

Matilda Lloyd 2023 Premiers ANZAC Spirit School Prize

Sister Carrie Jean Ashton

Service Number: SFX13548

2/13th Australian General Hospital

May 31st, 1905 - December 7th, 2002



Figure 1 Carrie Jean Ashton Portrait (Trove)

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Matilda Lloyd

Year 9 – Torrens Valley Christian School

Part A: word count - 1316

Jean Ashton, given the birth name, Carrie Jean Ashton, was the first daughter of six siblings of Walter and Caroline Ashton, born on the 31st of May 1905. Jean had two older brothers Walter and Jack, two younger sisters Alice and Molly and a younger brother Leslie. Jean was born in the town of Woodside, South Australia, 36km East of Adelaide. Four years after Jean’s birth the family moved 180km north to Booborowie, South Australia. Jean began her schooling education at the age of 7 and was enrolled at the Burra school on the 14/10/1912 (Burra Genealogy ‘Burra School Records – Girls’ n.d.). The Burra school was approximately 26km Southeast from Booborowie and the school can be seen in Figure 2.

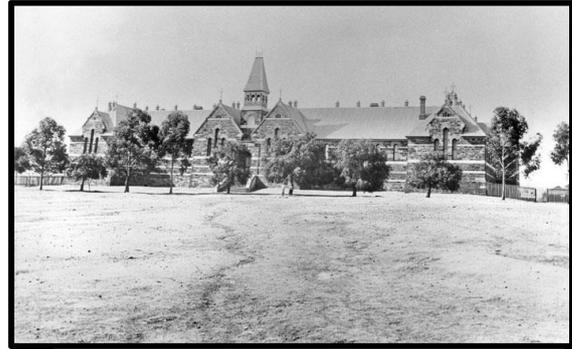


Figure 2: Burra Model School in 1912 (Burra History)

Jean’s father Walter, shortly after arriving in the Booborowie community, attended meeting at the Booborowie Mutual Improvement Society. The subject of the evening was ‘An Evening with the Poets’. Some members gave recitations from Robert Browning, Adam Lindsay Gordon and more famously, Shakespeare. Mr Ashton recited a poem written by Clement Scott (*Article, ‘Burra Record (SA: 1878 - 1954)’, 10 June 1914*). Walter’s occupation was a farmer, he grew up in the east of Adelaide in a town called Woodside.

When reviewing the relevant literature and historical research archives, there was little information on Jean’s mother Caroline, regarding her occupation and other interests.

After spending her schooling years in Booborowie Jean moved down to Adelaide, to a suburb called Unley, away from family and to pursue her own desires in life, that being becoming a dressmaker.



Figure 3: List of nurses from South Australia assigned for the Australian Army Nursing (The Advertiser) (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954) Army Nurses Appointed Page 15 Thu 25 Jul 1940

After a decade long career in dressmaking, she began training at the Adelaide Hospital in 1929. This was followed by a course in Infectious Diseases nursing at Northfield, and midwifery at the McBride Hospital. The Hospital was run by a board of management to treat, care for and isolate people suffering from infectious diseases including influenza, scarlet fever, diphtheria, poliomyelitis, and

tuberculosis. Jean treated both adults and children at the hospital.

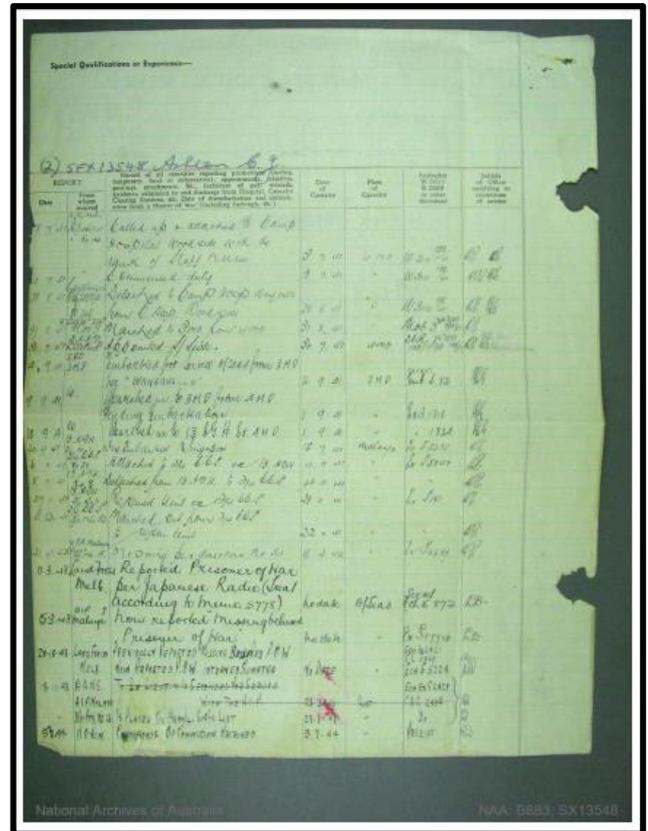


Figure 4: Document of 1 of 6-page service records inscriptions of Jean’s time in service (National Archives Australia).

