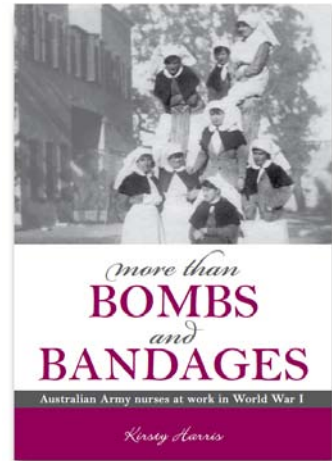




more than
BOMBS
and
BANDAGES

Australian Army nurses at work in World War I

Kirsty Harris



"From now and forever I am in love with all Army nurses. I was brought in yesterday, wounded and feeling frightened, and the first person I saw was a Victorian nurse. She smiled at me and said: 'Well soldier, I'll do what I can to help you but you'll have to look a bit more cheerful.' I was cheerful from that moment."

Unknown Soldier

"One boy who is paralyzed [sic] badly and will only leave the ward when he is carried out for the last time could not talk much. A Sister just stood by him quietly and stroked his forehead and 'crooned' in gentle words to him. I could have kissed her hand for the beautiful thing she did."

Padre David Garland

More than Bombs and Bandages, exposes the false assumption that military nurses only nursed. Kirsty Harris's new book, based on her CEW Bean Prize winning PhD thesis, offers an intriguing and sometimes gut wrenching insight into the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) during World War I. This is a book far removed from the 'devotion to duty' stereotype of nurses, revealing through personal recollections and interviews the enormous demands that the grim reality of war placed on the roles and skills of these amazing Australian nurses. *More than Bombs and Bandages* offers rich pickings for all those interested in nursing history, women in the Australian military and the application of medical treatments and World War I.

Many AANS experienced nursing 'under canvas' for the first time during the war. Australian Army nursing practices in World War I were very different to working in Australian hospitals; the sheer volume and veracity of war wounds and diseases previously unfathomable for many AANS nurses. *More than Bombs and Bandages* showcase the personal experiences of the women of the AANS, focusing on the individuals using their words and recollections to illustrate the vast array of roles and skills the AANS had during the Great War. Harris draws on personal diaries, interviews, service records, hospital diaries and autobiographies to create an absorbing and meticulously constructed book.

More than Bombs and Bandages records nursing practices long since removed from Australian hospitals and illustrates the heavy burden and responsibilities carried by these nurses knowing their actions could be the sole influence over whether a patient lived or died. In the Great War nursing challenges were many hospital stays were lengthy with nursing time required for each patient. There were no curative drugs such as sulphur or antibiotics - patients had to be 'nursed' back to health. There were no drips so all nutrition was provided by nurses, either by mouth, or other methods. Despite this, the nurses of AANS endured with tremendous effort and ingenuity.

The book showcases this diversity, covering a wide variety of topics including:

- 'care and comfort' nursing as a key difference between civilian and military nursing
- nursing in remote locations such as German East Africa and the North West Frontier of India
- the impact of war wounds and war-based diseases on nursing work
- the breadth of roles military nurses had outside the normal sphere of nursing

Kirsty Harris has both an academic and military background. She is an accomplished historian who has undertaken a considerable amount of reconstructive work to create the robust database of information and little known facts that underpin *More than Bombs and Bandages*. She hopes that her work will allow those both inside and outside the nursing world to gain a better appreciation of the work these nurses did during World War I.

More than Bombs and Bandages will be launched in Canberra by Major General John Caligari and Deputy Chief of Army, Major General Paul Symon. 10.30am Wednesday 2 March 2011, R1 Foyer, Russel Offices, Canberra. *Forgotten Men* by Mike Tyquin will also be launched.

Kirsty Harris is available for interview.

Available at all good book stores or online www.bigskypublishing.com.au
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More than Bombs and Bandages Extracts : the voices of the AANS WW1

These amazing nurses invested themselves in each patient, care of each patient time consuming through necessity, and the mental and physical fatigue of dealing with unimaginable injuries and the unrequested but accepted need to be a smiling face and a hand to hold for those soldiers far from home made the AANS a force to be dealt with.

