really was a dreadful night and after it was all over we wondered how we had ever been able to work with so many terrible sights and sounds, but the fact we could help made it possible.

Among the V.A.D.s who were sent to the 24th General were four of us who had been together at the 3rd London. Betty Cove, Billie Wickers, Eve Smith and me. I was nicknamed "Paddy". We spent our off-duty time together when possible. Betty Cove's father was connected with "Langdales" and whenever one of us had the slightest symptom of a cold, Betty used to dose us with Langdales Cinnamon. I have never lost my faith in Langdales Cinnamon and I take it to this day.

Betty shared a room with me and whenever possible we used to manage trips to Le Torquet and Paris Plage in our off-duty time. When we could not get a lift, we used to go by a little bus. Some of the drivers let us travel free. There were lovely sands at Le Torquet but not many people, only a few service men and women. There was a special little needlework shop called "Fairy Fingers". I bought a handkerchief to embroider, but I never finished it.

There was an officers' block in the Isolation Hospital with several rooms, some double, some single. They had patients in them suffering from different infectious diseases and we ran in and out nursing them without any real thought of infection. I only know of one nurse who contracted Spotted Fever, and unfortunately died, and one or two caught measles.

One patient, a young lieutenant called "Rabbit" (because his

name was Hare) had typhoid. He was in a room alone and was bored stiff. He just lay in bed and took no notice of anyone. He had an Aunt who sent him religious books like the "Sunday at Home". Whenever I brought the mail round I used to open the door and say,

"Parcel for you, Rabbit"
and dodge quickly, because he used to throw it at me.

One day the Doctor said he could have some food. He had been on a milk diet, but now he could have a poached egg for his breakfast. When I came on duty I expected him to be more cheerful, but when I asked him how he had enjoyed his breakfast he took up a book from his locker and I only got through the door before it hit me. It appeared no one had time to poach his egg and they gave it to him hard boiled and he didn't eat it. So I poached him an egg and he soon got over his habit of throwing things at me.

Another patient, a colonel who had been wounded in the leg but also had diphtheria, had evidently been very ill and his wife was with him. She used to feed him, which was a great help to us, but I wondered why he could not feed himself, because he was getting better and there was nothing the matter with his hands.

When he had his leg dressed, an orderly had to hold his leg up for the Major to get to the wound. The orderly used to grumble at this. The British Tommy will do anything to help if he thinks it is necessary, but he does not like pampering people. The orderly thought the colonel was having too much fuss made of him. so one day he decided to put an end to it. When he was holding the leg up in the air, he started to shake and the leg was going up and down. The Major told him to be careful, but the orderly said he was having a "funny turn", laid the leg back on the bed and ran out. So sister had to hold the leg. Next day I was called in to hold it, and I could not blame the orderly. It was back-breaking to stand with your arms outstretched with the weight of the leg. It had to be held high for the dressing to be done. I was not sorry when he was well enough to go home. I was called up at 6 a.m. to support his leg while he was put on the stretcher and into an ambulance. I received a card from the colonel from England. "Your King and Country thank you" was printed on it.

54th General - Wimereux

We were at Etaples for about two months when we were told to report to the 54th General Hospital at Wimereux, the hospital that we had come to France to "man". Wimereux was between Boulogne and Cap Gris Nez on the coast just opposite Dover. We could see the "White Cliffs" on a fine day.

The hospital was not finished: the wards were under canvas. The operating theatre was ready underground and our quarters were nearly ready. They were double huts furnished with the camp kit we had brought from England. We had a small stove and were allowed a bucket of coke a day, in the winter, to heat them. The soldiers were still working, putting sand bags round everything and digging dug-outs.

By today's standards, many of our treatments would be very unhygienic. The tents, and later on the wards, were only separated from the road by a barbed wire fence, and troops would march past on their way to the Rest Camp at Cap Gris Nez. "Old Bill", the bus, used to pass along twice a day, so there was a lot of traffic passing and the dust they raised was dreadful.