After appointments at both Lameroo and Jamestown hospital, Jean further pursued her studies and trained in infant welfare in Hobart, Tasmania. This ended when she was called up on the 9th of July 1941 by the Australian Army Nursing Service and was attached to the Camp Hospital Woodside with the rank of Staff Nurse as shown in Figure 3.

On the August 28th, 1941, Jean enlisted at the age of 35, for the Australian Army Nursing Service at Wayville as a Nurse. At the time, she was still single and her next of kin was her father. Her record of service can be seen in Figure 4.

Jean embarked from Australia on the 4th of September 1941 to Singapore with the 3rd Military District. On the 20th of September 1941 she arrived in Singapore.

Figure 5 shows some of the devastation of Singapore during WWII and it was only months later after arriving at Singapore they were forced to evacuate and return to Australia.

The Vyner Brooke was the ship that transported 65 P.O.W's from Singapore. It was an old ship that became an armed trader by Britain's Royal Navy.

On the 12 February 1942, the Vyner Brooke was one the last ships to leave carrying evacuees from Singapore. The ship usually carried 12 passengers, plus the 47 crew the ship needed but on this occasion the Vyner Brooke sailed south with 181 passengers, most being women and children. 65 of the passengers were Australian nurses in Singapore including Jean Ashton.

On the 13th of February 1942 the Vyner Brooke was attacked by several Japanese aircraft. It was destroyed by several bombs and within half an hour rolled over and sunk bow first. Approximately 150 survivors eventually made it to shore at Banka Island and spent between 8 and 65 hours in the water. Unfortunately, the island was already occupied by the Japanese and most of the survivors were taken captive.

Jean Ashton was reported missing on the 25th of May 1942 because there was no communication from her or any of the passengers on the Vyner Brooke. After missing for over a year she was officially reported as a P.O.W. by Japanese Radio in late October 1942 and was interned on Sumatra.

Despite still recorded as missing, Jean was placed on the Provisional Support List on 10th of October, 1943 for the Australian Army Nursing Service. This was a list of people who were deemed necessary for certain services by the Army including nurses to work with the many soldiers and nurses who had their legs amputated because of War injuries. These service men and women and were nicknamed "Leggies" as seen in Figure 6. Lex Arthurson was a soldier who was in the same P.O.W. camp as Jean. He wrote a diary about his experiences in WW2. The diary describes how they were treated by the Japanese and provides readers with an insight into the a day to day life as a P.O.W.. Once such entry he made in Singapore on '...Tues. , 1945-09-25 ...' explaining 'Twenty four Australian nurses, so thin that the combined weight equalled only that of six normal passengers...' He then added they '...were flown to Singapore on Sunday from Sumatra and rushed to an Australian army hospital for immediate attention.' These nurses were the '... survivors of a party of 65 Australian nurses whose ship was sunk off Banka Point, E. Sumatra as they were escaping from Singapore



Figure 5: 1945-9-26 Aerial photograph of Singapore, showing bomb damaged civil airport with many allied transport planes. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 6: Singapore, 1945-09-25. Former POW Australian "Leggies" arrive at Kallang Airport from Bangkok Thailand. (Australian War Memorial)

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in 1942, and the sight of them and the story they told of inhuman Japanese treatment is as bad as anything I saw or heard in Nazi horror camps...". (L.Arthurson(2009) *The Story of 13th Australian General Hospital 8th Division A.I.F, Malaya [PDF]*). As Jean did not need to a hospital immediately she embarked from Singapore via the 'Manunde' ship on the 24th of October 1945 and 9 days later on the November 2nd 1945 she disembarked at Port Melbourne.

On the 7th of January 1946, Jean was admitted to Melbourne Hospital and was fortunately dispatched one month later with no major injuries or medical issues. Figure 7 and 8 shows she received a hero's welcome on her arrival back in Adelaide for her services to WWII. Jean had a Total Effective Period of 1699 days, which translates into roughly 4 years and 8 months of service.