The Colonial was a very sick Canadian lad of twenty-one years, suffering a serious g.s.w (gangrene) in the leg... The doctors, hoping to save his limb, waited almost too long, and the day arrived when the M.O. said to me: "No good, sister. No more delay. It is his life or his limb. It must come off to-morrow. You tell him, I can't." I hated my job and lacked courage until I was off duty and could return to sit beside him. Then I told him. He turned his head and buried his face in his pillow, whispering hoarsely: "Oh, my God! No, sister, I won't consent, and they can't force me. Promise me you won't let them. I would sooner die than hop about on one leg for the rest of my life." I talked to him of his mother at home, waiting. She had written to thank me for my care of her only child... Next morning he faced his ordeal with an amazing calmness of spirit.
May Tilton

Today I had to assist with ten amputations one after the other. It is frightfully nerve-racking work. I seem to hear that wretched saw whenever I try to sleep. We see the most ghastly wounds and all day long are inhaling the odour of gas gangrene. Elsie Tranter

One of my patients was hit with shrapnel in five different places, his eye blown out, left arm blown off and other wounds on the back and body... I have about 156 dressings to do for about 30 one-armed men. Sister [Queenie] Avenell

I used to take the patients' temperatures and count pulses, but my biggest worry was being sure that a sound sleeper was not dead. Many of the patients had rather disturbed nights with me shaking them to make certain they were still alive – but I gave them cups of tea if I woke them up and as far as I know they never told Matron! Sarah Furnifull was nervous about being alone on night duty during her training.

The experience for war nurses could be as bloody, as frightening and as foul smelling as it was for some of the men in the trenches. The AANS dealt with wards reeking of the often stale smell of unwashed men, mud, blood, pus and debris of dressings. May Tilton at 3 ACCS Poperinghe in October 1917 described in some detail the nurses' enormous responsibility for bringing men back from the brink of death if they could: *One day a Jock was brought to us, unconscious, pulse-less, and stone cold, yet still alive, after lying in the rain for hours with a piece of shrapnel in his abdomen. For hours our efforts to thaw him seemed hopeless. The M.O. said he "couldn't make it." but where there was life there was hope, and we won.*

Men from Suvla coming in. Most awful frost-bitten feet. They had a terrible time. Men frozen to death standing up. Their feet are worse than any wounds. It makes you sick doing them, and they are so grateful for anything. Olive Haynes, at Lemnos 30th November 1915

28/4/18 ...but truth to tell, it was not all through that pet phrase of the press 'devotion to duty' that we kept on working while the shells were screaming round. It was really much easier to keep on working than not. Being with others made us feel safer. You can't face these things alone - but with a pal beside you, you feel strong to face danger. If alone in your hut you live every moment in dread until the bombing is over.
Elsie Tranter

The nights were the worst for both patients and nursing staff when *'the cheerful ward became a place of torment, with the occupant of every bed tossing and turning and moaning in a hell of memories let loose.'* Nurses could only tuck men sobbing hysterically into bed and talk to them 'as one would to a child'.

How we hated the beastly war! Sights and sufferings like these sickened us. The whole thing seemed such a ghastly muddle, engineered by a few men, sitting in safety and civilization, who never knew the horror, the agony, and abomination these poor soldiers had to bear. Fine types of men, they were; young, splendidly fit, and healthy. Then the war mowed them down; doomed them to spend their future with broken bodies, the long years marred by ghastly memories that would only die with them. How often they would say: "What is going to happen to me now, sister? What can I do with my life crippled like this?" May Tilton

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirsty Harris was born in Launceston, Tasmania and lived there until she was 16 when she moved to Canberra. Post high school, she joined the Australian Army and served both as a private soldier and officer in Signals Corps (RASIGS) in Sydney, Melbourne, Toowoomba and Wagga. She left after ten years and went to university in Melbourne where she completed a BA in history and public relations working in the corporate sector. In 2002 she commenced her candidature for a doctorate in history, researching the work and work practices of nurses in the Australian Army during World War I.

Harris's interest was sparked when she began researching her grandmother, Staff Nurse Bessie Proudfoot, military postings in the Australian Army Nursing Service in World War I. General research revealed some details of Bessie's nursing career, but not enough for Kirsty or her sister (a registered nurse) to discover what she 'actually did.' This book is the result of trying to find out.

(Staff Nurse Bessie appears on the front cover: She is standing at the base of the tree stump, second from left, squinting into the morning sun.)

Her current interests include sleeping in, research and writing, bike riding, food and wine, and avoiding injections!