

'The Care of our Wounded' - Answer Sheet for Reels One and Two



Reel One

1) How are the wounded moved from the battlefield and frontline trenches to the Dressing Station?

Answer: The wounded are carried on stretchers by 2-4 men, but also on soldiers' backs, and assisted by stretcher bearers, friends and on some occasions by German prisoners of war. Lightly injured men were expected to make their own way to the Dressing Station.

2) Who is responsible for looking after wounded German prisoners of war?

Answer: The Army Medical Services looked after the German wounded. The Geneva Conventions of 1906 required that wounded were treated according to their needs regardless of their nationality. It was not unusual for German doctors and medical staff to assist in the treatment of the wounded in the Advance Dressing Stations after their capture.

3) How can you identify medical staff in the film?

Answer: Doctors, Royal Army Medical Staff, nurses and ambulance drivers all wear a Red Cross armband or roundel on their upper sleeves. This was the internationally recognised symbol for medical staff of all nationalities that indicated that they were non-combatants and should not be fired upon. You will also notice that the medical staff generally do not carry weapons, but only wear a bag containing a gas hood or gas mask, and carry a water bottle. Stretcher bearers (wearing armbands with SB on) were ordinary soldiers and as a consequence regarded as legitimate targets for attack.

4) Who are the men in 'skirts'?

Answer: Scottish soldiers wearing tartan kilts covered with a khaki apron. You will also see soldiers in shorts and wearing wide brimmed caps – they are Australian troops.

5) What is the role of the Padre?

Answer: Every battalion had a Padre – a military vicar or priest from the Army Chaplains' Department. The Padres were normally Christians but the Army Chaplains' Department also employed Jewish chaplains. Hindu and Muslim troops in the Indian Army also had their own Priests and Imams. The Chaplains not only conducted religious services behind the lines, but were expected to be in the trenches with the troops to provide spiritual support. They often supported the medical staff looking after the wounded whilst the wounded waited to be treated or evacuated. The Padres often wrote letters home for those soldiers unable to write because they were illiterate or injured. They were also on call to support soldiers who were dying, and to perform the last rites and burial services for the dead. You can spot the chaplains wearing the white clerical 'dog collars'. In recognition of their devoted work, King George V conferred the prefix 'Royal' on the Army Chaplains' Department in 1919.

6) What form of transport appears to be abandoned around the Dressing Station?

Answer: Bicycles. Some infantry and cavalry battalions were cyclist battalions. The bicycle was probably not the most comfortable form of travel over French farm tracks.

7) How many stretchers fit in the motor ambulances?

Answer: Six stacked three each side of the ambulance. The suspension in the ambulances was pretty poor and not designed to cope with the bumpy farm tracks and low quality roads. Consequently the journey in the ambulances would be slow and painful for the wounded, particularly at night when it became harder to avoid potholes. One job for the ambulance drivers on the completion of the journey to the hospital was to wash out the vomit, blood, urine and faeces excreted by the wounded during the journey.



- 8) Many of the soldiers are engaged in a very un-healthy activity whilst they wait to be treated – what is that activity?

Answer: The soldiers are smoking cigarettes and pipes. It was known at the time that smoking was not a particularly healthy activity. Nonetheless smoking was a popular pastime for soldiers. You might even have spotted the medical orderly with the bare-chested soldier giving the soldier a cigarette whilst he bandaged the man.

- 9) As the Australian soldiers in shorts and wide brimmed hats unload the ambulance at the Casualty Clearing Station in the village, who else is present?

Answer: French civilian women and children. Many civilians lived quite close to the frontline so would have been well used to the ambulances coming into the Casualty Clearing Station. The civilians in this film are probably more interested in the film camera recording the casualties. Film camera crews would have been very unusual in 1916 and film of war a new experience for civilian and military audiences more used to theatre shows and concerts.

- 10) What type of medical staff do you first see in the scenes inside the Casualty Clearing Station hospital?

Answer: Professional female nurses. Nursing staff of the Queen Alexander's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) and Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS) were allowed no closer to the front than the Casualty Clearing Station three to five miles behind the lines. In the film you can see the nursing Sister adjusting the beds of men with their legs in traction (to help broken legs heal properly), and the TFNS Matron ensuring the card detailing the medical treatment received by each patient is attached to the soldier.