Figure 7: Sisters Carrie Ashton, 2/13th Australian General Hospital (AGH), and Mavis Hannah, 2/4th Casualty Clearing Station (CCS), arrive to a homecoming celebration in Adelaide in September 1945 after their three and a half years of imprisonment in Sumatra. (The Palembang and Muntok Internees of WW2)

Figure 8: Informal portrait of medical Sisters of the 2/13th Australian General Hospital (AGH), at a concert party at St Patrick's School. (Australian War

On the 6th of March 1947, King George VI, announced that Jean would receive awards in recognition of services rendered whilst a P.O.W. in Sumatra as seen in Figure 9. Due to Jean's tremendous courage, she was awarded multiple war medals including the Australian Service Medal (A.S.M), WW2 Medal, 1939- 1945 Star and Pacific Star Medal which can be seen in Figures 10-13.

NAME	Ashton, Carrie Jean	No.	3589
Address	57 Mary St, Malaga, W.A.		
1	1939/45 STAR	Recorder	
2	AFRICA STAR	Checker	JP
3	" with 1st Clasp	AWARDS	WITHHELD
4	" with 8th Clasp	Serials:	
5	ATLANTIC STAR	REASON:	
6	A.C. EUROPE STAR	30913/54	
7	ITALY STAR	AUTHORITY:	
8	FRANCE & G. STAR		
9	PACIFIC STAR		
10	BURMA STAR		
11	DEFENCE MEDAL		
12	WAR MEDAL		
13	A.S.M.		
14			

TO WHOM DESPATCHED *Polled 16 3 54*

Reg'd Parcel No. _____ DATE *10/1/54*

Serials _____ Sig. _____

ASIQ Form-2443-0/48-710m DATE _____

Figure 9: Carrie Jean Ashton Award Medals Issued (National Archives of Australia)



Figure 10: Australian Service Medal (A.S.M) (Australian Government)

Figure 11: WW2 Medal (Australian Government)

Figure 12: 1939- 1945 Star (Australian Government)

Figure 13: Pacific Star (Australian Government)

There was little information about her life after the war and it is not known whether she married or had any children.

The endurance and bravery of Jean Ashton was most evident when she was held as a P.O.W. in Singapore. In fact, when she got back to Melbourne, Australia she explained, *"We all knew we were going to die and stood there waiting. There were no protests. They died bravely, and their marvellous courage prevented me from calling out when I was hit. I couldn't let them down"* (The News (17 September 1945) '24 A.I.F. NURSES FREED FROM SUMATRA CAMP'). From the day she signed the enlistment forms until the day she was discharged, Jean showed true ANZAC spirit. This was demonstrated by her endless courage, loyalty, comradeship and mateship. Through hardship one could only imagine, Jean kept on serving her country with absolute perseverance and determination especially whilst she was held a prisoner for three and a half years, living in harsh conditions such as no basic sanitary facilities; limited access to clean water, no clothes and no firewood, gradually having to use the wood of the huts. They were also subjected to grossly brutish behaviour by Japanese non-commissioned officers and senior privates.

Part B – word count 441

My initial thoughts about finding a war veteran who reflected the ANZAC spirit, was to find a relative that served in either WW1 or WW2. It became quickly apparent when speaking to my extended family, that I didn't have any relatives who served, especially one whom I could find reliable information about. As a result, I knew I had to start looking elsewhere. Through self-determination and my curiosity about the First Australians, I came across an Aboriginal woman who served. This led me to further explore my interest in how service women from indigenous backgrounds were treated and how they were not given the same recognition as others. I only imagined that, given Aboriginal history and culture, they would have deeper connections with their land and have a desire to protect it more. After hours of scouring websites and records, I came across a veteran who wasn't previously researched and was anonymous enough to fit the criteria, Agnes Bonney. To my disappointment, the only information and records I could obtain were some basic notes about when and where she was born. I spent hours trying search for more records, articles or of anything of importance, but I was sadly unsuccessful.

In the Term 1 holidays, I attended the ANZAC spirit prize workshop and it was there that it was brought to my attention, that I would get little to no more information on Agnes Bonney. This was because, at the time of WW2, people were extremely racist, so that few records of people with coloured skin, such as Agnes Bonney were kept. I had to change the person to be able to submit a well written and researched essay that provided me with a variety of information and resources.

At this time, I had thoughts of quitting and giving up but luckily, a lady at the workshop helped me to find a different woman called Carrie Jean Ashton. As Jean was a white female who served as a nurse, she was much easier to find records and information on. Unlike Bonney, I could search Ashton in Trove and multiple other sites and get dozens of articles with information about her life and service in the Australian Army Nursing Service, whereas it was the opposite for Bonney.

I was persistent in finding a woman because I wanted to learn and showcase how they served their country. As a girl myself, I am keenly interested to know more about the history of women who served in the Australian defence forces and more now especially since researching Jean Ashton, who has empowered me to become a leader and follow my dreams, just like she did all those years ago.

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