

NFX122285 – Lt. Nancy Florence Macqueen – (Shepherd)

At the age of seventeen Nancy decided that she wanted to go Nursing, but was told she had to wait until she was nineteen, before she could commence her studies. Fortunately at the time, she discovered a job notice in the newspaper for an experienced nurse at St Hellen's Hospital at Chatswood, so she applied and got the job.

In the six months that she worked there, she worked hard and with dedication, willing to learn as much as she could. She lived at the hospital during the week and had one day off when she went home. During this time she was also doing voluntary work at Prince Alfred Hospital. She finally commenced her Nursing training in 1936 at Prince Alfred Hospital with the 4th Preliminary Training School. She was happy there, and made many good friends, such as Sheila Strang. Her training continued there until 1940, where she lived and studied at Prince Alfred, and passed her Nurses Exams with Distinctions. Finally, Sister Macqueen was asked to stay on staff and was given a big ward to administer.

To lend her support to Australia's effort in World War 2, Nancy wanted to join up with the Nursing Corps, but after going to Victoria Barracks at Paddington, Sydney, she found out that she had to be 25 years old before she could enter the Army as a trained Nurse, so she continued on the staff at Prince Alfred Hospital.

In March 1942 she joined up with the Australian Army Nursing Service – AANS – and was sent to the Sydney Showground where many soldiers were in training. She felt that during the ensuing time that she was 'always being sent somewhere'. She was sent to Ingleburn for three months, where she started a Regimental Aid Post - RAP – for the Australian Army Women's Services (AAWS) to treat patients and to conduct 'sick parades'. After some more nursing at the Showground, she was sent to the School of Artillery at Randwick, where she managed an RAP by herself, before proceeding to the Camp Hospital on Dramalbon Road in Bellevue Hill.

In 1943 she was attached to the 2/5 Australian General Hospital (2/5 AGH) and was asked 'Are you a good sailor?' But, fortunately due to sickness, she was unable to sail to New Guinea on the Centaur, which was bombed and sank on its way. After this lucky escape, when she recovered, she went to Brisbane, was fitted with tropical combat gear, such as long pants, big boots, tin hats, knapsacks, gas masks and tin trunks, then caught the train to Townsville and embarked on a troop ship to New Guinea.

They sat on the ship's deck in Townsville harbour for three hot days before departing. There about eighty nurses aboard, as it was a busy time in New Guinea. As the convoy proceeded northwards, Jap submarines were detected and depth charges were dropped. This was a pretty scary experience.

They arrived in Port Moresby in April 1943, and it was very hot in the heavy suits with which they had been issued. They were settled in at Tent Headquarters at nearby Bootless Bay. It was very busy at this big Hospital, with nursing for the many wounded soldiers flown in from the Kokoda Trail; Nancy mainly cared for victims of malaria, burn cases as a result of plane crashes, and scrub typhus casualties. There was also a lot of dysentery to contend with. She was there for ten months without any breaks, except for one day off each week. It was very hot in the tents, sometimes too hot for sleeping there on the camp stretchers, and you couldn't go to bed to read because of the hurricane lamps.

In Nancy's tent there was Teddy Greenwood, Marie Gibson and Joan Lyttle. They used to play cards like Bridge, at night after duty, and attended parties organised by the different Battalions, or got invited to go to the Officers Club. Nancy started a canteen there – did the buying (tin fruits etc.) and collected the money. But she finally stayed on with another hospital there, in charge of a Ward, and felt that she was 'always scavenging for things', during that time to keep the place running.

She came home after a year, and had Leave in Sydney for two weeks, -- it was nice to be home. She then spent three months in an Orthopaedic Hospital in Baulkham Hills, and enjoyed it, as all her friends were there.

Once again packing her trunk and kit bag, she then was on the move to the Tablelands in Queensland for six weeks, and the Brisbane General Hospital for a further three weeks. It was here where she particularly remembers nursing a burn victim from a Japanese Kamikaze attack on a ship. Then to Ingleburn where she assembled with others to finally board the Hospital Ship, Manunda, in Brisbane for a hectic six week journey to the Borneo Island of Morotai, south of the Philippines.

On the way they were subjected to frequent air raid warnings, were constantly battened down to weather any Jap attack from the air, and suffered an air raid near the island of Biak, north of Dutch New Guinea. They finally sailed into the harbour at Morotai and encountered so many ships since the Allies were pushing the Japs back. A hospital was being set up with many tents on the coral sand close to the water, with barbed wire across the beach. Many wounded came in, and there were malaria cases to look after during this hard time – water was scarce and there was no rain. She shared a tent with Marie Gibson and Joan Lyttle, and stayed there for about eight months until the end of the war, as the Japs surrendered in 1945, while she was there.

The Matron sent Nancy and six other nurses to Manilla in the Philippines, by plane to watch over POWs arriving from Japan and Hong Kong. It was her first trip in a plane, and the flight in the big transport ‘scared her stiff’.

She was sent to the Hospital there for six weeks, with Teddy Greenwood and was given so many wards each to care for. One POW, Harry Leslie from Britain, who had spent three months in Singapore’s Changi Prison and three years in Taiwanese detention camps, and who had suffered torture and deprivation at the hands of his Japanese captors, he was severely emaciated and lucky to be alive. Nancy treated him and wrote a letter to his anxious mother in England. In 1995, Harry Leslie tracked down Nancy and they were reunited after 50 years.

In departing Manilla in October 1945, she flew back home via Darwin and Townsville and reported back to Barracks in Sydney, and then spent the rest of her time in the Army at the Military Hospital in Punchbowl until January 1947.

She started seeing Ord Shepherd and they were married in 1947. Nancy and Ord lived their lives out in Sydney, NSW and had two sons, Ian and Walter. She passed away on January 11, 2006.