NONA'S STORY

Sister Nona Mildred Hildyard (22/125)

Nona was born in Lyttelton on 4th November 1888. Her parents, William and Betsy Ann Hildyard, were originally from Tasmania. William was a boot maker with shops at 6-8 Canterbury Street in Lyttelton and on High Street in Christchurch and he was well known around town as a Freemason and Lyttelton Borough Councillor. Nona attended West Lyttelton School and Lyttelton District High School and was a popular member of the Lyttelton Ladies Swimming Club. Nona trained at Christchurch Hospital, before working as private nurse with the prominent Dr. A. C. Sandston in Christchurch and then at Nurse Turner's Private Hospital in Woolston.

The Marquette Tragedy

In June 1915, Nona was selected along with 10 other Canterbury nurses to join the Army Nursing Service. She was the first nurse from Lyttelton to travel to the front in WWI. She embarked from Wellington for Egypt with 69 other New Zealand nurses on His Majesty's New Zealand Hospital Ship No. 1, SS *Maheno*, on the 11th July arriving at Port Said on 18th August where the nurses joined the No. 1 New Zealand Stationary Hospital.

On 19th October, the Hospital boarded the troop ship H.M.T.S. *Marquette* and left Alexandria with 741 people on board including 36 New Zealand nurses and 94 hospital staff, along with 500 troops of the British 29th Divisional Ammunition Column, their ammunition, mules, and horses.

Four days later at 9:15am on 23rd October, only a few hours from their destination of Salonika (now Thessaloniki), the *Marquette* was torpedoed by the German submarine U-35. Lifeboat drills had been well rehearsed, however the evacuation quickly became chaotic due to the listing of the sinking ship. On the port side one lifeboat fell on another killing one nurse and injuring others. Nona was in a starboard side lifeboat when a rope snapped tipping some of the nurses into the water before an open iron door from the ship smashed into it. In the confusion four nurses were left on board the *Marquette* as she sank within 15 minutes.

The survivors clung to the boats, rafts, and debris in the water fighting cold and rough sea conditions for seven hours until help arrived to pick them up. During this time many, including Nona, succumbed to injuries and exhaustion and drowned. In total, 167 of the service people on the *Marquette* were lost. Ten New Zealand nurses died along with twenty-two New Zealand men.

A Memorial Portrait

In mid-1916, the citizens of Lyttelton undertook to create a memorial for Nona. Fundraising events included the Lyttelton Marine Band playing in the street on a Saturday evening, and Richard Wallwork was commissioned to paint Nona's portrait. The portrait was presented by the people of Lyttelton to the Borough at the Council Chambers on 8th March 1917. It was unveiled by the Governor General's wife before a large gathering of citizens and nurses. The portrait remained in Lyttelton until 2006 when it was transferred to the Christchurch Art Gallery.

NURSE NORA M. HILDYARD, OF LYTTELTON.

A PLUCKY NURSE.
A MARQUETTE VICTIM

Mrs Hildyard, of West Lyttelton, whose daughter, Nurse Nona Hildyard, was one of the victims of the sinking of the transport Marquette when that vessel was sunk by a German submarine in the Ægean Sea, some time ago, has received the following letter from one of the surviving nurses:—

" . . . I thought you would like to have a few lines from one of us. When torpedoed we donned lifebelts and Nonie and I were in the same boat, but it heeled over shortly after reaching the water, and I got separated from her. She regained the boat with several others, and was very bright and cheerful, singing "Tipperary," etc., and helping to keep the others' courage up. . . . But the poor child eventually died from exhaustion before we were picked up. We were in the water about eight hours, and it was very cold. We all miss her awfully—she was such a good pal, and we had been together all through."

Above: *Nurse Nora M. Hildyard, of Lyttelton,* Auckland Weekly News, 18 November 1915 p.47 (detail). Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19151118-47-5

Above right: *A Plucky Nurse,* Sun, 22 December 1915, Page 4 (detail). National Library of New Zealand, http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz

Below: *Image of the hospital ship Marquette with list of members of the New Zealand Medical Corps, and New Zealand nurses lost in the sinking on 23 October 1915,* (detail). Price, William Archer, 1866-1948 : Collection of post card negatives. Ref: 1/2-000610-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22606846

IN MEMORY of those Lost in the sinking of HMTS Marquette.

N.Z.M.C.

Sgt.Maj.G.H.Baker
Sgt.A.H.Remmett
Cpl.A.M.Pratt
Pte.J.S.Bird
Pte.R.B.Herdman
Pte. T.H.Kirk
Pte.J.M.McGee
Pte.W.C.Pickering
Pte. R.A.Pole
Pte. V.C.Rhodes
Pte. G.B.Richards
Pte. J.T.Ross
Pte. W.B.Robinson
Pte. C.D.Thompson
Pte. J.B.Walter

Pte.C.H.Nicholson
Pte.Fricker
Pte.C.Perrin
Pte. W.Smart

N.Z.Nurses

Nurse M.S.Brown
Nurse I. Clark
Nurse C.A.Fox
Nurse M. Gorman
Nurse N.M.Hildyard
Nurse H.K.Isdell
Nurse M.E.Jamieson
Nurse M.H.Rae
Nurse L.A.Rattray
Nurse M.Rodgers

Pte. C. E. Kirk, Wellington Infantry
Pte. Reid, Otago Infantry
Pte. Westerway, Auckland Infantry