At intervals, between the road and the wards there were large iron coppers filled with water, kept boiling by a fire underneath. There was a wooden lid on top. In these we used to boil "Fomentations". These consisted of boracic lint rolled in some white lint and then in a strip of gauze. We brought them to the coppers in a dressing bowl and suspended them in the boiling water for a few minutes, brought them back to the patient and placed the boracic lint on to a septic wound.

One night when I was on duty, the Night Sister said there was a nasty smell in the ward and told me to find out what was causing it. We had a number of Portugese patients in the ward, and as I could not talk Portugese and the Portugese could not speak much English, I realised it was going to be difficult. There did not seem to be anything in the lockers to cause a smell. The orderly crawled about on the floor, holding his nose and sniffing, but he could not find anything.

The next morning when the day staff went to get hot water from the coppers, they found the water a most peculiar colour. On making enquiries, they found that the Portugese, who were allowed

to get up, had got through the barbed wire and across the road to the seashore, where they collected some small shellfish. These they put in their "Blighty Bags" and then suspended them in the coppers to boil. The colour boiled out of the bags. It was a big job to empty all the water away and clean the coppers before clean water could be put in. The smell in the ward was caused by the fishy bags and we could not find them because they were hidden in the bed clothes.

The soldiers used to call the Portugese "Pork and Beans". One day there was a notice in the board:

"In future the Portugese soldiers will be called "Our Noble Allies", not "Pork and Beans" as heretofore".

The Portugese liked to be called "Porky" and could not understand why the soldiers called them "Alleys".

We had no "Rounds" at the 54th General Hospital, but occasionally we had Kit inspection. We had two kinds of Kit—Army and Matron's. The Army Kit consisted of the knives, forks, spoons, etc.; plates and mugs, etc. the Hospital Blues, shirts, ties and slippers, dressing gowns and all the bed linen.

Matron's Kit was the parcels sent out by the Red Cross, the Blighty Bags, which held soap, razors, toothbrushes, etc. and knitted socks, mittens and scarves, and many other little comforts much appreciated by the patients. Every ward had a share and, as they were presents from the Red Cross, the patients kept them. Matron had to keep an account, and be sure that she had her fair share when the parcels were given out. The Red Cross also sent out bed socks, hot water bottle covers, and operation shirts. These were open down the back and some had sleeves cut open and tied with tapes. They were very useful when dressing a badly wounded patient.

I remember once an up-patient asked me for a clean shirt and when I gave him one he unfolded it and, looking very puzzled, held it out to me and said,

"Nurse, what is this?"

"Oh! I am sorry", I replied, "I have given you one of Matron's shirts by mistake".

"Matron's shirt!", he said, still holding it up, "Well, what do you know".

The Red Cross parcels were very valuable and supplied a great deal of comfort.

The Army Kit was different. It was very difficult to keep a

check on it, so when a kit inspection was on the way, we allowed the orderlies to take over.

We always had notice of the inspection and all the orderlies wanted to know was, at what end of the line would the inspection begin. So to save trouble, the first and last tent was fully "kitted up". When each item was inspected the orderly would pass it out to another, who ran to the next tent and made up his quota, and so on all down the line. I don't know whether the Quartermaster was satisfied that we had our full quota of kit, but if he had ever been in the ranks I am sure he had a good idea of what was going on.

One night we had a dreadful storm with thunder and lightning and a strong wind. We were all called out to hang on to the ropes while the patients were being evacuated. We were able to make up beds for them in other wards for the night. The huts were nearly finished and as the winter was nearly upon us, we finished with the tents for the time being.

Our Kit inspections were made easy for a time, for if we were short of any article, we were convinced that it had been blown over the cliff into the sea on the night of the storm.

When we had a half day off duty, Betty and I used to hitch-hike. It was a very good way to see the countryside.

We preferred to ride in an Army truck that was taking stores, etc. from the base to some inland camp. There were always two drivers and they were quite willing to have our company.

One afternoon we were lucky to get a truck that was going to a camp some distance inland where we had never been before. As usual, before we actually reached the camp, Betty and I left the truck and it went on to deliver its load and we sat down to await its return and to eat our picnic tea. The soldiers used to get tea at the camp.

