

## Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC)

One of the least publicised of all army Services is the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC) which, since its inception as an Army Nursing Service has given more than 100 years of dedicated service in the care of Australian Servicemen during times of war and peace.

**1898** The history of Australian Military Nursing began in 1898 when a small Army Nursing Service was formed in Sydney on August 13th. It consisted of one Lady Superintendent and 24 nurses.

**1899** The South African War of 1899-1902 saw the first nurses serving with Australian troops. The governments of NSW and Victoria arranged for a detachment of nursing sisters to go with their troops to Africa. The journey was made at the individual ladies' expense. The performance of these nurses was such that the Federal Government gave earnest consideration to an improved organisation of nurses for military service.

At the end of the war the Director General of Medical Services (Surgeon General Williams) submitted the initial scheme to major General Sir Edward Hutton - the General Officer Commanding, who was at that time was coordinating the conversion of state troops to Federal government control.

**1902** The General Order giving effect to an improved organisation for nurses was written in 1902 and promulgated on the 1st July 1903. Paragraph 9 of General Order 123/1902 stated...

*"An Army Nursing Service Reserve will be organised from those trained nurses who are qualified and willing to serve as such with stationary Field Hospitals and Base Hospitals when required upon a National Emergency."*

As the Australian Army Nursing Service formed the basis of the RAANC, the first of July is therefore celebrated as the birthday of Army Nursing and celebrated as the Corps Day. Each year celebrations occur as close to this date as possible.

**1904** In May, Lady Superintendents were appointed in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia with subsequent appointments of Matrons in NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

**1906** A Lady Superintendent and Matron were appointed in Tasmania, and by 1914 all states had Superintendents and Matrons.

**1916** At this time the nursing Service was under the control of the Director General of Medical Services, (DGMS) and a Matron-in-Chief was appointed to administer the service and advise the DGMS on service matters. The first Matron-in-Chief at Headquarters in Australia was Miss E.T. Richardson, appointed on May 8th.

**1914-18** The Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) shed its swaddling clothes when war broke out in 1914, and the Australian Government raised the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) for overseas service. The nurses, who were to staff medical units that formed an integral part of the AIF, were recruited from the AANS Reserve and from the civil nursing profession. Orders from the AIF laid down their conditions of service with AIF as follows:

*Members of the Australian Army Nursing Service and nurses appointed to the AIF will receive all courtesies extended to officers and will have the following rank and precedence - Principal Matron, Matron, Sister and Staff Nurse - Staff Nurses will be known by the title 'Sister' irrespective of rank.*

The first Matron-in-Chief appointed for the Nursing Service with the AIF overseas was Miss E.A. Conyers.

The uniform of the AANS was modelled on the uniform of the Queen Alexandra Imperial Nursing Service (QAINS). Compared to modern standards it is difficult to imagine how these pioneer sisters managed in their grey serge frocks that swept the ground, and their bonnets tied with bows under the chin! The uniform was 'modernised' early in the war.

The first draft of sisters left Australia in September 1914, and throughout the war the AANS served wherever the Australian troops were serving. A number were also attached to British Medical units in various theatres of war.

The Record of Service for these sisters set a very high standard for all those who were to follow. A total of 2139 sisters served abroad between 1914 and 1918, while a further 423 served in Australia.



RAANC Badge

25 of these sisters died overseas, and 388 were decorated for their service. Among the decorations awarded were: five CBE, 10 OBE, 42 RRC, 138 ARRC and 23 foreign awards.

The nursing Service was continued during the years of peace by the maintenance of a Reserve. Records were kept in all states of trained nurses appointed to the Reserve and willing to serve in times of National Emergency.

**1936** The Matron-in-Chief and Principal matrons from each state were sent to England with the Coronation contingent.

### **1939-45 World War Two**

At the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the AANS was placed on an active footing. Volunteers from the Reserve and from the civilian nursing profession were appointed to the AANS forming part of the Second AIF raised for service abroad.

On January 9th 1940, the first contingent of nurses embarked as a component of the 6th Australian Division for the Middle East. Further contingents followed at frequent intervals to staff the expanding medical facilities in that theatre.

