

Cushla Connolly (1891 – 1971)

Cushla Connolly was part of a contingent setting up hospitals in rural Greece. As well as intensive nursing duties in difficult conditions, Cushla's country experience of milking cows and goats, raising hens and growing vegetables proved critical for the health and comfort of the nurses and their patients.

Cushla Connolly was the eldest in her family. She was born in Beechworth and was educated at the Brigidine Convent in Beechworth.

The young Cushla was determined to become a nurse, in spite of her family expectations. Young women from good families did not work, especially in an occupation that was considered at the time by many as equivalent to being a servant.

She enlisted for overseas service just months after completing her training. She sailed to Suez and was immediately dispatched to Salonica, now Thessaloniki, in Greece to increase the capacity of the local military hospitals.

Cushla was part of the first contingent, Unit No 1, along with other Victorian nurses from the 3^d Military District under the charge of Matron White, also from Melbourne. Unit No 1 took over No. 66 British Hospital, an 800 bed tent hospital at Hortiach, about 20 kilometres from Salonica, high in the hills. The Unit then moved down to No. 52 British General Hospital at Kalamaria, now a suburb of Thessaloniki.

Conditions were far from ideal for Cushla and the other nurses. While ministering to sick and wounded soldiers, Matron White and her nurses contended with poor living conditions, extremes of temperature, threats to their safety from marauders, and mosquitos, lice, malaria, dysentery and typhus.

Speaking to her grand-daughter many year later, Cushla recalled: *"Infections were the norm, especially of wounds and pneumonia was very common. The nurses would sit with patients for many hours, sponging them continuously to relieve fevers. That was real nursing"*.

While in Cairo, Cushla met, and married, a British Lieutenant (later Captain), William Weale, who worked in British intelligence. After the war, Cushla lived in exotic locations such as Cairo and Constantinople accompanying William on his work with the British Foreign Service.

Later, in the 1920s, Cushla, William and their young family moved back to Australia and settled in Canberra.



Service summary: 66 BGH (Hortiach, Greece); 52 BGH (Kalamaria, Greece)

Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne: 1916

Enlistment: 1917

Final rank: Sister

Medals: British War Medal and Victory Medal

Image source: SVHM Archives, copy of original in family collection

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