



Sister Julia Mary CROSBY by Carmel Crosby

My great aunt Julia Mary CROSBY was born on the 3rd October, 1869, in Armagh, near Clare, north of Adelaide, South Australia. She was the 7th of 13 children born to Walter Thomas CROSBY and Ann CAMERON. My paternal grandfather was the 12th child of this family.

Julia trained as a nursing sister at The Adelaide General Hospital and had been Matron at The Miners' Hospital, Boulder, near Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. She enrolled in the Australian Army Nursing Service on the 3rd May, 1915, possibly as a result of the landing at Gallipoli, which had occurred 8 days earlier. She enlisted for service abroad, in the Australian Imperial Force, on the 24th May, 1915, as part of the No.3 Australian General Hospital. There is no request for Date of Birth on the enlistment papers, only "What is your age?" which these days seems unusual, as D.O.B. is a very common identifying factor. How did the authorities distinguish between the many John Browns? Whatever the case, if adjusting your age was less of a white lie than changing your date of birth, Julia took that option. Instead of writing 45, she put down 38 as her age. Nurses over 40 were not allowed to enlist in the service.

The enlistment form made no allowances for women and her chest measurement of 38 inches was recorded! At 5 foot 7 inches (170cm) and 148lb (10st 8lb or 67kg) she was sturdy enough to be sent to nurse the sick and injured on the other side of the world, for what was thought would only be until the end of the year. As enlistment was for "the duration of the war" we now know that it would be nearly 4 years before the surviving soldiers and medical staff returned home.

The 3rd Australian General Hospital (3 AGH) had been set up in response to a request from the British War Office. On 15th May, 1915, the new unit sailed from Sydney, on the *RMS Mooltan*, just one month after its formation had been requested. Julia joined the *SS Mooltan* at Freemantle, Western Australia, on 24th May, 1915, along with one surgeon, two doctors, another nursing sister and four nurses.

The *Mooltan* arrived in Plymouth, England, on 27th June, after only 1 month at sea. Originally heading for France, the 3 AGH received orders on the 1st of July to proceed to Mudros, on the island of Lemnos, in the Aegean Sea near Gallipoli. The nurses arrived at Mudros to a hastily erected tent hospital and accommodation on 8th August. Julia's mother had died in Port Pirie, South Australia, on 28th June 1915, so it would have been a difficult time for her, being so far from home, though the busy time to come would have kept her mind occupied. Before breakfast on the day after the nurses had arrived, more than 200 wounded and sick had been admitted to the new hospital. Four days later, there were more than 800 patients. The beginning of a busy 6 months had arrived.

The nurses were still living in tents for several months as the weather turned cold. "The weather is terrible, bitterly cold, with a high wind and rain. We are nearly frozen, even in our balaclavas, mufflers, mittens, cardigans, raincoats and Wellingtons. It's a mercy we have ample warm clothing else we should perish. Last night five tents blew down, one ward tent and four Sister's tents" [Anne Donnell, *Letters of an Australian Army Sister*, Sydney, 1920, p.58]

The 3 AGH left Lemnos for Egypt in January 1916, following the successful evacuation of Gallipoli in December 1915. After 8 more months, Julia and the 3 AGH left Egypt for England, no doubt a welcome change and her Casualty Form shows that she had a furlough for 2 weeks in November 1916. The many postcards she bought as mementos show she travelled widely in Scotland and England, during this holiday and also at the end of the war. She was based at the new Kitchener Hospital, Brighton and presumably she knew that her father had been born in Brighton 80 years before, and that her grandfather was buried there 50 years previously in 1866, 3 years before her birth.

After 6 months in England, Julia was transferred from 3AGH to 2nd Australian General Hospital, in Wimereux, near Boulogne in France. It was a very busy hospital on route from the front to the most important base port of the British Expeditionary Force. Julia went on leave to Paris for 2 weeks in January, 1918. There she purchased a set of little coffee cups and these are still in the family.

Julia was mentioned in despatches by Sir Douglas Haig on 8th November 1918. So far, except for a mention of "conspicuous services rendered" I have not found out why she and another sister were mentioned. Julia also received a Royal Red Cross, 2nd class in January, 1919.

On 8 April, 1919 Julia left for Australia on the "*Trasos Montes*" and was demobilised on 23rd October, 1919. After 4 years, her big adventure was over. She received the British War Medal, a Victory Medal and a 1914/15 Star Medal. On 21 March 1927 Julia was sent her "3rd War Medal", which she had requested several times. Her forceful letter written 8 years after her return to Australia was not meant to be ignored by the Army hierarchy!

There is a digitised copy of this letter plus most of her official details, along with 376,000 others, in The Gift to a Nation on the National Archives of Australia website, where much of my information has come from. Julia went onto a successful nursing career in Sydney after the war and died at the age of 71 on August 10, 1941 in Picton, NSW.



Sr. Julia Crosby's ward at Mudros, Lemnos Island, 1915. (Julia on right of the 2 nurses)



Nurses on Tour, Egypt. 1915-16.

Source: Biography by Carmel Crosby from a story for a Family History Journal .- 20 March 2022.

<https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/153623035/person/292115895100/facts>