

Women - WWII - Nursing Sisters - Primary Source

What can you learn by looking at these pictures?



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After Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, Canada again found itself thrust into a world conflict and again the Nursing Sisters answered the call of duty. This time, however, the nursing service was expanded to all three branches of the military: navy, army and air force. Each branch had its own distinctive uniform and working dress, while all wore the Nursing Sisters' white veil. They were respectfully addressed as "Sister" or "Ma'am" because they were all commissioned officers.

With the average age of 25, by war's end 4,480 Nursing Sisters had enlisted, including: 3,656 with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, 481 with the Royal Canadian Air Force Medical Branch, and 343 with the Royal Canadian Naval Medical Service.

The army sisters, after training in Canada, were the first to go overseas, where they joined units which had preceded them to the United Kingdom. With the soldiers going overseas, the sisters travelled by ship in large convoys, running the perilous gauntlet of German submarine action in the North Atlantic. Upon arrival in England, they worked in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps' hospitals at Taplow, Bramshott and Basingstoke.

To illustrate the demands of their work, following the Dieppe raid, the hospital at Basingstoke received more than 600 casualties and in one 19 1/2 hour period, 98 operations were performed. The surgical staff took only a few minutes' break to rest between operations.

How did Nursing Sisters contribute to WWII?