

A lonely Anzac pilgrimage

Two nurses at peace in lonely graves in our North were remembered as dawn broke on this 2020 Anzac Day. Janie Mason, the Curator of Charles Darwin University Nursing Museum made a lonely pilgrimage this year to tread the ground of Adelaide River War Cemetery.

Sister Margaret Augusta de Mestre died in the first bombing raid on Darwin 19th February 1942 on HMAHS *Manunda*. She is identified with others whose bodies were lost on the Northern Territory Memorial [Panel 5], placed within Adelaide River War Cemetery.



Sister Marion Watt Eunson died in 121st Australian General Hospital in Katherine 8th December 1942 from peritonitis. Rough and primitive conditions were thought to have exacerbated her condition. She was first buried at the Katherine War Cemetery in a dawn service “so colourful and so sad” with the rising sun and the nurses’ red capes. With closure of the Cemetery, Marion Watt Eunson now lies at the Adelaide River War Cemetery [Plot: F, C, 1].



Crossing the River, Janie walked the site of the transit station of the 119th Australian General Hospital on the spur line of the old North Australia Railway and laid flowers on the nursing plaque there. ‘Leaping Lena’ is remembered, that gallant hospital train carrying the soldiers south to Katherine, rocking and rolling on its very narrow-gauge rails, when this was Australia’s front line of defence.

For Museum staff and friends, Janie Mason celebrated nurses, both civilian and military, who served when war came to Australia’s northern shores. Once mighty armies camped here, fought and cared for their wounded. Anzac nurses were here, so far from home and some were never to leave.

*Who when in light the Final Dawn is breaking,
Still faithfull, though the world's regard may cease,
Will honour, splendid in triumphant waking,
The souls of women, lonely here at peace.*

[Vera Brittain, Mudros Harbour 1916]