This day things went wrong. One of the soldiers came running back to tell us they were not returning, as they had to take another load to a site further on, and would not be coming back until the next day. He had made enquiries and there was a railway station, not too far away, where we could get a train to Boulogne. He gave us directions and ran back to the camp.

Well, there was nothing we could do but go and find the station, which we did without too much difficulty. Here we were faced with a Transport Officer, who seemed to be very suspicious and not too happy to give us a travel warrant. He asked our names

and I said my name was Forbes, and Betty said her name was Robertson. The Officer said,

“Surely you can do better than that! How about “Smith?”

“All right”, said Betty, “Smith”.

The Officer laid down his pen and said,

“Now suppose we stop telling fairy tales and have the truth”.

We told him exactly what had happened. I still said my name was Forbes and Betty changed hers to Blackburn. We had to give the name of our Hospital and were given our warrants. As we left the office, the Officer said that when we handed in our tickets at Boulogne, they would be checked and if they were not in order we would be in trouble. I don't think he could have traced us because we had given our Hospital as the Canadian General at Boulogne.

As it happened, we did not give up the warrants, because when we got to Boulogne, we saw the Embarkation Sister on the platform seeing some V.A.D.s into the train, so we go out of our carriage on the wrong side and waited until the train and the Sister had left. We did not give up our warrants, because when we left the station, there was no one to take them. So we burnt them.

As time went on we settled down to a routine. The hospital was finished and we were more organised. We had regular off-duty time. Matron allowed us to invite our brothers to tea, if they happened to be passing through Boulogne or staying at one of the camps nearby. It was surprising how many brothers we had. Some had to be introduced to one another if two brothers arrived on the same day to see their sister. One day a brother came to visit his sister, and I knew him. He lived in Hampton and I knew, and he knew that I knew, he was an only child. I met him after the war was over and asked him if his sister was well, and he had forgotten her name.

One afternoon I had to go to Boulogne for my washing. Our uniform was washed by the hospital laundry, but our personal clothes were our responsibility and I took mine to a woman in Boulogne. On my way back to the hospital I took a bus to Wimereux and began the long uphill walk to Ambleteuse, when I heard a car approaching, so I stood and hailed it (as was usual). But I had a shock when I saw that the car had a pennant with the letters D.D.M.S. (Deputy Director of Medical Supplies) and was an

important person in the Medical eyes. But luckily he was not in the car and the driver said he would give me a lift to the hospital. I had to sit well back and with the blackout curtains drawn forward no one could see me. When we reached the hospital gates I thought the driver would stop and let me get out, but when the sentry on duty opened the gates and saluted, the driver sailed in, right up to the reception hut. What I didn't know was that the sentry had seen the D.D.M.S. car coming up the hill and stopping at the hospital, he had rung through to reception to warn them, and so as many staff as could be mustered in such a short time were standing to attention when we arrived. A sergeant sprang forward and opened the car door. Everyone saluted and I got out with my washing done up in a white towel. The driver drove off quickly and I left as fast as I could.

I was on duty that night when a message came through to say that a convoy had come in and I was asked how many empty beds I had. I only had one, so I was told to be ready to receive one patient. When the patient arrived and the stretcher bearers had put him on the bed I had prepared, I started to undress him. He was evidently wounded in the face and head. Suddenly he sat up and pulled off his bandages and I found I was putting the sergeant from the Reception Hut to bed. It was his way of paying me back for giving him extra work preparing a welcoming party.

The War Drags On

Our hospital was built on one end of a golf links by the sea. At the other end of the links was a Rest Camp for officers. We were invited to their camp when they had a dinner or concert. I remember attending a dinner at the camp on "Burns Night". We had Haggis. It was piped in by a Scottish Piper and he continued to play the pipes and march round the table until the end of the meal. I didn't like the Haggis but I enjoyed the music.

One night on our way home from a concert at the camp there was an air raid. The links were showered with shells. Some of the officers had accompanied us back to our hospital and when the bombing was getting too hot we crouched in a bunker until it quietened down a little. It was a miracle that no one was killed, though many were wounded. One shell hit the large red X that was

painted on a white ground, to indicate that the building was a hospital.

