

Ida O'Dwyer RRC (1879 - 1960)

Ida O'Dwyer was an early member of the Australian Army Nursing Service reserve (1906) and was amongst the senior and experienced nurses who were first to enlist after the outbreak of World War 1

Her first posting was to the No. 1 Australian General Hospital in Egypt. There she was in charge of looking after the infectious diseases cases treated in tents adjoining the hospital that was established in the converted Heliopolis Palace Hotel building.

In France she was Sister-in-Charge close to the front line at No. 3 Australian Casualty Clearing Station in 1916 - 1917. In one 24-hour period in October 1917 3,000 patients passed through this unit. Ida later wrote a detailed report outlining the difficult conditions faced "the nearest nurses get to the actual fighting".

Ida also took care of "war-wracked nurses" at Mrs T.S. Hall's Hospital for Sick Nurses in London.

She was awarded the Royal Red Cross, First Class in December 1917 in recognition of "her valuable service within the armies in the field".

After her return to Australia Ida continued to care for sick and wounded soldiers, first at No. 16 Australian General Hospital (Macleod) then as Matron at Caulfield Military Hospital. She was also active in both St Vincent's nursing alumni and military nursing circles. She founded the St Vincent's Past Nurses Association in 1923.

In the year following Ida's death, the St Vincent's Past Nurses Association established a prize awarded to the most outstanding nurse in their final year of study which was given the name, the Ida O'Dwyer Memorial Prize. The tradition continues today with the St Vincent's Nursing Alumni Association awarding a prize to a graduating nurse who consistently reflects Ida O'Dwyer's values, nursing knowledge and commitment to the profession.

Ida O'Dwyer's story has also inspired two significant creative works. One is a PhD thesis by her relative Judy Keighran. The other is a textile work by artist Dawn Duncan-Smith, in 'The Story of St Vincent's' series.



Service summary: 1 AGH (Heliopolis, Egypt); Bagthorpe Military Hospital (Nottingham, England); 2 AAH (Southall, England); 1 AGH (France); 29 CCS (France); 3 ACCS (France); 32 CCS (France); Mrs T.S. Hall's Hospital for Sick Nurses (Southwell Gardens, Kensington, England).

Graduated SVHM: 1902

Enlisted: 1914

Final rank: Head Sister

Medals: Royal Red Cross, 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal

Image source: SVHM Archives Collection

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