

10/11/18

54 TRIBUTES

# Casualty nurse in theatres of war

**M**ARGARET Isaachsen was a nursing sister who worked in Australian casualty clearing stations in Egypt and New Guinea during World War II.

She was born to Margaret (nee Pitcher) who died two weeks after her birth. Her father, Archie Robertson, was a sheep farmer who ran Golden Grove, the family farm near the present-day suburb of the same name.

Also known as "Robbie," "Margo", and "Margie", Margaret grew up in a large and extended Scottish family. There were generations of aunts, uncles and orphan cousins, the Fornachons. All the children were taught by a governess in the farm's cellar rooms.

Margaret carried grief for her lost mother all her years. Apart from her father, her main carers were older cousin Huldah Fornachon and her mother's sister, May Pitcher.

Aged 10, Margaret went to Girton College, staying with her aunts in Hyde Park during the week. She loved school, learned the piano, won prizes, and became a prefect. She started nursing after working at Estcourt House and trained at the Women's and Children's Hospital.

Golden Grove farm was sold as The Depression hit hard, and the family moved to Burnside. Margaret completed nursing in 1939 and went on to take medical and surgical specialities at

She cared for enemy soldiers left behind in appalling conditions

the Royal Adelaide Hospital before joining the Army Nursing Corps. She was made lieutenant en route to the Middle East.

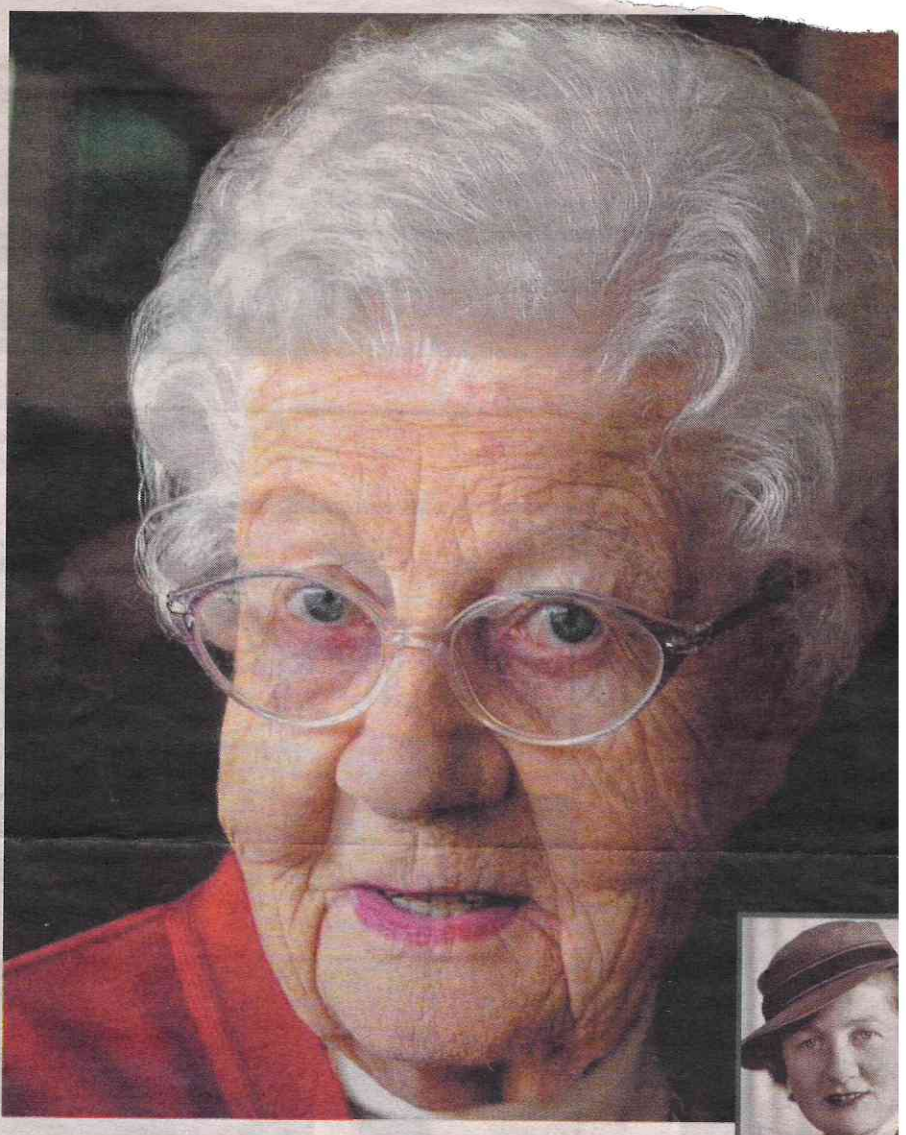
Based at first in Damascus, Syria, she worked 12-hour shifts looking after 60 patients at the casualty clearing station, dealing with battle wounds, illness and infectious diseases, and coming down with diphtheria in the process.

Margaret had fallen for one of her patients, British Army major Bob Ginever, but her commanding officer wrote to him forbidding the marriage, saying he couldn't afford to lose Sister Robertson.

She also struck up a friendship with Captain Donald Wallis, one of the Rats of Tobruk, from Adelaide's 2/48th Battalion. However, work took her to Lebanon, Palestine, Cairo and Alexandria before she moved to El Alamein in time for the Allied push against General Erwin Rommel.

Working in dugout casualty stations, Margaret dealt with hundreds of soldiers wounded by bullets and shrapnel following the Allied assault in October 1942.

She was amazed at how Aus-



## MARGARET JOAN ISAACHSEN

**Army nurse**  
**Born:** June 29, 1917; Hyde Park  
**Died:** October 6, 2018; Malvern  
**Education:** Governess, Girton College, Women's and Children's Hospital, Royal Adelaide Hospital  
**Achievements:** Nursed

soldiers in the Middle East, including Tobruk and El Alamein, and Papua New Guinea  
**Family:** Survived by children Wendy, Diana and Donald, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

While nursing soldiers from 2/48th, Margaret was met with Don Wallis. They met in Adelaide, while on leave in 1944.

Don returned to war. Margaret worked at the Repatriation General Hospital.

Her service, and the story of wartime nursing sisters captured in her portrait, is held in Beirut in 1942 by the National War Museum.

After having children, Margaret returned to work at the Adelaide Hospital. In 1971 and Don divorced, and Margaret began a second phase. At the age of 82, she met Cedric Isaachsen and they lived contentedly together until their death nine years later.

She gave up driving aged 85 and her health declined until she turned 100.

tralian, Germans, Italians and others befriended each other in hospital. As the Allies carried the battle, her unit moved further west, caring for enemy soldiers left behind in appalling conditions by the retreating Axis troops.

By then, her war-weary confusion over desert names was such that when her commanding officer told her that they

were going to "sit fast", she responded by asking "Where's that?" After El Alamein and the withdrawal of Australian troops, she was sent to Queensland before joining the troops once again in New Guinea.

In Lae and Finschhafen, the hospitals were tents and, with the conditions hot and humid, she now treated tropical diseases as well as the war injured.