

= Pearl Corkhill =

Pearl Elizabeth Corkhill MM (11 March 1887 ? 4 December 1985) was an Australian military nurse of the First World War . Trained as a nurse in Sydney , Corkhill enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 4 June 1915 . After serving in France at the 1st and 3rd Australian General Hospitals , Corkhill was assigned to the 38th British Casualty Clearing Station near Abbeville on 21 August 1918 . On 23 August , while the camp was being heavily bombed by enemy aircraft , Corkhill remained calm and continued to tend to her patients , despite the danger . For her bravery , she was awarded the Military Medal , one of only seven Australian nurses to be so decorated in the First World War . Following the Armistice , she went on to work as a nurse at various public hospitals , and donated a large collection of her father 's photographs to the National Library of Australia .

= = Early life = =

Corkill was born on 11 March 1887 , the second child of William Corkhill , a grazier and photographer , and Francis Hawtrey née Bate . Growing up on the family ranch , " Marengo " , near Tilba Tilba in southern New South Wales , Corkhill and her sister Edith 's lives were extensively recorded by their father , who by 1890 had become a professional photographer . She was first educated by a governess before attending the public school in town . She undertook nursing training at a private hospital in Summer Hill , Sydney and qualified as a general nurse in 1914 .

= = Military years = =

On 4 June 1915 , Corkhill enrolled as a staff nurse in the Australian Imperial Force . She left Fremantle aboard the A62 Wandila on 25 June 1915 , and arrived in Egypt in July that year . She was assigned to the 1st Australian General Hospital , and assisted in the treatment of soldiers involved with the Gallipoli Campaign . On 24 March 1916 , Corkhill was among a group of nurses sent to Marseille aboard the Braemar Castle , a hospital ship . Arriving in early April , she was then sent aboard a train destined for the 2nd British General Hospital in Le Havre . The train was poorly equipped and was missing many amenities , such as toilets or water , so the women were forced to improvise by washing with cologne . In her time at the British hospital , Corkhill looked forward to returning to an Australian hospital and being " amongst our boys " ; the Australian soldiers often found their compatriots to be friendlier than the British nurses . On Anzac Day 1916 , a year after the Landing at Gallipoli , Corkhill and two other Australian nurses commemorated the occasion . They wore gum tree leaves on their capes , and gave small packets of cigarettes and matches to the Australians who were interned at the hospital as gifts .

Corkhill went back to serve at the 1st Australian General Hospital in Rouen on 16 June 1916 for the remainder of the year . On 23 January 1917 , she went to England on leave until 9 February . She then served at the Australian Hospital until July 1918 , with the exception of her two leaves ; to England in October 1917 and to Paris in February 1918 . On 15 May 1918 , Corkhill was sent to Abbeville to join the 3rd Australian General Hospital , and was briefly posted to the 38th British Casualty Clearing Station on 2 June . After serving in with the 3rd Australian General Hospital for a further two months , she was again posted to the Casualty Clearing Station on 21 August 1918 .

= = = Military Medal = = =

Casualty Clearing Stations were deliberately sited as close to the front line as possible , since many injuries caused during battle required more urgent attention than the time to travel to a field hospital allowed . Often within seven miles of the front line , they were considered extremely dangerous , and the appropriateness of having nurses attend such stations was hotly debated within the military . As a result of its proximity to the front , the station would often come under enemy attack , as was the case of the 38th British Casualty Station on 23 August . The Casualty Station suffered a heavy air raid by German forces , with the sterilisation room being destroyed and the camp being hit by

numerous bombs . Despite the heavy attack , Corkhill , who was attending to the wounded at the time , remained calm and continued to aid the patients . For her actions , she was recommended for and later awarded the Military Medal .

War Office , 23rd August , 1918

His Majesty the KING has been pleased to approve of the award of the Military Medal to the undermentioned Lady for distinguished service in the Field , as recorded : ?

Staff Nurse Pearl Elizabeth Corkhill , Aust . A.N.S.

For courage and devotion on the occasion of an enemy air @-@ raid . She continued to attend to the wounded without any regard to her own safety , though enemy aircraft were overhead . Her example was of the greatest value in allaying the alarm of the patients .

Corkhill was initially unconvinced that she deserved the award , being more concerned about having to purchase a new dress to wear while meeting the King . The award was more heavily celebrated by the men than by Corkhill herself , as she described in a letter to her mother :

Today word came that I had been awarded the MM. Well the C.O. sent over a bottle of champagne and they all drank my health and now the medical officers are giving me a dinner in honour of the event . I can 't see what I 've done to deserve it but the part I don 't like is having to face old George and Mary to get the medal . It will cost me a new mess dress , but I suppose I should not grumble at that ? I 'm still wearing the one I left Australia in .

= = = Later service = = =

The day following the action , 24 August , Corkhill was posted to the 1st Australian General Hospital , and went on leave in the United Kingdom . She was retained for service at the 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital in Harefield , London on 27 August 1918 . She was promoted to the rank of Sister on 1 October , and continued to serve at the hospital until She returned to Australia on 24 January 1919 . She was discharged on 22 June 1919 .

= = Later life = =

A memorial commemorating Corkhill 's efforts in the war was erected in Tilba , and she was presented with the medal by Governor @-@ General Lord Foster . Following the war , Corkhill went on to pursue a nursing career . After serving as a nurse in various hospitals both in Australia and overseas , Corkhill became the senior sister at the District Hospital in Bega , New South Wales in 1951 . In 1975 , she donated a large collection of her father 's photographs to National Library of Australia . Amongst the one thousand piece collection were personal photographs along with pictures the Tilba area , which were later used to create a book , Taken at Tilba and an engagement calendar . Corkhill was a skilled horsewoman , and was the lead in the centenary Cooma Show . A supper cloth made by Corkhill while on duty has been used as an example of decorative crafts of the era , and a number of photographs she had taken while on duty were donated to the Australian War Memorial . Corkhill died on 4 December 1985 in Dalmeny , New South Wales . She was unmarried .