

FEATURE STORY

Nursing to being a VAD: One Woman's Contribution to Cowra's War Effort

Elvine Elliott Horsfall

By Kate and Isobelle

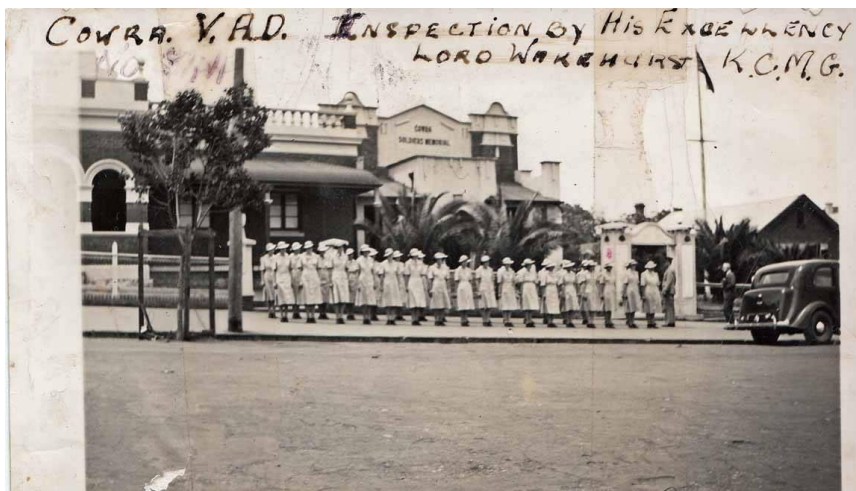
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During WWII men were willing and proud to enrol to serve in the war even after the devastation WWI had caused in several countries as well as for many families. As a high percentage of the male population left to fight, a major hole in the working industry had risen. This was an opportunity for women to step up and take on a new role in society through working in factories, on farms and with vehicles doing tasks such as mail runs.

Elvine was born 17 days after the outbreak of WWI and began the start of her life working as a teacher before beginning her nursing career in Cowra in 1940. Over the years Elvine held numerous nursing positions in Cowra, Orange and Sydney, including seven years as a supervisor at the Edith Cavell Memorial Home for retired army nurses. Elvine has been a member of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association for 68 years and received life membership in 1990.



*Elvine Elliot- Horsfall 1940
Retrieved From: Cowra Guardian 'Helping on the
Homefront: How Cowra's Red Cross Volunteers
served during the Second World War'*



The Cowra VAD during an inspection by John de Vere Loder, 2nd Baron Wakehurst, the last British Governor of NSW.

Retrieved from: Cowra Guardian 'Helping on the Homefront: How Cowra's Red Cross Volunteers served during the Second World War'

During WWII Elvine Elliott Horsfall was a volunteer on the Homefront with the Red Cross from 1940 to 1944. The Voluntary Aid Dispatchments (VADs) were assigned with the jobs that nobody else wanted to complete. These varied from changing tyres on army vehicles to serving tea and sandwiches to the troops.

Elvine rode her pony each week approximately 17 kilometers into the town of Cowra to attend lectures in St John's First Aid as well as some nursing lectures. For fitness, the Cowra VAD's would march from the local post office to the corner of Grenfell and Forbes Roads twice a week, led by the Cowra Brass Band. They also knitted socks and made dressing gowns to send to field hospitals. These women also were required to buy their own uniforms and pay for their own food and accommodation. As Elvine has said, they were paid nothing, and required to help with everything and anything. Whilst not fully recognised during the war effort, their contribution was integral to Australia's involvement in WWII.

Fifty years after the war ended, the Red Cross VAD's were honoured with the Civilian Medal for their services by the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Elvine is extremely happy that a plaque commemorating Red Cross VAD's is now placed at the entrance to Cowra RSL sub-branch rooms, although she would like a record of the contributions of the Second World War VAD's in the Australian War Memorial. She hopes that the future generations of Australians teach and recognise the impact that the Red Cross VAD's had on the war effort, despite not being on the front line.