

# About English evacuation infirmaries and hospitals during the First World War

## Introduction

Here follows a series of simultaneous renderings, which are to illustrate the parts of the "Wounded's Way" that lie behind the battlefield.

## No. 1 British Red Cross Hospital (Duchess of Westminster's Hospital)

The Duchess of Westminster opened in October 1914 the hospital at Le Touquet [1](#)), which until July 1918 bore the designation *No. 1 British Red Cross Hospital (Duchess of Westminster's Hospital)*. Patients could be admitted here until they were strong enough to handle transport for further treatment in England.



*The Duchess of Westminster along with parts of the staff at No. 1 British Red Cross Hospital [2](#)).*

The Duchess of Westminster personally headed the hospital, which was described as one of the best of its kind in France.

Le Touquet was a popular resort for the English upper class, and everyone who was - or wanted to be - spent their holidays here. One of the obvious attractions of the place was the Casino, the closest legal option to London. Some sources state that there were often more MPs in Le Touquet than in Parliament...



*Volunteer ambulance workers from No. 1 British Red Cross Hospital.*  
Simultaneous postcard, sent 26 December 1914.

The Duchess opened her hospital in the Casino and it had a capacity for 260 patients, including 10 officers.

In May 1915, the capacity was expanded and a total of 40 officers could now be taken care of. In August of the same year, the hospital was converted to care for wounded officers only. Until then, the hospital had had 8,800 patients, including 286 officers.

## Other private initiatives

Approx. 150 similar evacuation hospitals and hospitals were located elsewhere on the Western Front, and they were located near public transport, including railway lines, for reasons of transport.



*Nurses at work, approx. 1914.*  
Drawn by Harry Payne.

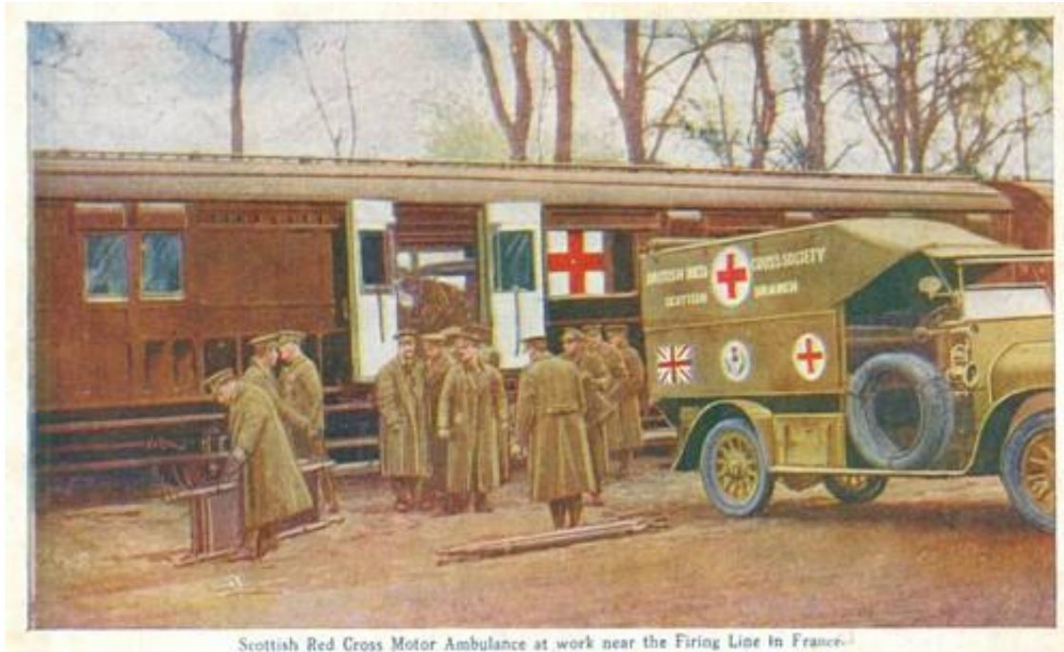
Hospitals and a quantity of sanitary equipment, including sanitary motor vehicles, remained for a large part

in question financed by - and could hardly have functioned without - private aid organisations, including the English Red Cross organisation.

The following appears from the back:

*Good words and kindly actions toward the brave and wounded, while helping to alleviate their sufferings, leave our own hearts the lighter.*

The drawing shows a wounded officer, at least a major judging by the three galloons on his left sleeve, cared for according to all the rules of art.



*Scottish Red Cross Motor Ambulance at work near the Firing Line in France, ca. 1915.*

The staff at evacuation infirmaries and hospitals were a mixture of military personnel and civilians who signed up for voluntary service in the thousands 3).

Simultaneous postcard, where it is stated on the back that proceeds from the sale of the postcard - which is one of a series - will go to the Scottish branch of the English Red Cross.

The ambulance's badge shows who sponsored the ambulance - *British Red Cross Society, Scottish Branch*.

