



# New Zealand Nurses during World War I



**M**any of our men from the Department of Education were looked after by New Zealand nurses at some stage during the war.

The New Zealand Army Nursing service was set up in 1915 and 550 nurses served as part of it throughout the war. There were also New Zealand nurses that worked for other imperial units. Tragically, 12 New Zealand nurses lost their lives while caring for our troops, with ten of these drowning when the transport ship, the *Marquette* was torpedoed by the Germans in October 1915.

Wherever they were based, New Zealand nurses were highly respected for their work – and the patients loved being cared for by women from their own country. One nurse reported: “One visitor even thought the New Zealand atmosphere was the best “tonic” the patients could have.”

New Zealand nurses went wherever they were needed. They worked in British Military Hospitals in Egypt and British hospital trains and boats. Eventually New Zealand had five of its own hospitals and two hospital ships – the *Marama* and *Maheno*.

Life was pretty tough for nurses. At Wisques in France, 40 New Zealand nurses worked in the 1000-bed hospital. They had three hours off a day, and half a day's leave

once every 10 days. If there was a rush of wounded, all leave would be cancelled.

While nurses were never sent to the front line, they were pretty close to it if they worked in a casualty clearing station. That was where wounded soldiers were given their first patching up and were then sent away for full medical care.

## Hospital ships

Hospital ships were used to treat and transport sick and wounded soldiers to better equipped hospitals. The New Zealand Hospital Ship *Maheno* took on patients at Gallipoli and was in Anzac Cove at one stage. From Gallipoli, the *Maheno* took sick and wounded soldiers (up to five hundred at a time) to the Greek island of Lemnos.

By the end of the war, New Zealand's “white ships” (or hospital ships) had transported 47,000 patients.

## New Zealand hospitals

The first New Zealand hospitals were set up in the Middle East and England in July 1915. New Zealand men were cared for in our hospitals in Walton-on-Thames, Hornchurch, Brockenhurst and Codford. Between 1916-1919 Brockenhurst handled 21,004 patients.

In France, the New Zealand Number 1 Stationary Hospital was initially in Amiens and used as a casualty clearing station. In February 1918, it shifted to Wisques and treated New Zealanders wounded in Passchendaele during October 1917.

## Pictured:

Top: Nurses look out of the windows of the New Zealand Stationary Hospital, Wisques, France, during World War I.

Inset: Wounded soldiers with nurses at the New Zealand Military Hospital at Brockenhurst, England, taken in 1918.

## Sources:

Photo credit (top): Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association: New Zealand official negatives, World War 1914-1918. Ref: 1/2-013481-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

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The New Zealand Army Nursing Service website

New Zealand History website

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