

# Mary Freitag (1883 – 1939)

Mary Freitag served overseas in a hospital in India and on a hospital ship in the Persian Gulf. Her war service ended with her marriage to a Scottish Lieutenant in India. They eventually settled, and brought up a family, near her family home in Gippsland.



Mary Freitag was second youngest of seven siblings who survived to adulthood. She was born at Stratford, just north of Sale in Gippsland and educated at the Notre Dame de Sion Convent in Sale.

Mary's father was of German extraction. He arrived in Australia during the Gold Rush and became a successful grazier.

Mary enlisted following a call from the Australian Defence Department for trained nurses to enrol to relieve British nurses working in overseas hospitals.

Mary's name in her service records was misspelled as Freetag, perhaps as an attempt to Anglicise her German surname, given the strong anti-German sentiment of the time.

Mary embarked from Melbourne for Bombay, now Mumbai, where she was sent to the nearby Deccan War Hospital in Poona, now Pune. This very large 1,000 bed hospital received British soldiers and prisoners of war from Mesopotamia, now Iraq.

Nurses sent to India faced different challenges to those sent to the Western Front. These challenges included contending with difficult climate conditions and adjusting to cultural and language differences.

In March 1919, Mary was transferred to the 450 bed Hospital Ship 'Varella', which served in the Persian Gulf bringing the wounded from the Mesopotamian campaign to the military hospitals in Bombay. She was then promoted to the rank of Sister.

Mary resigned two months later due to her marriage, in Bombay, to Lieutenant James Morrison of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Scottish Rifles. Immediately following the war, the Morrisons lived for a time in Edinburgh and then settled near Mary's childhood home. They had two sons.

An obituary in the local press after her death reported that: "She possessed a very amiable disposition and was very popular with all with whom she came in contact". The "Diggers" were well represented at her funeral and the casket was "covered with wreaths and poppies".

**Service summary:** Deccan War Hospital (Poona, India); Hospital Ship 'Varella'

**Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne:** 1910

**Enlistment:** 1917

**Final rank:** Sister

**Medals:** British War Medal

**Image source:** SVHM Archives, copy of image in family collection

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