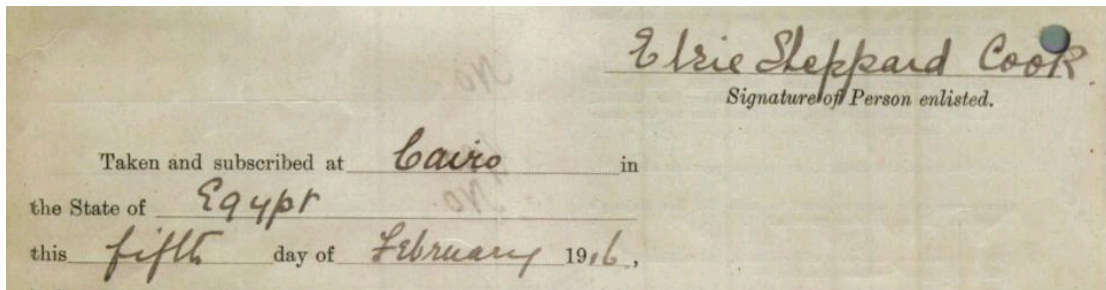




Sister Sheppard
Australian Army Nursing Service



Elsie Sheppard's service in World War I is commemorated on the War Memorial in Burwood Park [see above]. Sheppard was her maiden name. Unusually she enlisted as Elsie Sheppard Cook, under her married name, in Cairo, on 5 February 1916 [see below]. Unusual because she had married before leaving Australia in 1914 when she enlisted under her maiden name to get around the requirement that nurses be single. Now aged 24, her next of kin was recorded as her father, Michael Sheppard, 'Kassala', Burwood.



On 19 February 1916 she reported from the 2nd Australian General Hospital and was placed on the supernumerary staff of No. 1 A.G.H. A month after her Cairo enlistment, on 19 March 1916, she was, "Returned to Australia in accordance with instructions from D.M.S [Director of Medical Service]", leaving Suez on the 'Demosthenes'. That seems to be definitive so two further records are interesting: "Ret. To Aust. Per H.S. Karoola ex, Sthampton (duty on board)" on 19 October 1915 as this pre-dates her enlistment in Cairo; and, "Nursing duties on 'Port Sydney' to Australia" on 24 June 1916 most likely an error as will be seen later.

Strenuous efforts were made to complete the A.I.F. records and a Minute Paper dated 4 February 1920 stated:

"On further inquiry it is learned that the abovenamed Sister [Sister Elsie COOKE (sic)] was married when mobilized, and took her maiden name "Elsie Sheppard" she was mobilized in Tasmania, but embarked 2nd Military District in the "KYARRA" 24/11/14.

Returned ex "DEMOSTHENES" 22/4/16, and finalized 2nd M.D. 6/5/16.

Mobilised for Home Service 6/5/16, 2nd M.D. and placed on the strength of No. 4 A.G.H. she resigned on 29/6/16, to accept service with the Red Cross Society."

What happened next is revealed in a letter from Elsie Cook written on 11 April 1945 from 'Silchester', 4 Trahlee Rd, Bellevue Hill. While the letter is about missing medals it includes:

"I served in France with the French Army Nursing Service and Red

Cross, from 1916-1919 going from Sydney on July 4th 1916 – with the party of twenty nurses, sent by N.S.W. Red Cross – known as the 'Bluebirds'. I was awarded the Medaille de Reconnaissance by the French authorities, about 1917, details and confirmation of which I have in My "livret" – equivalent of a Soldier's Pay book in our Services."

The "Bluebirds" were a group of twenty Australian civilian nurses and a masseuse who volunteered for service in France during World War I. Recruited through the Australian Red Cross Society, the group's nickname referred to the colours of their specially-designed uniforms. After arriving in France the nurses were split between different hospitals where they treated wounded and ill soldiers. They returned to Australia individually following the war and did not receive any medals or veterans' benefits from the Australian government as they were civilian rather than military nurses.



A group portrait of the "Bluebirds" [including Elsie Sheppard Cook] and their French language teacher during the group's voyage from Sydney to Europe on board the HMAT 'Kanowna'.

The Medal of French Gratitude (French: "*Médaille de la Reconnaissance française*") was a French honour medal created on 13 July 1917 and solely awarded to civilians.



Elsie Sheppard Cook had a remarkable career during World War I.