

On this unique occasion, and as this will probably be the last time I will have the opportunity of addressing the former members of the Christchurch Hospital Nursing staff who have known and loved this Chapel, I want to take you back 62 years to the time when a tragedy occurred. Statements, many of them quite absurd, have been made over and over again, and I would like to tell you the ~~actual~~ truth of what actually happened away up in the cold Aegean Sea on the morning of 23rd Oct., 1915.

First of all the HOSPITAL SHIP myth which has recurred a thousand times, and which still persists. The Marquette was an 8000 ton troopship chock full of war equipment, and containing the whole Ammunition Column of the 29th British Division, which comprised over 500 mules and horses, a very large number of waggons heavily laden with munitions, and hundreds of soldiers. The vessel was a rich but perfectly justified prize for the enemy. The ammunition column was loaded on to the troopship at Alexandria, together with the staff and equipment of the No. 1 N.Z. Stationary Hospital. The military campaign based on Salonika had just commenced, and the urgency for a complete medical unit was apparently the reason why the Hospital unit, complete with Nurses and staff was sent on the troopship. It was an urgent demand of war.

Salonika is about three days sailing distance from Alexandria. For two days a destroyer escort was provided, but on the fateful morning when about 60 miles from the destination, the destroyer had vanished. Boat drills had been held and everyone knew their respective station. The torpedo struck just after 9am and

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and the Nurses immediately took up their stations adjacent to two lifeboats into which they were quickly loaded. Tragedy came when the first boat was being lowered and when about 15 feet from the water one of the davits jammed and the boat was held end on, the occupants being spilled out into the water. The boat was cleared and floated along just as the second lifeboat was being lowered. It crashed on top of the first boat and capsized, all the nurses being thrown out. Had it not been for these mishaps the nurses would probably have been saved. I witnessed the whole tragedy and my memory is as clear as if it had happened yesterday. Between 8 and 10 minutes after the torpedo struck the Marquette had completely vanished.

Now when the news of the torpedoing of the so-called "Hospital Ship" was bruited abroad a ridiculous story was also circulated that the nurses stood by and insisted that in the matter of rescue it was "FIGHTING MEN FIRST". It was a dreadful slur on the soldiers and keenly resented. Credence was given to this fantastic tale even ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ up to recent times.

The disaster occurred about 9am, but it was late afternoon before any rescue vessel hove in sight. Away in the distance I saw three vessels pass but no notice was taken. Afterwards I spoke to the radio operator who took the S.O.S. signals when he told me that a message, probably from the submarine, came giving the site at a point about 60 miles away, and this was why the searching vessels, a French destroyer and a British mine ~~latter~~ <sup>sweeper</sup> were misled.

I have given these details so that you might have a truthful eye-witness account of what happened that dark day.

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As you all know how the Nurses Memorial Chapel came into existence it is not my intention to refer to this matter, but I do want to emphasise the profound influence it has had down the past 50 years. The fact that there are so many here today tells its own story, and I feel proud that it was largely through your influence when it looked as though the chapel was doomed, that you rose and said "NO, THIS SHALL NOT BE DONE". Your action reminded me of Clemenceau's war cry when the German hordes tried to break through at Verdun during World War I, "Ils ne passeront pas". Through your action this lovely ~~building~~ chapel is now an historic building and will remain to be a memory, a comfort and an inspiration through the years which lie ahead.

But although this is a "Nurses Memorial Chapel" it is in fact the Hospital Chapel which is used not only by nurses, but by patients, staff and visitors. I joined the staff just prior to the commencement of World War II, and during the strenuous years which followed I knew what it meant to have a "place apart" where one could rest awhile and find peace. I realised what a necessity it was to have a sanctuary such as this open to anyone at any time.

4 This is the "Mother Chapel" of New Zealand's hospitals, and it was the inspiration for the campaign which resulted in chapels being built at Burwood Sunnyside and Princess Margaret Hospitals. This, however, was only the beginning for now there are 38 chapels from Kaiāia in the north to Invercargill in the south, but most probably the most striking of all is what happened following the building of Sunnyside Chapel. Prior to this there was not a single chapel in any mental Hospital. For 100 years, nothing, but now every one has its own lovely chapel.

It is a remarkable tribute to the people of New Zealand that in no instance has a paid organiser been used, all labour and organisation being entirely voluntary, those who contributed knowing that their donation went direct to the objective in mind.

The long chain goes directly back to that dark morning in 1915. The sacrifice made by those nurses whose names are enshrined in this chapel has resulted in victory, yes a marvellous victory.

Finally I would like to express my admiration and appreciation of Nurses in general and our own nurses in particular. I myself have had experience of their patience, kindness and efficiency and cheerfulness. Now at 89 I look back with much pleasure at all that this great hospital has meant to me and to this beautiful chapel which, like you, I regard as its heart.