

— Etres and Etricourt, five miles behind the firing line. We have come fifty miles and it's midnight.

The Matron receives us saying, 'We are frantically busy and I want one nurse for night duty straight away.'

I volunteered but wasn't accepted and the others were very tired for they had been two days on their journey. Finally, we all dosed in somebody else's bed and rested till morning.

Anne's next posting was to a Casualty Clearing Station near the frequently bombed Belgian town of Ypres. Once again, she was so close to the front line that she could hear the booming of enemy artillery. CCS postings were highly dangerous as the Allied and British lines kept shifting and the CCSs were bombed and shelled unmercifully. Tin hats and gas masks were issued to medical staff to wear during air raids. Anne was issued with a pair of gumboots to replace those she had worn out working on Lemnos.

30.12.1917 – 48 CCS Ypres. Terrific barrage opened out at 6.45 a.m., lasted for an hour... Very soon after this the wounded started to come in. A very busy day and night followed. The Huns attacked again — came over in the snow, all swathed in white [as camouflage]. The Naval Division caught it. Also during the morning the shelling was heavy and rather close. The Battalion had a bad time of it. Such a number of gas Patients coming in too. I am working in the Acute Medical Unit nursing chiefly pneumonia [patients] The Medical Officer is a Chest Specialist from London and we have several patients with chest wounds.

31.12.1917. Good bye to 1917. I was awakened at 2.30 a.m. to the sound of shelling and detected a faint sweet scent like pineapple... Owen [my orderly] said, 'Sister Donnell they are sending over gas shells — have your gas respirator ready'. I jumped up *toute-suite* (as did most of us), got dressed, shivered and shook and coughed as it seemed as if I never could manipulate that respirator. Will this restless life never end? As I write the shelling is going on again — heavier too. I am not undressing — It's a terrible life!

of life on Lemnos, caught bronchitis which turned into double pneumonia.

17.1.1918 – Thursday. Captain Chandler examined me this a.m. He recommended a thorough rest, and I should be sent to a warmer clime. Matron has been like a mother and I love her for it. She has written to Miss McCarthy suggesting that I go to the South of France. I'm going first to the Abbeville Sick Sisters Hospital by ambulance to-morrow.

Sister Donnell spent almost two weeks as a patient at Abbeville's Sick Sisters Hospital. On 30 January 1918 she left the hospital and arrived the following day in Cannes. She stayed at a convalescent home for nurses set up- in what had been the Hotel de l'Esterel, run by Lady Gifford.

1 2.1918 – Friday. At the first peep of dawn I awakened to the crowing of cocks, threw open the shutters and drank in the most beautiful scent from the mimosa blossom that is growing on the bank opposite my window. I was eager to get up but had to stay in bed for breakfast. After which I explored the place.

I feel as if I have come from the depths of hell to the Gates of Paradise. There is the lovely blue Mediterranean on one side and this hotel on the hillside with the loveliest garden of palms, mimosa, oranges – and some real gum trees.

2.2.1918 – Saturday. Oh, this delightful place! I wandered along the beach to Cannes with its fascinating shops – laces and hand-made things, flowers, candied fruits and pictures. I bought two small paintings – one of the Esterel Mountains and the other of Monte-Carlo.

After a month of convalescence at Cannes, Sister Donnell was considered sufficiently recovered to commence duties. Once again she had to live in a damp chilly tent, this time at No. 3 AGH at Abbeville. Within a week of hard stressful work, caring for men

staff. By the time Anne arrived there several thousand men had passed through the hospital.¹³

Anne's patients were quadriplegics or paraplegics in wheelchairs. Some wards had as many as 30 patients with only a dozen legs between them. Bathing and lifting them placed a great strain on the backs of the nurses and many (like Sister Donnell would not recover). Anne's patients, many of whom had lost both arms, could not feed or bathe themselves and had to be helped to perform the most basic bodily functions. Those who could not walk were wheeled around on iron-framed beds on wheels, called 'walking stretchers'.

Amputees were dependent on the nurses to push them around the wards or the garden. Many suffered from psychological damage, including fear of impotence after being wounded in the groin. These patients needed sympathetic care as well as very careful nursing. Working with amputees placed a strain on Anne Donnell's lower back from which she would never recover.

By 1918, the German population were hungry and tired of war. Aware of the strong feeling against him the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. An Armistice was declared, nurses and patients observed two minutes silence in memory of dead colleagues and patients.

Anne could hardly believe the war was over but found it hard to celebrate when so many young men she had nursed were dead.

Sister Donnell was selected to receive an invitation from King George and Queen Mary to attend a function at Windsor Castle. She was awarded the British Campaign and Service Medals and the British Victory Medal. But like many nurses who had served near the front line and been bombed each night she received no special recognition such as the Royal Red Cross Award or a British Military Medal. The awarding of medals for deeds of bravery by the British appears to have been arbitrary in the case of soldiers and nurses. In this war the Australian Government did not give awards or medals.

