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Catherine O'Connor
Nurse

Catherine (Katie) was born in 1870 in Kilmore, the daughter of Patrick O'Connor and Elizabeth Seymour. At birth she was registered as Kate Margaret but later was known as Catherine. After school she trained for three years in nursing at Melbourne Hospital obtaining her Melbourne Hospital Certificate and her Victorian Nursing Certificate. She then nursed as a sister in charge of medical and surgical wards at Melbourne Hospital.

Katie enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service at Melbourne on November 3, 1914 as a nurse with the 1st Australian General Hospital (AGH) and embarked in Melbourne on November 28, 1914, on the Kyarra taking the 1st AGH to Cairo, via Alexandria. Nurses with at least three years service at a recognised hospital and aged between 21 and 45 years could apply to serve overseas. For some reason Katie lowered her age from 44 years to 37 years on enlistment.

Katie first served in Egypt at the Heliopolis Hotel, the base for the 1st AGH in Cairo from early 1915 to April 1916. This hospital expanded rapidly during the Gallipoli campaign. Katie was promoted to Sister on December 1, 1915, and was transferred to the 1st AGM at Rouen, via Marseilles in France in April 1916.

In France, the 1st AGH was based at the racecourse at Rouen from 1916 to late 1918, west of the Western Front. It is said that 90,000 casualties passed through its wards during this period. Katie's service record indicates that she was attached to the 3rd Australian Casualty Clearing Station (ACCS) from April 1917 until November 1917. Stations such as this were established almost "in the front line". During this time Katie was also temporarily transferred for short periods to the 32nd CCS, 46th CCS, and also spent leave in the UK, Paris and Trouville. It is likely Katie held a senior position with the 1st AGH from November 1917.

Katie was mentioned in despatches on April 7, 1918, as confirmed in the Commonwealth Gazette of October 24, 1918. She was awarded the Royal Red Cross (2nd Class) on January 1, 1919, as reported in the Commonwealth Gazette of May 23, 1919.

Katie left Rouen in November 1918 for England and returned to Melbourne on the Somali, arriving on February 8, 1919. She was welcomed home in Kilmore in early March. Her appointment was terminated on April 16, 1919. She was awarded the British War Medal, Victory Medal and 1914/15 Star.

Katie died on July 30, 1949 in Melbourne and was buried in the Kilmore Catholic Cemetery where her headstone can be seen today. Her name is recorded on the Kilmore Shire Honour Roll in the Memorial Hall.

