



Celebrating the Contribution of Nurses



CRNPEI Connect

eNewsletter of the College of Registered Nurses of PEI

The First World War

More than 2800 hundred Nurses served in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC), as fully enlisted officers in the specially-created all female rank of Nursing Sister, the first women among the allied forces to do so. The CAMC was established in 1904. Nicknamed “bluebirds” because of their blue uniform and white veils, Canada’s nursing sisters saved lives by caring for wounded and sick soldiers as well as convalescents, prisoners of war and civilians.

The average age of the women who enlisted was 29.9 years and almost all were single at the time of their enlistment. Many of the nurses had brothers or fathers serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. All were volunteers and there was never a shortage of candidates. In January 1915, for instance, there were 2,000 applicants for 75 positions.

Of the 2,845 Canadian nursing sisters who served, at least 58 died as a result of enemy fire, disease, or drowning during the war. On two occasions in 1918, CAMC hospitals in Europe were hit by enemy bombers and several nurses were killed in the line of duty. On 27 June 1918, a German U-Boat torpedoed and sank the Canadian hospital ship, the *Llandovery Castle*, all 14 nurses on board were killed.

They had won the affection of thousands of Canadian soldiers, the gratitude of soldiers’ families, and public respect for the role they had played. A memorial to the war’s nursing sisters was erected in Ottawa in 1926, in the Hall of Honour of Canada’s Parliament building.



**Cecily Jane
Georgina Fane
Pope served in the
Second Boer War and
the First World War.
Georgina was from
Charlottetown.**

Canada’s Nursing War Memorial



**Centre Block
of Parliament,
Ottawa, ON**

**Robin Laird (Council
Chair) and Claire
Betker (CNA President)
at the Canadian Nurs-
ing War Memorial**

**Ottawa, November
2018**



The Second World War

After World War I, the CAMC was downsized, and re-named the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (RCAMC). After WWI the nursing service was only twelve permanent nursing sisters. At the outset of World War II, Canadian trained nurses responded overwhelmingly once again to the “call to war.” The nurses were no longer a Canadian Expeditionary Force attached to the British army, rather they were fully integrated into the Canadian Military — where they remain today. The nursing service expanded beyond the Medical Corps to both the Royal Canadian Air Force Medical Branch and the Royal Canadian Naval Medical Service.

The number of volunteers was so high that military had to freeze enlistment only 10 days after the initial call. Each year the waiting list to join grew longer and longer until some Canadian nurses joined the American, British and South African Nurses services. By the end of the war, 4,480 Canadian Nursing Sisters served in the Canadian military, with 3,656 in the army, 481 with the air force, and 343 with the navy.

The nursing sisters in WWII ranged in age from 21 to 36 with an average age of 25. The “bluebird” uniform first seen in WWI was still widely worn in WWII.



Other Conflicts and After the Second World War

Canadian Nurses have worked in other conflicts both before and after WWI and WWII. Nursing Sisters have continued to serve with the Armed Forces since the end of the Second World War. During the United Nations Operations in Korea, RCAMC Nursing Sisters served in Japan and Korea. Canada’s commitment to NATO saw Canadian nurses serving in Europe with the RCAMC in Soest, Germany and the RCAF in Germany and France. Today, Nursing Officers serve with the Canadian Armed Forces Medical Service, both at home and abroad. In recent years, they have served in the Canadian Armed Forces’ efforts in the Gulf War, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Somalia and Afghanistan.



**Canadian Military
Nursing Officers
at the Canadian
Nursing War Memorial**

Ottawa, November 2018

PEI Nursing Sister Who Lost Her Life in the First World War on June 27, 1918



**Nursing Sister Lieutenant
Rena MacLean** was 38 years old when she lost her life in the First World War. She was on the hospital ship, The *Llandovery Castle* when it was torpedoed in June 1918. Ms. MacLean was born in Souris, PEI in 1880. She was the only PEI nurse to go overseas with the first Canadian contingent in October of 1914 and had the further distinction of helping to set up the first Canadian hospital in France.