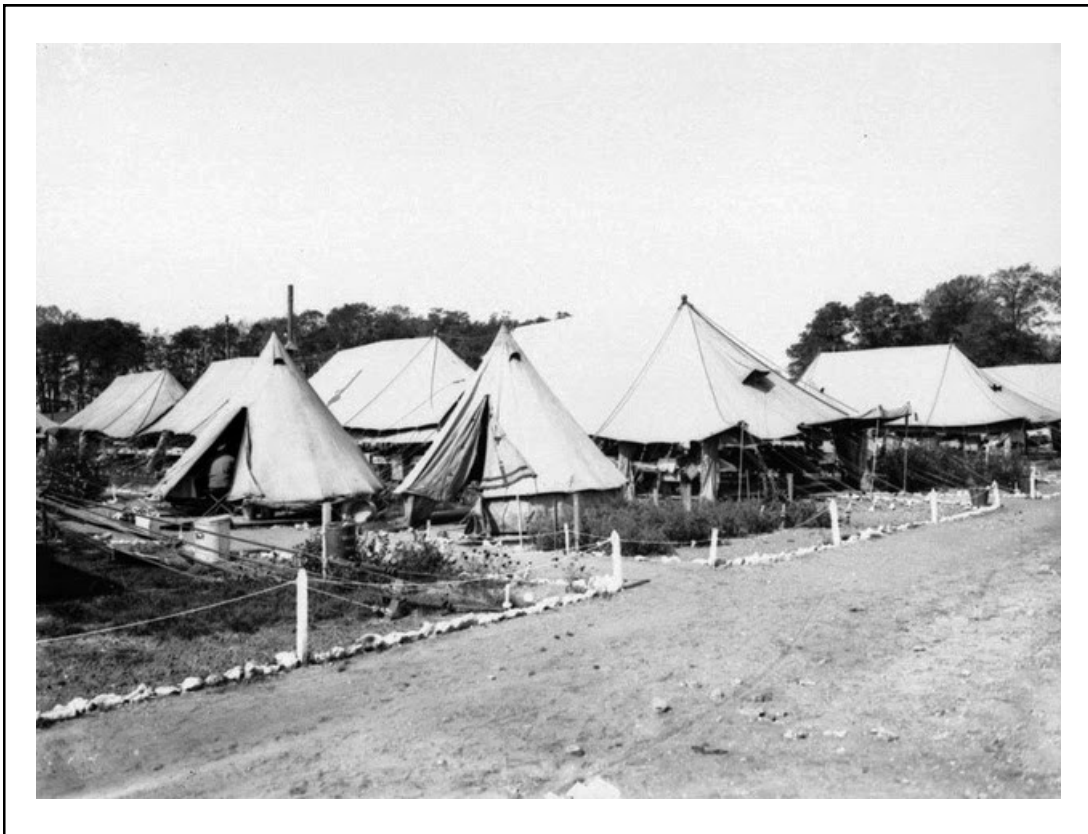


# Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 96

## **JOSEPHINE ELLEN AGNES O'NEILL 1885 - 1962**



Australian War Memorial photograph id E03422

This booklet remains the property of Saint Andrew's Uniting Church.  
Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

## Cover Illustration:

*The tent wards at the 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen.  
23 September 1918, two and a half years after it had been erected.  
Jessie O'Neill served here in 1917.*

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Brisbane QLD 4000  
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# Josephine 'Jessie' Ellen Agnes O'Neill

## Family background

Josephine Ellen Agnes O'Neill - fondly known as 'Jessie' - was born in 1885 to James and Frances 'Fanny' Hardie (nee Hall) O'Neill of Lilymere, Warra, Queensland. Warra is a small town located on the Warrego Highway on the Darling Downs region of Queensland, 256 kilometers north west of Brisbane.

James, a farmer, and Frances had six children; three daughters, (Mary, Josephine, 'Jessie' and Daisy Isobel) and three sons (James Bointon, Francis Thomas 'Frank' and Walter Hudson O'Neill).

