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## **Pauline Marion Sanders**

My name before marriage was Pauline Marion Ingvarson and I lived in 8 Stokes Street, White Gum Valley WA, now Paula Sanders of Bicton WA.

### **My Story Program – Medical Services: World War Two**

As a teenager I worked in Nestles office in St George's Terrace Perth and one lunch time as I was walking down the Terrace I perceived a notice saying 'join the army and become a nurse'. This appealed to me greatly. Prior to this I was in a voluntary aid section attached to Saint John Ambulance in Fremantle and after receiving our medallions we used to do voluntary work at Fremantle Hospital in the weekends so that staff could have a little relief. I then worked all week as an office girl and all weekends as a hospital aid. Our aid work comprised of doing dressings, taking temperatures, counting respirations, bathing patients and of course emptying the bed pans and the cleaning and emptying of beds.

Well I joined up and signed in; five minutes later I was in the Army Signalling Branch at Leederville. I was a good stenographer and also a good switchboard worker. At this time the Army had decided to have girls who had joined the forces working at the Hollywood Hospital as their own Army personnel. My first position was training six others who had joined at the same time to become anything that was required of them so they were to be switchboard operators. I can only remember the McManus sisters' names. We spent about two weeks here, travelling from home in Fremantle to Leederville by train and then came the crunch time of our being transferred to Hollywood Hospital to work. We were billeted out to various houses around the hospital. Six new recruits walked into the hospital and as we walked in the civilian girls walked out and there we were faced with a huge double sized switchboard, with the cord system and head phones, and myself the only competent one of the six. The next three weeks was a nightmare. We averaged a call every four seconds of calling for doctors between wards, answering the inward and outward calls. We had a hundred and twenty connections and ten incoming lines and had to reach over one another to cover the distances with the cords. The girls would get into terrible tangles and I would have to resort and put them back on track. Fortunately after about a month we were able to work out our shifts comfortably and of course we worked around the clock. It was a pity that the civilian girls were not prepared to help us, although I can understand that their positions had been taken from them and they very likely had families to care for.

I am sorry to state at this particular time that it annoys me considerably when I sit and look at any war shows. They show only the action in the field and never do you see the action that went on behind the scenes. Every operation involved people behind the scenes and in my thoughts was the necessary background and backbone of every administrative detail.

I was at Hollywood Military Hospital for a while and then I was transferred to Guildford Grammar School, which had been taken over by the Army. At the time the Second First General Army had returned from the Middle East and were housed in Guildford Grammar School, Guildford and Merredin. One evening whilst on duty at the switch a Colonel Hone came into the switch and said to me, 'Do you take' and I answered 'Yes' and then came another change of scene. 'Take' meant do you do shorthand. I was then transferred to the Orderly Room at Merredin. The Hospital was situated near the "Rock" in Merredin and only tents for a while to live in and then we had mess rooms only at a later date. I gave

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my photos of the Merredin Camp to the Merredin Council. On the old railway platform at Merredin are photos of others and myself in a so-called museum.

Merredin's soil when wet is best described – five minutes rain and five days of mud. Our office was a tent and to get from one desk to another we walked on planks of wood. The wards were built of large E.P.I. tents joined together, with wooden floors and in each tent there would be four patients and to move from one set of beds to the next you had to bend under the join. Our sleeping quarters were these kinds of tents and each tent had about six or seven living in them. We had these large poles in the middle of them, which was our hanging wardrobes etc. Although it may sound uncomfortable I cannot remember us thinking of it as thus. We enjoyed the camaraderie that existed. Many train trips were made from Merredin to my home in Fremantle. By this time I was a Corporal and still working in the orderly room and for the first time in my life had to have a tooth filled.

Then came the news that we were moving overseas. We had new colour patches given to us, had to mark our travel gear with the same colours. Our uniforms had changed from a nice navy blue and light blue blouse to a khaki coloured uniform and blouse because the Army had taken over the VADs and we became the Army Women's Medical Service. We were all excited at the prospect of moving out, dispensing with the wards etc but my move out and eighteen others was not to be as we expected. A :HQ order came saying those not a certain age could not go. We boarded a train bound for a 'Rookies' camp at the Teachers' College in Claremont. On the Merredin Railway Station we sang to the others wishing them well with a song saying:

Goodbye 2<sup>nd</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> goodbye  
We are leaving you today for a unit far away  
Though today we are feeling blue  
To you we will be true.  
Goodbye and good luck to you.

Well we arrived at the camp and a more disgruntled group could never have been there before. After all, we had already been in the services for 18 months to two years and to be met up with those Army girls just joining for the first time and be given straw to make palliasses was very much below us. We did not try to make or create a good impression on anybody. We hardly made the parades, made a hole in the fence to go 'ack willy' absent without leave, and had a good time in the suburb of Nedlands and Claremont. When we were inspected as to what or why we had not gone on parade, we had toothaches, stomach pains etc. You name it, we had it. Perhaps we were in mourning. Fortunately this camp did not last for long and we were moved out, no longer as a group, but each of us sent to many varied and different places. No longer part of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/First A.G.H.

I was transferred to 118 A.G.H. – Australian General Hospital – in Northam, which after the war housed the many refugees who came to live in Australia.

My job was in the administrative part once again. No mention was ever made of the training plan for becoming a nurse. I worked in the admission and discharge hut. Office work covered all the movements in and out of the hospital and I was also in charge of seeing to the transfer of patients from Northam to Faversham, where a rehab place was. Amongst my duties was having to go to the hospital trains in the middle of the night with the Admitting Doctor to tag the patients as to where they would go, type of wards etc. Attached to 118 AGH we had a 'prisoner of war' ward and here again I would go with the Admitting Doctor to tag their many complaints. Even though you were out in the middle of the night, you were expected to still be on the parade ground at some ungodly hour in the morning. We slept two to a tent. One morning, I objected and the Officer-in-Charge came

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to my tent and my penalty was to pick up all the lolly papers left on the ground in front of the canteen. When I see people picking up waste on grass with a pick-up, I think I could have done with one of them once upon a time. The ambulance officers were also in the admission and discharge hut and when they had to go to the wards to pick up a patient that had passed on they would ask me to go with them and you would hear the bump into the back of the ambulance and I would have to say to the driver, 'Yes it is there', then she would drive off. Such a thing as moral support isn't there.

We also had a special tree that was our ack willy tree. Many happy times were spent in the Northam township. In Northam there was an Army camp and a 109 Con Depot and during the time there we would be gathered to go to dances at these places. These services would provide transport for we ladies of the services. Many of the local farmers would also invite members of the forces to their homes to be entertained. They were a very friendly bunch.

I was made Acting-Sergeant and once again sent off to the Perth DDMS Department in Tintern House, West Perth and DDMS was later transferred to the Francis Street Army Barracks, Perth. The DDMS office was the head office for all Army medical actions and movements etc in Western Australia. Here I was five years later back to the Terrace in Perth and nearly back to the spot where I had first saw the sign – 'Join now and be trained as a nurse'. I went home to Fremantle every night and we were called the Cut-Lunch Commandos.

This is my story of my time in the Medical Services.

Paula Sanders