The sisters in the first contingent were posted to the 2/1st General Hospital at Gaza Ridge in Palestine. The second draft of April 15th 1940, was posted to the 2/2nd Australian General Hospital and the 2/1st Casualty Clearing Station (CCS). The 2/2nd moved to El Kantara on the edge of the Suez Canal to receive the wounded from the first Libyan campaign.

The third draft, the convoy US3, was diverted from its course owing to the entry of Italy into the war and the sisters disembarked in England where they gave valuable service during the blitz of 1940.

By the end of 1940 there were five Australian General Hospitals (AGH) and three Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS) in the Middle East, with Camp Hospitals and Base Hospitals established throughout Australia. Sisters were appointed to these units, many of them awaiting movement overseas.

During the war, members of the AANS served in England, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Greece, Crete, Syria-Eritrea, Ceylon, Malaya, New Guinea, New Britain and the Solomon's. They also served throughout the length and breadth of Australia, at sea in hospital ships and sea ambulance transports, Borneo, the Philippines, Morotai and Japan.

The first three and a half years of the war, members of the AANS did not hold military rank, but were entitled to the courtesies extended to an officer.

**1943** In March 1943 with the change of the AANS from an auxiliary service to an incorporated part of the Australian Military Forces, members of the AANS became Commissioned Officers with the following ranks and appointments: Matron-in-Chief (Colonel), Matron (Major), Senior Sister (Captain), and Sister (Lieutenant). The troops however, continued to use the time honoured titles of Matron and Sister, except in official correspondence.

The AANS sustained a great loss following the capture of the 2/10th and 2/13th Australian General Hospitals (AGH) and the 2/4th CCS at the fall of Singapore. Of the 126 members of the AANS who served in that theatre, only 61 returned to Australia in 1942. The ship in which the others were evacuated was bombed and sunk. 12 of the sisters were believed drowned, and the remainder became prisoners of war. Of these, 21 were shot by the Japanese in a massacre on Bank Island, off Sumatra in early 1942. Eight sisters died in captivity and only 24 returned to Australia at the conclusion of hostilities.

When the Japanese captured Rabaul, six sisters attached to a small Camp Hospital were taken prisoner. They were liberated by the Americans when they occupied Yokohama in August 1945.

The bombing of the hospital Ship MANUNDA in Darwin Harbour on 19 February 1942, resulted in the death of one sister and the serious wounding of another.

On 14 May 1943, while steaming at 12 knots in fine weather about 24 miles from Point Lookout on the Queensland coast, the Hospital Ship CENTAUR was struck without warning on the port side by a torpedo. There was a loud explosion, flames enveloped the forward part of the bridge, the ship lurched to port and sank in two or three minutes. Of the 332 on board there were only 64 survivors. Sister Ellen Savage was the sole survivor of the nursing staff of 12 and gave great help to the other survivors, all of whom suffered from injuries and exposure.

In total during the war, 71 members of the AANS lost their lives, 53 were battle casualties and 18 died as a result of accident or illness. The strength of the Service was 3,477, and a total of 137 decorations were awarded including two George Medals.

Demobilisation of the AANS proceeded concurrently with the general demobilisation of the fighting services when the war ended. As part of the general scheme, it had been arranged that Military Hospitals would transfer their patients as rapidly as possible to Base Military Hospitals in each state.

These Base Hospitals were to be taken over and staffed with civilian personnel from the Repatriation Department. That Department however experienced great difficulty finding the necessary staff, and in some states, members of the AANS continued service until May 1949.

**1945** During her visit to Australia, while her distinguished husband was Governor General, Her Royal Highness, Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, graciously accepted the appointment of Honorary Colonel of the AANS.

**1946** Early in 1946, members of the AANS provided the nursing staff for an AGH, established in the former naval academy at Iwo Jima in Japan. The purpose of the hospital was to care for the Australian component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. Later, this unit moved to Kure, and in February 1949 became the British Commonwealth General Hospital, with a small detachment of Nursing Officers at a CCS in Tokyo.

The hospital at Kure cared for the sick and wounded of the Commonwealth Division in Korea when war broke out there. Later, a Commonwealth Medical unit was established in Korea, and together with medical personnel from other parts of the Commonwealth, Australian sisters were posted to the unit.

**1948** The title **Royal** was granted to the Nursing Service in November in recognition of the service given in two world wars. The service thus became the Royal Australian Army Nursing Service.