Reel Two

- 11) What markings can you see on the train and ambulance?

Answer: The Red Cross on the white background. Like medical staff, all the transport and hospitals used for the wounded and sick were marked with Red Crosses indicating that the transport and buildings should not be attacked.

- 12) Why are the nurses in a convalescent home?

Answer: To rest. Medical staff were expected to work long hours – 12 hours or more a day – particularly when there was a major offensive. They normally only had about one full day off a month, and a half day each week. It was not always practical for the medical staff to go home on leave for extended periods. Therefore they would go to convalescent homes in France for a break.

- 13) What sort of work are the female VAD Ambulance drivers doing before they go out in a convoy?

Answer: They are doing vehicle maintenance – checking oil levels and changing tyres etc. Before the war it would have been unusual for women to drive a car let alone get involved in maintaining the vehicle. Mostly only the very wealthy owned cars - they generally employed chauffeurs to drive and maintain the cars. Some tradesmen would have motor trucks and vans, although most relied on horse-drawn vehicles. The major cities did have bus and tram networks, but men drove these vehicles. The women in the film probably came from wealthy car-owning families where they had the opportunity to learn to drive. With the conscription of men for the war effort, many other women were trained to drive buses and trams at home.



14) Who are the women who received a medal from the King of the Belgians – the Order of Leopold II?

Answer: “The two women of Pervyse”, Baroness T’Serclaes (previously Mrs Elsie Knocker) and Mairi Chisholm. These British ladies were members of a privately organised medical group from the United Kingdom who went out to help the Belgian forces. The Belgian’s military medical services were less well supported by nursing staff than the British medical services. More information can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28609597

15) How are the casualties carried into the inside of the ship?

Answer: They are carried up the gangplank on stretchers and then placed on a cargo lift to be lowered into the hold. Many hospital ships were ordinary cargo or passenger ships converted for use as hospital ships. No hospital ship crossing the English channel was sunk by the German Navy, in part because the Royal Navy was able to protect the essential shipping route, and in part because hospital ships were protected by the Geneva and Hague conventions. However, some hospital ships were sunk in submarine attacks in other areas such as the Mediterranean.

16) What does FANY stand for?

Answer: First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. The FANY was formed in 1907 before the First World War and was intended to be a Corps of female horse-riders able to rescue casualties from the battlefield. This role was clearly not practical in modern war, and the women became ambulance drivers. The FANY served through the Second World War and still exist as a voluntary organisation now called the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (Princess Royal’s Volunteer Corps) (FANY (PRVC)).

17) How are the details of the casualties recorded?

Answer: On labels worn by the soldiers, and in hand-written record books maintained by the Medical Officer. All medical records were either handwritten or typed as there were, of course, no computers available in the First World War.

18) What is ‘Blighty’?

18) Blighty is British Army slang for ‘home’, ‘Britain’ or ‘England’. The word, like many slang terms in the British Army, comes from the Urdu language from India. The original Urdu word was ‘bilayati’ meaning ‘foreigner’. British soldiers who served in India during the 19th and 20th centuries often appropriated foreign words into every-day use. Some British soldiers who had served in India believed all foreigners spoke Urdu – they were known to try and speak to the French and Belgians using Urdu.

19) How does the film differ from modern documentaries about war?

Answer: The film is silent and in black and white. It has some inter-titles to give information about the context of the pictures that follow. This type of documentary film was unusual at the beginning of the war. After the beginning of the Battle of the Somme a documentary film of the same name was released to the general public on 10 August 1916 – most of the scenes were of real activity, with some battle scenes recreated (such as troops going over the top). Whilst the film was intended as a propaganda film designed to encourage the war effort, it contained many shocking scenes of wounded and dead soldiers. The film was sponsored by the Government, rather than being made by independent film makers.



20) How many different types of transport are shown that are used to move the wounded?

Answer: Six. Carried by other soldiers, stretchers, wheeled stretchers, motor ambulances, trains and ships. The wounded were also transported in horse-drawn ambulances, on specially adapted saddles on pack mules, on large canal barges and on open top wagons of the narrow gauge railways used to move munitions behind the lines.



Supporting Every Member of the Military Family
For more information about RWBDay please visit redwhiteblueday.co.uk