

Ivy Bartlett

Nursing close to the heart of ANZAC

Commemorating the contribution of the Australian Army Nursing Service during the First World War, mural artist Simon White has depicted Ivy Bartlett. Staff Nurse Ivy Bartlett was one of Corryong's trailblazing, unsung heroines. Ivy enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 20 July 1915 and was one of the few nurses from Corryong who had volunteered for active service. She thus became one of the more than 3,000 Australian civilian nurses who volunteered.

As one of the 130 Australian nurses who served in the Australian General Hospital in West Mudras on the Greek island of Lemnos during the Gallipoli campaign, Ivy came closer to the action of the Gallipoli Peninsula than any other woman from Corryong. Describing Lemnos Ivy wrote home on 16 October 1915 saying,

"You would never think that on this island we were so near the firing line. I would like to get nearer, and wish they could get enough safe land on the Peninsula to have a hospital there, as it would be much handier than this place."

Lemnos is less than 100 kilometres from the Gallipoli Peninsula and the island played a vital role as a staging post for troops, medical care and an advance supply base for the Gallipoli campaign.

Staff Nurse Ivy Bartlett described the conditions : "The tents are in danger of breaking loose, and the boys are always hammering on the tent pegs. It is strange to think you must be well into spring, when we are just staring winter. The mud is dreadful, and sticks like glue. Colonel was here today, and suggested several improvements. Also he says skirts are quite unsuitable in such a place in such rough weather !"

Ivy was one of the nurses who did their best to nurse men who had been through hell and were being cared for in very difficult conditions in a makeshift tent hospital. As well as the injured, they had a large number of typhoid cases and with the onset of winter the nurses were also coping with troops suffering from exposure and frostbite.

The news of the withdrawal from Gallipoli between 15 and 20 December brought troops in transit via the island on their return to Egypt. For the nurses like Ivy Bartlett of the No 3 Australian General Hospital, the news heralded an end of an era.

Ivy embarked on 14 January (mid winter 1916) at Mudras for Abbassia in Egypt. Ivy was assigned nursing duties on the No 1 Australian Hospital Ship A63 Karoola, docked in Alexandria. She described the hospital ship as 'beautiful change from the muddy old island.'

Ivy spent the rest of the war nursing wounded on board ships destined either to the UK or on homeward voyages to Australia. By the time she returned to Australia she had been on active service for three years and eight months. Ivy had made nine trips across the seas.

Ivy's father Sidney Bartlett campaigned to establish Corryong's first hospital and served as its inaugural Secretary. Her writer-artist-musician brother Albert owned and edited the Corryong Courier. It wasn't surprising that after the First World War and her marriage to Packenham Sire Engineer, Ivy used her talents and experience to serve her community in nursing and as a member of the Red Cross and newly established Country Women's Association.

This commemorative project was a Corryong and District Memorial Hall initiative supported by private donations.