**1949** The post war reorganisation of the Australian Army Medical Service did not provide for any General Hospital, consequently the appointment of female personnel to the Regular Army was not envisaged in the early stages. However, with the development of the Regular Army, the war in Korea and the introduction of National Service, it became necessary to maintain a General hospital overseas and Camp Hospitals in Australia. To provide the nursing staff for these hospitals approval was given in July 1949 to appoint female officers and enlist female Other Ranks into the Regular Army.

**1951** In February, the Service was designated a Corps, and became the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC). At the same time, the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS), which had provided nursing orderlies and clerical assistance in Military Hospitals was disbanded. In the reorganisation of the RAANC, commissions were granted to fully qualified nurses while non-professional duties were undertaken by the other ranks.

**1952** A Corps Badge with the motto **Pro Humanitate** - For Humanity, was introduced in this year. The badge has as its central feature a lamp. In Greek and Roman times the lamp was figuratively a source of intellectual and spiritual light. It was used symbolically to denote learning. The lamp incorporated in the RAANC badge is the Greek lamp of learning, and is sometimes seen in statuary of Hygieia. In Greek mythology, Hygieia is the goddess of health.

It is interesting to note the relationship between the RAANC badge and the RAAMC badge. The staff, called a caduceus was carried by ancient Greek or Roman heralds. A representation of this kind is used as an emblem of the medical profession, as is the symbol Aesculapius, the god of Medicine, who was worshipped under the form of a serpent and who is commonly represented as a staff with a single serpent coiled about it. Hygieia was eventually regarded as a daughter of Aesculapius.

**1953** In June, Her Majesty the Queen, graciously accepted the appointment of Colonel-in-Chief of the RAANC.

### **1955 Emergency in Malaya**

1948 saw the threat of a communist revolt in Malaya, bred during the years of Japanese occupation. Australian servicemen joined the Commonwealth forces in Malaya to provide a resource, strategically located in South East Asia, and also to participate in operations against communist terrorists in the Federation of Malaya. In September 1955, six sisters were sent to Malaya, where they nursed in British Military Hospitals at Kamunting in Perak, Kuala Lumpur and in the Cameron Highlands. Later the number was increased to eight, and throughout the Emergency until its conclusion in 1960, RAANC sisters nursed Australian, British and New Zealand servicemen, as well as members of the Gurkha Division, locally enlisted members of British units and even Iban trackers from Borneo.

The British Military Hospitals provided care not only for the servicemen, but also for their dependents. This provided an opportunity for the RAANC to broaden their nursing horizons and further their experience in maternity and child care.

Though operations against terrorists decreased with the end of the Emergency, the Commonwealth force remained in Malaya as a part of the Strategic Reserve.

The Commonwealth force, by 1962, was concentrated at Terendak, Malacca, and included in this sophisticated carefully planned complex, was a well-appointed British Military Hospital. Here RAANC sisters continued to serve until 1969 when Terendak was handed over to the Malayan Government and a somewhat reduced Commonwealth force moved to Singapore. There the sisters joined the staff of the British Military Hospital, Singapore.

**1957** Colonel A.M. Sage, CBE, RRC, FNM, was appointed as the first Honorary Colonel and Representative Honorary Colonel to the RAANC on 16 April. This was notified in Australian Army Orders 29 and 41/57. An alliance between the RAANC and the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) was approved by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II in that year.

**1958** Approval was granted for the adoption of a Corps flag for the RAANC on February 7th. The design of the flag was dull cherry bunting for the body of the flag, with the Corps badge appliqued in silver grey on each side.

**1966** In this year, the need for nursing sisters to care for the wives and families of the indigenous servicemen in Papua New Guinea became apparent, and two Nursing Officers arrived in Port Moresby - a vastly different scene from that familiar to members of the AANS on their departure in 1945. At Taurama Barracks, near Bootless Inlet, some miles from Port Moresby, the Nurses found that the Officers' Mess was constructed on the 'hard standing' of the 2/5th AGH operating theatre of some 20 years previously. The establishment of Family Aid Posts was given priority, but there was also seen to be a need to upgrade standards of Pacific Island Medical Assistants working under supervision of RAANC Medical Officers and Senior NCO. By 1969, the number of Nursing Officers in Port Moresby had grown to four with one engaged solely in classroom and bedside teaching.