We had a very good concert party at our hospital. One of our staff was David Macullam, the violinist. When I see him on television I wonder if he remembers the time he sat on the golf links playing his violin and as many of us who were off duty sat round listening to him. We also had a good pianist and one of the Doctors had a lovely voice. Several of the nurses and V.A.D.s could sing and take part in the plays. The plays were very popular with the patients, as they were usually written by the staff and had reference to many incidences that had happened in the wards.

We were able to return the officers' hospitality by inviting them to our concerts, which they seemed to enjoy.

One day I was dressing a gas gangrene wound. I ran the point of a safety pin under the nail of my left thumb. It turned septic and I had to have the nail removed. As I could do no work I was sent home on leave.

It was lovely to be home on leave and I had a good rest. My young brother was in hospital in London. He had been wounded in the leg and had won an M.C. Mother and I went to the hospital to see him, but he was not to be found. He could not have gone out because his leg was in a splint and for another thing he had no clothes. As we stood in the entrance hall a taxi drew up and my brother, wearing his pyjamas and dressing gown, being practically carried by the taxi man and a friend, came in. He had been to the outfitters for some uniform. Luckily he didn't come to any harm. He eventually went back to the trenches, was again wounded, and won a bar to his M.C.

I enjoyed the leave, but I was not sorry to return when my leave was up. One thing worried me. I was afraid I should not be sent back to the 54th General. When you returned from ordinary leave you went back to your own hospital, but not from sick leave. When I returned I reported to the office marked "Troops returning from leave" and was told to join my hospital. I went back to my old hut with Betty, and everything went on as usual until pay day, when we had to report at Matron's office for our monthly allowance which was very small. We could not have managed if we had not had money from home.

When I reported at Matron's office. Matron said my pay packet had not arrived, and I was told to call at the Paymaster's office in

Boulogne on my next half day and find out what had happened. I went to the Paymaster's office and I was told my pay had been sent to Abbeville, but it was evidently a mistake and would be put right, I was to call next time I was in Boulogne and my pay would be ready for me, and it was.

It struck me how easy it would be to disappear. The hospital at Abbeville was a V.A.D. short and the 54th had a V.A.D. too many, and no one was interested.

On looking back I wonder if it would have made any difference to my life if I had gone to Abbeville.

As the winter of 1917 approached, our huts became very cold. The sand bags round the outside walls kept out some of the draughts but the floors let in a lot of cold air. The grass grew up between the cracks and we thought of asking for a mowing machine instead of a sweeping brush, to keep the floor clean. Our one bucket of coke didn't seem to go very far, so we followed the example of the orderlies and won a bucketful. The orderlies never stole anything—they won it.

To win a bucket of coke you lined your bucket with paper. You then crept out, dodging the sentries, and finding the place in the barbed wire surrounding the coke dump where the wire had been cut, filled your bag silently, picking up a lump of coke and placing it in the bucket. When full, you crept back again. If the sentry caught you, the bucket had to be taken back to the dump and emptied.

The hospital now became very busy. We had a convoy of soldiers suffering from burns caused by mustard gas. The Germans had been using it for some time and the troops had been issued with gas masks. They were very clumsy articles in comparison with the ones used in 1940, but they were quite effective, so I suppose these soldiers must have been unlucky. It was usually the face and especially round the eyes that were most affected. They blistered and were very painful.

The M.O. ordered leeches for them. The leeches looked like slugs. When put near the flesh they fastened on and sucked away the poison. When they had had their fill, they would drop off into a tray of salt water that we held ready to catch them. They would get rid of the blood and poison. The patients said that they had wonderful relief from the leeches.

The convoys of wounded came in regularly. The weather

conditions were very bad. It seemed always to be raining. The stretcher bearers bringing the wounded down from the front had to walk on duck boards and if they slipped off they sank in the mud up to their waists.

The wounded were in a very bad state. They had not had their clothes off for days; they were covered in mud and many of them had lice. We did our best to clean them. Their clothes had to be cut off and sent away to be burned.