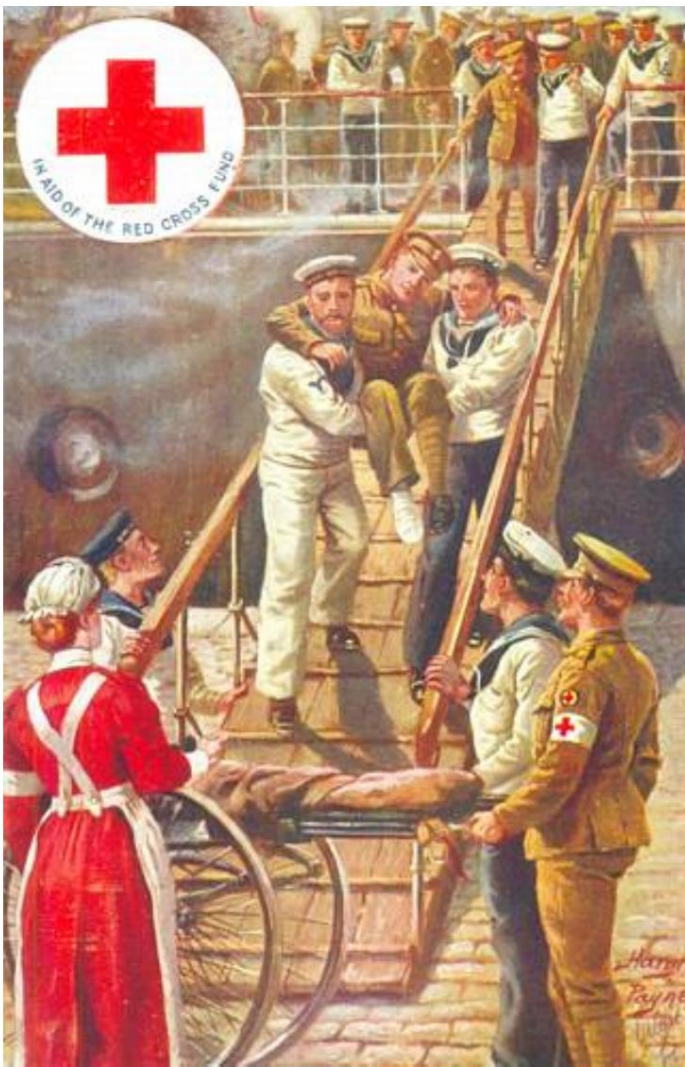


*Royal Army Medical Corps, Entraining wounded for hospital, ca. 1915.*

The female nurses were organized in i.a. Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, which in August 1914 numbered just over 300 women. By the end of 1914, the number had grown to 2,223, and by the end of the war to 10,404 trained nurses, supplemented by approx. 9,000 nurses/nursing assistants from the organization Voluntary Aid Detachments.

The following appears from the back:

*The completeness and efficiency of the splendid work of the Royal Army Medical Corps demands and deserves a volume of appreciation.*



*The wounded are brought ashore from a hospital ship, approx. 1914.*

Drawn by Harry Payne.

*From the firing line to the Hospital, from then to the Base, in the train, the Hospital Ships, and at home, everything that can soothe the sufferers or heal their wounds, every agency, personal or material, for this ameliorative work, is lavishly provided.*

The following appears from the back:

*Our brave and devoted men, fighting for our dear country and risking their lives, have great comfort in knowing that they may look to the Red Cross in time of need.*

It also became a fashion phenomenon among some women of the better class to be involved in the treatment of the many wounded, and for these it was more important to be seen "in full regalia" as nurses, which did not exactly create respect among the professional parts of the treatment system as well as the many volunteers who went wholeheartedly into nursing.

**1st (City of London) London General Hospital, Royal Army Medical Corps, Territorial Force**



*1st (City of London) London General Hospital, Royal Army Medical Corps, Territorial Force, 13. juli 1913.*

The Territorial Force also played a significant role in this area in the organization of sanitary units, including the larger establishments in the staging areas.

A *General Hospital* consisted of 32 doctors, 3 field chaplains, 76 (female) nurses as well as 206 non-commissioned officers and privates.

A *General Hospital* at the beginning of the war had a capacity of 1,040 patients and they were located in the army base areas of Boulogne, Le Havre, Rouen, Le Touquet and Etaples. In 1917, the units' capacity was expanded to 2,500 patients.



Wounded corporal of the cavalry [4](#), approx. 1914.

Drawn by Harry Payne.

## Closing

As in all other "advertisements", the images naturally show a very idealized representation of the reality that met both the wounded and nurses as well as other sanitary personnel.

Despite the "nice" wounds, you get a pretty good impression of the uniforms as well as some of the functions and equipment associated with handling the wounded.

## Sources

1. *Women's War Work* of Lady Randolph Churchill (red.), C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1916.
2. *When Tommy was wounded*, from *The story of the British Army in the First World War*. Here you will find, among other things, a series of instructive overviews of major sanitary installations on the Western Front.
3. *The British Journal of Nursing*, 6. februar 1915.
4. *Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Service* of Juliet Piggot, Leo Cooper Ltd., London 1975, ISBN 0-85052-193-9.
5. *Doctors in the Great War* of Ian R. Whitehead, Leo Cooper, Barnsley 1999, ISBN 0-85052-691-4.

Per Finsted

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**To note:**

- 1) Read about the history of the place in the article *Le Touquet: The Centenary of the British Connection*, from the Michelin Magazine.
- 2) From [FirstWorldWar.com](http://FirstWorldWar.com), citing *History of the World War* by Francis A. March, Philadelphia 1918, as the source.
- 3) There was also a large influx of volunteers from abroad, e.g. USA. An impression of the American contribution can be obtained i.a. here: *Letters from two hospitals by Katharine Foote and Stanford and the Great War*.
- 4) The regiment is perhaps the 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards.