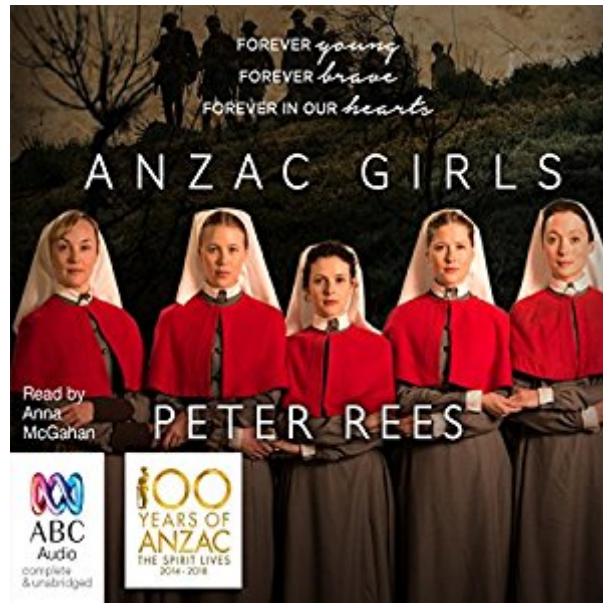


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Anzac Girls: The Extraordinary Story Of Our World War I Nurses



Synopsis

The harrowing, dramatic and profoundly moving story of the Australian and New Zealand nurses who served in the Great War. Now a major six-part television series. By the end of the Great War, 45 Australian and New Zealand nurses had died on overseas service and over 200 had been decorated. These were the women who left for war looking for adventure and romance but were soon confronted with challenges for which their civilian lives could never have prepared them. Their strength and dignity were remarkable. Using diaries and letters, Peter Rees takes us into the hospital camps and the wards, and the tent surgeries on the edge of some of the most horrific battlefronts of human history. But he also allows the friendships and loves of these courageous and compassionate women to shine through and enrich our experience. Profoundly moving, *Anzac Girls* is a story of extraordinary courage and humanity shown by a group of women whose contribution to the Anzac legend has barely been recognised in our history. Peter Rees has changed that understanding forever.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

ANZAC Girls (2014, first published 2008 as *The Other ANZACS*) is a work of non-fiction about Australian and New Zealand nurses in World War I from 1914 to 1918. In 1914 when the war commenced, Australia had a population of five million, with 2,498 nurses attending 331,781 soldiers sent to serve overseas – of them nearly 62,000 were killed (19%) and 153,500 (46%) were casualties sustaining injuries. New Zealand sent 610 nurses to attend to 128,000 enlisted men from a total population of 1.1 million – by the end of the war 16,000 (12.5%) were killed and 41,300

(32%) were injured. Sixty-five Australian and New Zealand nurses received medals for their distinguished service. The nurses of WWI were civilians, qualified nurses, between 21-40 years old, and single or widowed. To marry meant termination of duties in the field. Nurses rose to the status of ANZACs (the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) – “army officers” – in May 1916 – halfway into the war. Previously nuns treated the wounds of overseas soldiers – “but not below the waist!” On April 25, 1915, troops were sent to war – “this is now the date of the annual commemoration of ANZAC Day in Australia and New Zealand. The battlefield was Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, Turkey, to assist the 14,000 British and French forces. By mid-May, barely a month into battle, news of the high numbers of deaths and casualties stunned the public back home. In two months, from September and October 1915, 57,000 sick and 37,000 wounded men were evacuated from the beaches of Gallipoli – “and there were only 9,000 beds. Understaffed, and under-equipped, the nurses attended to a myriad of war wounds and other injuries or diseases.

In July 1917, Sister Alice Ross-King was on duty at the Second Australian Casualty Clearing Station near Armentieres in France when the Germans began bombarding the hospital. Sister Ross-King had been called to see a patient delirious with pneumonia and was following an orderly, Private John Wilson, along the duckboards when a bomb exploded near them. In her diary, Sister Ross-King later recorded that: ‘The noise was so terrific and the concussion so great that I was thrown to the ground and had no idea where the damage was.’ She got up, and raced along the duckboards to check her patients. The tent with the pneumonia patient had collapsed and she shouted for help. Eventually she found her patient on the ground at the back of his stretcher. She leant across the stretcher to try to lift him. She thought she had her arm under his leg, but when she lifted it: ‘I found to my horror that it was a loose leg with a boot and a puttee on it.’ It was Private Wilson’s leg. The next day, his torso was found in a tree. This incident is one of a number of memorable moments in this book. Peter Rees has drawn from the diaries and letters of some of the nurses from Australia and New Zealand who served in the First World War. ‘As nurses in Australia and New Zealand saw it, the issue in 1914 was quite simple. They wanted to be there, with their boys, when they went to war.’ By the end of the First World War, 45 Anzac nurses had died on overseas service, and more than 200 had been decorated. Among the 200 were Alice Ross-King, Clare Deacon, Dorothy Cawood and Mary-Jane Derrer who each received the Military Cross for their bravery in July 1917 during the German raid.

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