When the M.O. came to inspect them and dress their wounds he ordered all who were able to travel to be given clean clothes and sent straight over to England.

But many were not fit to travel. We put the most seriously wounded into the beds and placed the others on stretchers between the beds.

I think we should have been unable to manage without the help of a few up-patients. They should have gone back to the trenches, but we hid them when the M.O. came to inspect the patients and mark those fit for duty.

I think the most depressing part of those days was the attitude of the men coming in. They were so tired and hopeless, and so young. They had seen sights and heard sounds that they would never forget. Later on when they were more comfortable and able to talk about the war with the other patients, they told of incidents that were too horrible to repeat. They were as sorry for the German young soldiers as they were for themselves.

When the young men were called up, Lloyd George promised that no one under eighteen would be sent up to the front. My husband's brother was killed in France a month before his eighteenth birthday. They were so anxious to fight that they said they were older than they were.

One lad came in clutching a rosary that he said he had taken from Lourdes Cathedral. I asked if he would like to see the R.C. Padre. He said, "No. I am not a Roman Catholic". I saw he was marked "C. of E." which was usual if the patient said he had no religion. This lad seemed to get a lot of comfort from his rosary. He kept it in his hand always. He was very badly wounded and in pain. It was obvious that he would not get any better. Just before he died he asked me to keep the rosary. I said I would send it home to his mother, but he got quite agitated. He made me

promise not to send it home, because his parents would not understand and would throw it away. So I promised to keep it for him and he gave it into my hands. I still have it.

Christmas 1917 came in the midst of this and we tried to make some effort to cheer them.

We had some German prisoners working at odd jobs in the hospital grounds. We used to hear them singing. One of them had a lovely voice. Sister approached Matron to ask if it would be possible to let the prisoners walk through the wards and sing some carols on Christmas Eve, as the nurses did in the hospitals at home. Matron said she would agree if the Colonel gave his permission. He did, and the prisoners were glad to sing their carols. It was a great success. Some of the carols they sang had a familiar tune, so the patients joined in and it was very strange to hear the two languages mingled together.

The End of the War

As the weeks past the work went on with convoys coming in regularly. We hardly had any off duty time. We had a great many wounded from Poperinghe in Belgium. The town had many attacks during the war. Talbot House, from which the Toc H movement was established, was in this town and we heard a lot about the movement from the patients, and also about "Tubby" Clayton, who worked for Toc H. He was very much liked by the men.

As the weather improved we felt more cheerful. We did not know what was going on outside the hospital, but the patients seemed to think the Germans were not going to last out much longer.

I was again on night duty and one morning I had just come off duty and was asleep in bed, when I heard a noise in the room and saw one of my patients sitting on the chair by my bed. I said,

"What are you doing? Get out quickly. You will get me sent home to Blighty".

The soldiers could never understand why we were so afraid of being sent home. They were all for helping us, but no one had ventured into our quarters before.

"Get up" he said, "The war is over".

I did not believe him, but he told me to listen and I never heard such a din. Everyone who could be spared was marching round the hospital: Doctors, nurses, orderlies, V.A.D.s, banging tin plates, bowls and anything that made a noise, singing "Now this *** War is over, Oh how happy we will be", and a few verses made up as they went along.

I got rid of my visitor and made ready to join the procession.

Of course the patients had to be nursed and I was on night duty I had to go back to bed. It was just my luck on Armistice Night.

When I went on duty that night there was plenty of work waiting for me. The up-patients had been to the town. They had drunk a fair amount of "Vin Blanc", etc., and brought some back to the patients in bed, who were allowed a little wine. Some, of course, could not take it.

I spent the night running with bowls to the bed patients and regulating traffic on the ward for the up-patients. They had brought back tables, chairs, glasses and anything they could carry as souvenirs from the Estamines. I don't know what they thought they could do with them. As a matter of fact they had to return them the next day.

Christmas 1918 was very different from Christmas 1917. We still had lots of patients, but the atmosphere was much happier.

