



FIRST AID NURSING YEOMANRY



Captain Edward Baker founded FANY in 1907.

FANY members served in both WW1 and WW2

FANY members weren't only first aid specialists, they also trained in cavalry work, signaling and camping out. All of these skills were needed to enable them to get to casualties on the battlefield.

British society was very much male dominated in 1914. At that time the general view was that a woman's place was in the home. In August 1914 when WW1 was declared the military took the view that women had no part to play in it. FANY did however have some support from unlikely sources such as the Brigade of Guards. The Royal Medical Corps had helped in training recruits to FANY but this unit in the army was less socially orientated than others were.

By August 1914 *Grace Ashley-Smith and Lillian Franklin* essentially ran FANY. At that time however no-one at a senior level in the British Army was sympathetic to them. This meant that when WW1 was declared, FANY recruits were not able to help the British army. They were however welcomed in Belgium where they helped casualties in the Belgium army.

Just six weeks into the war, FANY recruits were working at a hospital in Antwerp where they were given a hospital to run. This meant that a great deal more FANY members had to be sent to Belgium. Ironically, Antwerp fell to the Germans as the first team of FANYs was waiting for a train in London to take them, via boat, to Belgium.

Ashley-Smith made her escape back to Britain where she set about trying to get transport for the FANYs as she believed that was the only way the unit would improve its function in a war zone.

Six FANYs went to France at the end of October 1914 with just £12. In view of the German advance, when they got to Calais they found the dock covered with wounded British soldiers who were receiving only the minimum of care. ***The FANYs set up a hospital in a convent school*** - British wounded soldiers were arriving at it before they had time to unpack their equipment.

Before long ***the hospital had 100 beds*** and ***between 1914 and 1916 over 4000 patients were treated at the hospital.***



FIRST AID NURSING YEOMANRY



As well as treating wounded soldiers, *FANYs drove ambulances and set up soup kitchens and general canteens*. Much of their work put them in touch with the front line and danger.

For the duration of the war, *FANYs won 17 military medals, 27 Croix de Guerre (a military decoration of France that was bestowed on foreign military forces allied to France) and one Legion d'Honneur (the highest decoration founded after the French Revolution – created by Napoleon Bonaparte, then first consul, on May 19 1802 as a general military and civil order of merit conferred without regard to birth or religion provided that anyone admitted swears to uphold liberty and equality)*. This was the perfect way of replying to those who stated pre-war and in the initial days of the war that the front line was not the place for a woman.

Women drove vehicles! This addressed old prejudices. To many men in Britain, this was yet another nail in the coffin of Great Britain!

FANYs needed their ambulances to do their work effectively - the British soldiers needed help, the gender of who helped them was irrelevant. To start with, FANYs improved their driving skills when working for the Unit. Eventually however they had to take a formal driving test to assess their competence.

FANYs also took food and spare clothes to the front line. This dangerous task was recognised by King Albert of Belgium who awarded medals of bravery to three FANYs - Muriel Thompson was awarded the Order of Leopold II.

The FANYs attempted to remedy the fact that few soldiers had the opportunity to bathe by bringing over to the front line a mobile bath unit nicknamed 'James'. The unit carried 10 collapsible baths and used the motor engine to heat water so that about 40 men an hour could have the luxury of a bath. Elsewhere the FANYs set up a mobile cinema.

In 1915 more recognition was received by the FANYs from senior echelons in the British Army. In Calais they were given the casino as a formal base from which to work. Here the FANYs expressed a desire to do more work with the British, much of their previous work having been with the Belgians. The surgeon general at Calais, Woodhouse, expressed his support for their request but pointed out that the FANYs were not the Red Cross, they were not St. John's and few had been formally tested for their driving competence. He referred to them as "neither fish, flesh nor fowl but a damned good red herring".



FIRST AID NURSING YEOMANRY



By 1916 FANYs were working with mechanics to repair broken down motor vehicles. Pre-August 1914, such work would have been all but unthinkable. Slowly but surely the members of FANY broke down basic prejudices that were held in certain sections of society, a society that was still dominated by men and one where some women - the suffragettes - had done a lot to turn many against women's rights.

The FANYs had few rules and regulations. Examples of ones they did have are listed below:-

- As they were not 'Army' they only saluted an officer once in the morning as a simple recognition of the position that officer held.
- As FANYs were only a few women near many thousands of men, they had to be careful. One golden FANY rule was that an individual FANY did not go to dinner with a male friend by herself – another FANY would accompany her.
-

Entertainment in a war zone was vital to take away the monotony of the life of FANYs. In Calais, they created the 'Fanyastiks' while in St. Omer their entertainment group was known as the 'Kippers'. Groups such as these entertained the troops.

After the Great War ended, many FANYs stayed in France and Belgium and continued to work there. The FANYs provided a guard of honour when the body of Edith Cavell was returned to Britain. *Edith Cavell was the WWI British nurse who is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers in Brussels from all sides without distinction. She and Belgian and French colleagues helped over 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium. Edith Cavell (who said "I realize that patriotism is not enough – I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone" - was arrested, tried with 33 others by a German military court, found guilty of 'assisting men to the enemy' and shot by a German firing squad on October 12 1915. For further information about this amazing lady see <http://www.edithcavell.org.uk/>.*

Few British soldiers knew what the letters FANY actually stood for. In an apocryphal story, it is said that two British soldiers were having a conversation. One asked the other what FANY stood for – he said he did not know but that it probably stood for 'First Anywhere'.



FIRST AID NURSING YEOMANRY



Membership depended on a number of things:-

- Applicants had to be over 23 years of age
- They had to be interviewed at the FANY headquarters in London
- Those who passed the interview were put on probation for four months
- Those who passed probation were then attached to a FANY unit
- They had to provide their own uniform though an allowance was given for this
- When it was required, all FANYs had to pass the BRCS driving test
- When posted abroad, all FANY s had to obey the commanding officer where they were stationed - failure to do so resulted in dismissal from the unit
- Every six months' duty brought two weeks' leave.

*Information obtained from sources on the Internet, notably the History Learning Site
Crown & Empire : July 2014*