In February 1919, Sister Anne Donnell, her face gaunt and lined, her chestnut-brown hair streaked with grey, returned to Adelaide on the troopship *Marga*. Looking worn and much older

On 25 March 1926 *The Adelaide Register* reported that Sister Donnell had resigned from the Glenelg Anzac Hostel to accompany Mr L.W. Walker, a disabled ex-serviceman, on a trip to Colombo, presumably as his nurse-companion.

After Mr Walker died, Anne moved to Western Australia. From 1930 she provided advice to mothers of young children at the Goldfields Infant Welfare Centre in Kalgoorlie. Anne loved working with children. The fact she remained single and childless was a cause of regret, as was the fact she lacked sufficient capital to buy a house. Considering what she had endured in World War One and the fact she had injured her back, Sister Donnell's government pension was so small it was almost insulting. Nurses, underpaid when serving in the AANS, were never adequately compensated and did not receive the benefits granted to former officers. Their pensions were not index linked to inflation, so over the years, they suffered as prices rose.

Such a large number of men had died in the war that many women, who hoped to marry, never found a suitable partner and were condemned to lives of genteel poverty in an era when women were paid at a much lower rate than men.

Working at Kalgoorlie's Infant Welfare Centre, Anne Donnell lived in very modest lodgings at 89 Egan Street. During World War Two Anne did some voluntary work for the Australian Red Cross. She was now in her mid sixties and had become very frail.

Sister Donnell could only afford a rented room and one meal a day, but was too proud to ask for help from her former colleagues. The fact she may run out of money to pay for medical expenses and for her funeral worried her.

Fortunately a Perth Red Cross friend realised the gravity of the situation and invited Anne Donnell to live in a granny flat under her home. This kind act ensured that Anne, who had done so much for others, was well cared for in her final days.

In 1956, aged 81, Anne Donnell died at her friend's house at North Beach, Perth.¹⁶

war. The
looked in
the war,
and Captain
ed by the
World War

urles Bean
extensive
Caroline
Director of
tribution

of heroic
ance had
y Clearing
nced. In a
hat Army
e frontline
s chose to
urses died

es several
d in what



Above: Queensland Nurses of No. 3 AGH. Sister Florence James-Wallace is in the top row 3rd from left.



Left: Abbeville's main square when Florence arrived there to work at No. 3 AGH. This attractive town later suffered from German bombing raids, but was rebuilt after the war.

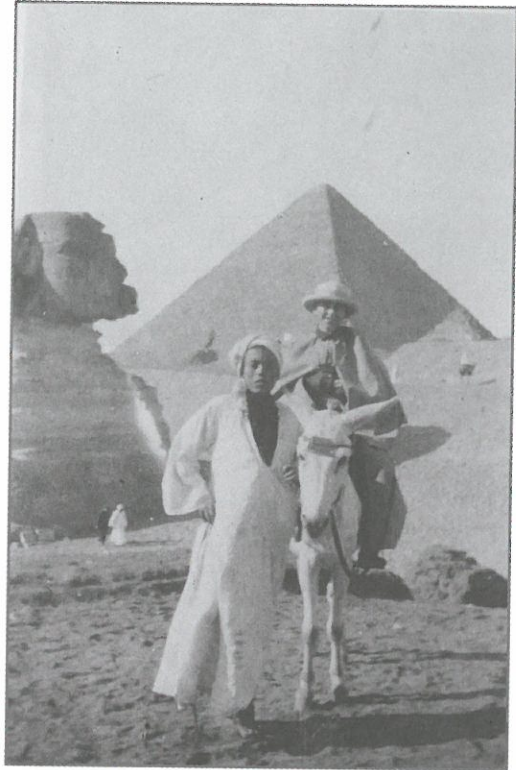


Left: No. 3 AGH at Abbeville was housed in two rows of tents. Australian War Memorial ref. AWM P03088.018

FLORENCE JAMES-WALLACE AND ANNE DONNELL



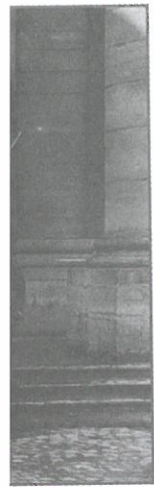
Above: Autographed photo of Anne Donnell used as frontispiece for her book, published in Sydney in 1920.



Right: Sister Donnell visiting the Pyramid of Geza and the Sphynx, where she rode on a donkey. Private collection formerly owned by Sister Donnell.



Anne Donnell & Florence James-Wallace spent 8 months working in the efficiently run army hospital at Abbassia under Matron Wilson. Photo courtesy of Fryer Library, University of Queensland.



3 Sister James-
No. 16 CCS, a
in hospital.

y-beds used
nal injuries
nelg where
ed in 1920.
photos
nell sold in

school house
x which was
here Florence
ced. It is now
n.

