

Mary Linehan (1878 – 1961)

Mary Linehan enlisted early in the war. She nursed in surgical wards receiving acute casualties from Gallipoli, the Somme and Ypres. In England, Mary provided care to soldiers suffering from “shell-shock”. She was interviewed about her service by Matron Kellett, with a record of the interview retained in the collection of the Australian War Memorial.

Mary Linehan was born in 1878 in Nagambie, the second eldest child of ten. Her elder sister, Julia, entered the religious order of the Little Sisters of the Poor, which had originally occupied the terrace block which was to become the beginnings of St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne.

Mary’s first overseas postings were in temporary hospitals in Egypt established to cope with the increasing numbers of casualties arriving from the Gallipoli campaign.

Her next postings were at various Australian and British hospitals at Étaples, Wimereux and Boulogne in France, all very busy accepting large numbers of casualties from the nearby Battle of the Somme. Eighteen months later, Mary was posted to a hospital in Abbeville, near Amiens in northern France and close to the fighting at Ypres.

Many lives and limbs were saved through what was then a new method of irrigating wounds with sterilizing solution.

In a documented interview, Mary described one day as the Germans approached: *“On the eve of evacuation, we got in about 2,000 patients in one night, so of course we could not leave, but worked very hard, until we gradually got reinforcements of nurses. We had no time off duty”*.

Exhausted after many months, Mary spent some weeks in hospital and a convalescent home before being transferred to nursing duties in England where she was promoted to Sister.

Following the end of hostilities, Mary nursed in Dartford in Kent which had developed specialist skills in treatment of war-related damage to the nervous system and neuroses, known as “shell shock”.

Mary’s final posting was duty as a nursing sister on the troop ship, the ‘Prinz Ludwig’, on her return to Australia.

Immediately following the war, Mary continued to work as a nurse. In later years she took on the job of managing a guest house in Port Lonsdale.



Service summary: 1 AGH (Alexandria, Egypt); 2 AGH (Cairo, Egypt; Wimereux, France); 14 BGH (Wimereux, France); 13 BSH (Boulogne, France); 23 BGH (Étaples, France); 24 BGH (Étaples, France); 3 AGH (Abbeville, France); 3 AAH (Dartford, England).

Graduation St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne: 1909

Enlistment: 1915

Final rank: Sister

Medals: 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal

Image: Group portrait of nurses and the Sanitary Section with group of patients after a cricket match played at the 3rd Australian General Hospital, 2 August 1918. Sr Linehan is in the second row, the woman furthest to the right.

Image source: Australian War Memorial, E02769

Link to interview by Matron Kellett: [AWM41 1072 - \[Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of Arthur G Butler:\] Interviews containing accounts of Nursing experiences in the AANS \[Australian Army Nursing Service\]. These nurses were interviewed by Matron Kellett \[Index to interviews of members of AANS included in file\] | Australian War Memorial](#)

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