**1967** At this stage, the need for Nursing Officers in Vietnam was established and initially four nurses left Australia in May to join 8 Fd Amb at Vung Tau. In 1968, the 1st Australian Field Hospital was formed and the nurses, by this time increased to six, were posted to this unit. Here a sophisticated and highly successful triage system was developed involving the reception, assessment, resuscitation and surgery of multiple casualties. The use of helicopters combined with the triage system showed gratifying results in the saving of lives, and contributed to the overall reduction in battle casualties.

In all, 43 Officers of the RAANC served in Vietnam. Their contribution was recognised as outstanding and they continued to serve under most trying conditions until the withdrawal of the main Australian force in late 1971.

**1970** The first Alice Appleford award was presented in 1970. This award is presented annually by the Ex-AAMWS to a non-commissioned member of the RAANC for proficiency in service. It perpetuates the memory of the late Alice Ross Appleford, Assistant Controller for Victoria of the AAMWS during the years 1941-50. She was also one of the most distinguished and highly decorated nursing sisters of World War One. This Award continues as an annual presentation.

**1971** An opportunity came in early 1971 for RAANC Other Rank nurses to join the staff of the British Military Hospital (BMH) in Singapore. This was the first time Other Ranks of the RAANC had served outside Australia, although members of the AAMWS, the nucleus of the other rank element of the RAANC, served in numerous theatres of operations during World War II. Two nurses were sent to Singapore, and remained until the BMH closed in August 1971.

With the withdrawal of the British forces in 1971 from Malaysia and Singapore the ANZUK force came into being. RAANC Officers and nurses serving at the BMH were re-allocated - most to ANZUK Military Hospital, formerly RAF Hospital Changi, and the remainder to the RN Sick Bay, renamed ANZUK Woodlands, at the Naval Base.

In this year also, the alliance between the RAANC and QARANC was consolidated with the introduction of an exchange posting. Whilst the QARANC have served in most postings in Australia, their RAANC counterparts have served in British Military Hospitals in various parts of the UK and in Germany. The Exchange posting was formally concluded in 1996.

**1972** The first male Nursing Officer was appointed to the Corps.

**1979** The first issue of the Corps Magazine "Grey and Scarlet" was published. Published annually it is designed to provide readers with information of people and places, in an effort to build and strengthen RAANC tradition and identity.

**1980** The Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps Association (RAANC-A) was officially formed on April 20th. An annual Award is made to personnel involved in the provision of nursing care.

**1982** Since the appointment of male nursing officers to the Corps, it was considered inappropriate to maintain "Girls in Grey" as the Corps March. A march by the name "Nil Secundus" (Second to None) was

suggested, and with the assistance of DMUSIC-A an arrangement of Nil Secundus together with the second part of "Girls in Grey" was approved by DNS-A as the new Corps March.

**1983** As approval was granted for the traditional colours of grey and scarlet to be used for all RAANC embellishments, steps were taken to change the RAANC flag and lanyards to those original colours. Approval was granted in 1983.

**1985** The first VA and AAMWS award was presented to a RAANC other ranks ARES in 5MD. This Award has since been discontinued.

**1989** Major Marjorie Roach Award was initiated for female Other Ranks serving within Queensland. The Award is sponsored by the AAMWS Association and acknowledges those in the provision of nursing care.

**1990** In January 1990 four Nursing Officers (one male and three female) were sent as part of Australia's commitment to the United Nations force to the Gulf War.

The nurses served on the United States Hospital Ship COMFORT for three months.

**1991** A Training serial to USA was commenced. This is a six month attachment of a Nursing Officer to the Academy of Health Sciences, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

### **1992-2001 United Nations Deployments**

Nursing Officers have participated in all deployments undertaken by the Force. These deployments include Somalia, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bougainville and East Timor. Latter deployments have included Nursing Officers of the RAN and RAAF.

**1997** Head of Corps (HOC) abolished. Technical advice and existing elements of HOC responsibilities to be maintained by an appointed Honorary Head of Corps (HON HOC).

**2001** Chief of Army Directive 05/01 revitalises and re-appoints the HOC RAANC and provides staff and financial resources to carry out the responsibilities of Head of Corps. These responsibilities include the provision of personnel and training advice to the respective agencies, technical advice relating to capability development and stewardship of Corps history, tradition and Corps Funds.