

Bishop's Fighting Woman

Nursing in the First World War

Alyshia Mccabe
+ Paige LaPierre

Who was Elizabeth W. Odell?

Born on June 29, 1888, Odell graduated from Bishop's University in 1909 with a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages¹. She went on to teach at Westbourne School in West Toronto, before enrolling in the Montreal General Hospital of Nursing, where she graduated top of her class². Finishing with high honours, Odell joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps and was sent overseas to help in the war effort.

Fortunately, Odell survived the war, and continued to nurse for the remainder of her career.

She passed away on August 3rd, 1971 and was laid to rest at Saint Peter Cemetery in Sherbrooke, Quebec.



Odell, www3.sympatico.ca/

The Canadian Army Medical Corps

The Nursing Sisters

Established in 1908, the CAMC had only five permanent members at the start of the First World War. The CAMC enlisted over 3,000 new nurses over the course of the war. These women were trained nurses, coming from hospitals, medical professions or universities - such as the one Odell graduated from. Of these nurses, 2,504 were sent overseas to work in Canadian hospitals throughout Europe. Although these women did not work directly on the front lines, they were not safe from the dangers of war. Indeed, of the 2,504 that served in the war, 53 were killed while in service.

When the war finally ended in 1918, nurses returned home with extensive medical skills and a new sense of duty. Canadian soldiers looked up to them, often referring to them as "Sisters of Mercy" or "Angels of Mercy", and Canadian society appreciated their devotion to their country. So much so, that in 1926, the Parliament of Canada erected a memorial to honor these nursing sisters who risked their lives to save others.³



"Nicknamed bluebirds because of their blue uniforms and white veils, Canada's Nursing Sisters saved lives by assisting with medical operations and by caring for convalescing soldiers."³



Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps Insignia

War Girls

Strong, sensible, and fit,
They're out to show their grit,
And tackle jobs with energy and
knack.

No longer caged and penned up,
They're going to keep their end up
Till the khaki soldier boys come
marching back.

-Jessie Pope

The Mitre: News from Overseas

The Mitre, 1917

"Miss Elizabeth Odell '09 is, as far as we know, the only one of our number who has gone overseas. Miss Odell, who graduated from a Montreal hospital with high honours, is now serving in one of our Canadian hospitals in Boulogne, France."

The Mitre, February 1918

"Again word comes to us of the good work being done by Miss Elizabeth Odell, nursing sister, overseas. Miss Odell, with five other nurses, has been appointed to go into the Jura Mountains and establish a hospital there, in order to minister to the needs of a Forestry Battalion quartered in that section."

Nursing Awards: The Royal Red Cross

The Royal Red Cross is awarded to nurses from the United Kingdom or Commonwealth who have shown exceptional commitment and ability with their nursing duties, or who have performed an act of bravery within their post⁴. Odell received the Royal Red Cross, Second Class⁵ (A.R.R.C.) for time spent in the Canadian Army Medical Corps before eventually being promoted to First Class¹!



A.R.R.C., Second Class

5% of nurses could receive this award

R.R.C. First Class

2% of registered nurses could receive this award



Notes

1. "World War I", [www3.sympatico.ca/mmsut.mtl/worldwar.htm#Elizabeth W. Odell](http://www3.sympatico.ca/mmsut.mtl/worldwar.htm#Elizabeth%20W.%20Odell).
2. *The Mitre*, Bishop's University
3. "Nurses," 2008, <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/people/in-uniform/nurses/>
4. "Royal Red Cross", <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/medals-decorations/details/43>
5. "Round the Hospitals", *The Hospital*, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5eb3/93f535e71fea7179d024788bed7499f00954.pdf>