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Nurse Writers of the Great War

Christine Hallett

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Part II

Professional women

In August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, British women volunteered in their thousands to participate in what most people thought would be a short-term conflict with a clear, decisive end. Members of the QAIMNS and its Reserve were among the first to travel to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Nurses of the British Dominions followed, with Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand nurses reaching Europe by late 1914 or early 1915.¹ The American Army Nurse Corps was not mobilised until the entry of the United States of America into the war in April 1917, although numerous trained American nurses offered their services to the French and Belgian Red Cross Societies and were engaged in 'front-line nursing' from 1914 onwards, and a small number of 'official' American units also travelled to France.

Members of the army nursing corps of allied nations saw themselves as belonging to elite units. Trained in the most prestigious nursing schools of their day, they carried with them a remarkable degree of confidence and self-belief, and their achievements were eagerly reported by professional nursing journals in their native countries.² Although they were not always fully accepted by the army medical services to which they were attached, and though they experienced, at times, a certain degree of prejudice and opposition, they came to be recognised as vital components of the organisations that offered life-saving services close to the front lines.

Notes

- 1 The New Zealand Army Nursing Service was the latest to organise, the first fifty nursing staff not embarking for Europe until April 1915. See Anna Rogers, *While You're Away: New Zealand Nurses at War 1899–1948* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003): 55.
- 2 The most influential of these were: in Britain the *BJN*, *The Nursing Mirror and Midwives Journal*, and *The Nursing Times*; in Australia *Una: The Journal of the Victorian Trained Nurses Association*; in New Zealand *Kai Tiaki*; and in the USA the *American Journal of Nursing*, although it should be noted that the pacifist convictions of Lavinia Dock, Head of the International Office of the *American Journal of Nursing*, meant that the early years of the war were not reported in that journal.