We decorated the ward and I took some of my patients to Boulogne Market to buy some little extras, such as nuts and sweets, apples, etc. We had collected some money from the patients and staff and set off full of enthusiasm. We went down to Boulogne in "Old Bill", the Army bus, and that was a noisy operation.

We wandered round the market buying a few things here and there and I had an awful feeling that we might be spending Christmas in Boulogne Jail, because the men's pockets were full of odds and ends they had picked off the stalls unnoticed (I hoped).

On our way home, we had to walk as Old Bill did not return until too late for us, we noticed a lovely holly tree covered with berries standing in a garden. The men thought holly would be just the thing to decorate the ward and they were all prepared to go through the hedge and pick some. I said the best thing to do was to let me and two of the men go and knock on the front door and ask the inmates to let us have some.

We walked up the path and knocked on the door. It was opened

by a big Frenchman with a dog. Before I could say a word, he let the dog loose and it chased us down the path and out of the gate. I was furious. As the men said, we were fighting for his country. I was disappointed about the holly, but I need not have worried, because while the dog was chasing us, the other patients had squeezed through the hedge and cut off branches of holly. I was not sorry to get back to the hospital.

We had a very good Christmas, with plays and concerts for the up-patients and some suitable entertainment for the ones in bed. Everyone was looking forward to going home.

Work went on as usual. The Casualty Clearing Stations sent patients, fit to travel, down to the Base Hospitals, and they were despatched home as soon as possible. They went joyfully knowing they would not have to return.

But it was not the end. We were hit with the "Asian Flu" and that was a dreadful disease. I expect the soldiers were not in a fit state to fight it. They ran a very high temperature and were very delirious. Many developed pneumonia and that was generally fatal.

Some of the staff went down with it also.

One patient in my ward was trying to get up. He was very delirious and fought hard to get out of bed. He said his father was standing at the foot of his bed. He had come to bring him home, because his mother was ill and called for him. We could do nothing with him, so we sent for the orderly officer who gave him an injection and he quietened down. Next morning Matron came with a telegram from the boy's father to say that his mother had died and the time of her death was given in the telegram. It was the time the patient was trying to get up to go with his father because his mother was calling him.

He eventually recovered and went home. I cannot forget the look on his face when he was pleading with us to let him get up and go to his mother.

The weeks passed and the tension grew less. Part of the hospital had been isolated to take the influenza patients and they continued to be very busy. The casualty wards were getting easier but there were still a lot of patients in the wards too ill to be moved, and we were all getting very tired.

Christmas 1919 came and we again put on a show for the patients. This one was a medley of songs, dances from home and

lighter incidents that had happened in the wards. One of the songs had a chorus which went:

"I'm Jumping Jack and I am Bouncing Bill

And we are so happy that we can't keep still".

I was Bouncing Bill and I sat on a hassock on the stage and every time "Bouncing Bill" was mentioned, I had to bounce up and down. Another V.A.D. was Jumping Jack and she had to jump up and down when "Jumping Jack" was mentioned.

Unfortunately, I was so tired that after one or two bounces I fell asleep and had to be lifted off my hassock and sent to the Sister's Hospital in Boulogne.

The Chateau Meurice had been turned into a hospital for the Nursing Staff and it was a lovely place.

I was on the first floor. The room was decorated with a painting of cherubs. As I lay, I could look up to the ceiling and see cherubs floating all over the sky.

One incident that surprised me was when I accidentally touched a spring, or some gadget, and found my bed moving to my neighbour's. We investigated and found there appeared to be railway lines connecting the two beds, which at the touch of a spring came together. My partner and I were very thrilled with this, especially as no one else had the same convenience.

I was in the hospital for a few weeks. My parents had a telegram from the War Office saying that I had been admitted to hospital suffering from Debility (severe).

I was soon sent home. We were taken to the quay at Boulogne and were loaded on to the Hospital Ship by German prisoners. As I went I saw the familiar huts. "Troops back from leave report here", etc. Under the notice "Troops out for the first time", someone had chalked, "Go home—you have missed the war".

It was the last glimpse of the war before they left for the "Homes fit for heroes to live in" that had been promised them.

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