

UNIFORM OF THE ARMY NURSING SERVICE

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All of us of the Army Nursing Service, whether of Britain or of India, are trained nurses, and as such were initiated into the art of wearing uniform correctly from the day we first entered our training schools. We can all remember how we were reprimanded by the Home Sister for the slightest sign of carelessness or slackness in our appearance, or if by chance we escaped her eye, by the Matron herself. So that on becoming officers of either Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, the Territorial Army Nursing Service, (British Services) or of the Indian Military Nursing Services it should not have been difficult for any of us to wear the distinctive Army uniform with the pride officers of the Army have always worn theirs. There is tradition in our Army dress and to us and to our soldiers everywhere it means so much. To those of us who love it, the carelessness in detail which one sometimes meets in hospital and outside at social functions and elsewhere, fills us with horror.

Since September, 1939, when the world conflict began, the uniform of our two services has been seen in every theatre of war, where both British and Indian Nursing Services are working together for the one common cause, the nursing and caring for the sick and wounded soldiers, sailors and airmen of our forces, Civilians too, who have escaped from enemy occupied countries, have been nurses in our Military hospitals. The grey and scarlet of Britain's Army Sisters is well known and the Indian Empire Blue of India's is known and respected in Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Palestine and now in Italy as well as in the country of its origin. It is to be hoped that one day the people of the United Kingdom will have the pleasure of seeing it and so be given the opportunity of thanking the wearers for the nursing care shown by them to the husbands, sons and sweethearts of the woman of Britain.

It is with regret that the War Office has been obliged to change the uniform of Q. A. I. M. N. S. from grey and scarlet (which has been worn by that service since 1902 to khaki, but there was no option, supply and production being what is now in England, Her Majesty, Queen Mary, consented to the change for a war time measure only. In future all new appointments to the Service will be dressed like women officers of The Royal Army Medical Corps, but with the distinctive badge of the Nursing Services on their tunics and caps. No white uniform will in future as long as the war lasts, be replaced by either the British or Indian Services. The latter will have an attractive blue overall with darker epaulettes whilst the other will wear grey cotton dresses with scarlet or scarlet and grey epaulettes for tropical wear and the dresses with the caps for Home service. Badges of rank will be worn on the caps or epaulettes in all cases, similar to those worn by all Army officers of equal rank.

In certain war areas it has been essential to do away with the traditional dress of a nurse or of that of a woman for that matter. The nursing officers in these particular countries have been issued with "Khaki Battle Dress" which is exactly like that of the officers and men of the forces, trousers and a battle dress blouse, with the exception that it is made with slight modifications for women's wear. It is worn on and off duty in difficult countries and in bad weather. This dress is much more practical than the cotton dresses, it is warmer, and more suitable for climbing in and out of trucks and lorries. The question of laundry is a big one, where water is scarce and where the washing of their clothes has to be done by the sisters themselves in their off duty time, the dress problem is, therefore, solved by the Battle Dress. As no caps are worn on the wards with this uniform, it is essential that the hair should be neat and not dressed in an ultra fashionable style. Nursing can still be carried out with skill and efficiency, even if the nurses are dressed like the soldiers themselves but although the patients don't mind as a war time measure, they will all be glad to see their 'Sisters' once again in the attractive dress and cap, always associated with the Nursing Profession.

When this dreadful war is over and all countries and peoples return to peaceful happy times once more and when the terrible sufferings of many end with Total Victory over evil, then we must strive to make our profession more perfect in India, so that the honoured uniform may be seen all over this vast country, the wearers of it bringing relief and comfort to the many millions who have, as yet, been denied the care of the Nursing Profession.