## Enlistment

Nurse Jessie O'Neill had been a member of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) since 31<sup>st</sup> August 1915 when she enlisted in the AANS Reinforcements to go overseas. She was described in her enlistment papers as being 31 years and 10 months old, height 5' 5" (165 cm) weight 125 lbs (57kg) with fair complexion, grey eyes and fair hair. Her religious denomination was given as Presbyterian and her father was next of kin.

Jessie embarked His Majesty's Australian Transport (HMAT) A32 *Themistocles* in Sydney on 29 December 1916, and disembarked at Plymouth on 3 March 1917. She then proceeded to Rouen, an ancient city on the Seine in France, where she served with the No12 Stationary Hospital for four months.

*HMAT Themistocles*



## Hospitals at Rouen

The No. 1 Australian General Hospital (1AGH) along with British and American General Hospitals and Stationary Hospitals were situated in the *Champ de Courses*, a racetrack on the outskirts of Rouen. Most hospitals remained there for the duration of the war.

The British had established No 12 General Hospital, British Expeditionary Force, in 1914. This was a 1350-bed hospital, mainly comprised of tents. It also contained a hospital for captured, wounded enemy prisoners and British prisoners with self-inflicted wounds.

The 1AGH had arrived at Marseilles from Egypt in April 1916 with a nursing Staff of 117. After a few days rest, they proceeded to Rouen, where the unit took up the site on the racecourse vacated by No.12 Stationary Hospital.

Fifty members of the Nursing Staff had proceeded with the unit to Rouen, where they were temporarily accommodated pending the preparation of their quarters. The remaining nurses were temporarily distributed in the Le Havre, Étapes, and Boulogne areas, with the intention of rejoining 1AGH as soon as accommodation was available.

On the nurses' arrival it was found that the hospital had only 750 beds – and not the 1350 beds originally available - for which a Nursing Staff of 75 was ample; consequently, they requested the authority to temporarily employ the remaining 47 or so nurses in British units.

## **Service**

In July 1917, Staff Nurse Jessie O'Neill was posted to the 25th General Hospital (25GH) in France reporting for duty on 22 July 1917. She took leave in England and on her return to France in August was then posted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station (5CCS). At the end of August she proceeded to the Nurses Home, Abbeville for re-posting. In September she joined the 23CCS, October the 57CCS, returned to the 23CCS, and then in November to the 22CCS.

On the 22 November she was admitted to the 14<sup>th</sup> General Hospital with laryngitis and remained in hospital until mid-December 1918.

She was subsequently promoted to Sister on 29 December 1918 and rejoined the 25GH in France on 5 January 1919. She served with the 25GH until 7 March 1919 when she proceeded to the UK en route for Australia.

## **Return to Australia**

Jessie embarked at Southampton on the *Wandilla*, arriving home on 18 May 1919 and her appointment was terminated on 2 July 1919.

After World War 1 Jessie O'Neill worked as a Sister at Rosemount Hospital in Brisbane.

## **Awards**

Sister Jessie O'Neill received the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal (26948) and the Victory Medal (25868).

## **Passing**

Miss Jessie O'Neill lived with her sister, Daisy, at 8 Snowden Street, Ekibin prior to her death on 10 November 1962 at the age of 78 years.

## **Link to Saint Andrew's**

Sister Jessie O'Neill AANS and Sister Winifred Sagar AANS were listed on the Saint Andrew's Honour Boards. Jessie O'Neill and Winifred Sagar both volunteered for active service and travelled to France on 12 March 1917. Both Sisters were great friends and were fortunate to be together on their service in England and France. They returned to the UK on 6 March 1919 on the same ship. They served with the 12th Stationary Hospital and 25GH in Rouen. Sister Minnie Chapman (also on the Honour Boards) and Jessie worked at some of the same Casualty Clearing Stations in France. It is possible they all knew each other quite well.

## **Select bibliography**

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*Lest we forget*