

Miss B.J.D. Reid – A Q.A. Nurse’s Experiences in WW1

Beatrice Jessie Duthie Reid was born on 28th April 1878 in Thornton, Kincardineshire, the second child of Alexander Reid and Ann Reid (née Craig). Her father was a gardener at Idvies House in Kirkden, Forfarshire and Beatrice was first educated at Fetteresso School in Stonehaven and then privately.



St. Thomas's Hospital built in 1871

In 1902 she joined the staff of St. Thomas's Hospital, London where she spent four years training before taking up a post as sister at the Royal Sussex County Hospital. She returned briefly to St. Thomas's in 1909 before leaving to take up a nursing position in France. Returning to England in 1910, she spent a further 2 years at the Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital, undergoing training in midwifery.

Moving to Oswestry in October 1912, Beatrice took up the post of sister and assistant in the practice of Drs. Cartwright, Girdlestone and Crofton. It is possible that she already knew Dr. Garthorne Robert Girdlestone, who had also trained at St. Thomas's Hospital. They certainly shared an interest in orthopaedics and it was as a result of Dr. Girdlestone's work at the nearby hospital in Baschurch, that she came into contact with Dame Agnes Hunt and Sir Robert Jones.

In early April 1914, Sister Reid applied to become a member of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) Reserve and two weeks later she received notification that she had been accepted. There were just 300 QA's serving with the British Army at the beginning of the war but by the end of the year the number had risen to 2,223 and by the end of the war over 10,400 trained nurses had enrolled in the service. Following the declaration of war Staff Nurse Reid (her QAIMNS rank) received orders to mobilize immediately. She later recalled:

"Later on orders came for our unit to entrain for an unknown destination. As the train sped on we found we were journeying to Southampton, and when we arrived there we were met by the Embarkation Officer, who greeted us with "You are not expected, and tonight there is no vessel to take you over to France."

However on enquiries being made a boat, which had been lying up at Liverpool in dry dock, had just come in, and it was while we were waiting to embark that the Scouts came forward and fetched cups of tea and helped with our luggage."

The scouting movement was to become very important to her after the war.

Finally, on 16 August 1914, Beatrice was on her way to France, and after arriving at Le Havre she travelled on to Rouen, en route for Amiens, but as it was not safe for her to proceed she remained there in tented accommodation until forced to withdraw as Rouen also became unsafe. In a letter to friends, which was published in the Border Counties Advertiser, she wrote:

"One morning the patients were woken up at 1.30 and conveyed to the hospital ships for England, while all the nursing sisters in Rouen were "thrown" into a train, many of us in loose boxes. I was in a third-class carriage with eight others! There we travelled for two nights and two days.... Finally we arrived at St. Nazaire and thence to Sornichet"

On 24 September 1914 Staff Nurse Reid was attached to No. 3 Ambulance Train which consisted of first and second-class voitures, with communicating corridors. Each voiture was a ward and the seats were prepared as beds. Describing life on the train in one of her letters, she wrote:

"Our train is over a quarter of a mile long, and we are four nursing sisters and three M.O.'s. Last journey we brought down 300 wounded, many of them very ill and dying. The Tommies are absolutely splendid – never complain – and are so grateful for all one does. One man had his leg amputated on the train, without anaesthetic and all he asked for was "a bit of chocolate". One has to be in the midst of all to realize it. We go right up to the front within a few miles of the firing line....."

Major Burke, Commanding Officer of No. 3. Ambulance Train vividly described an entrainment following the battle of Messines in October 1914;

"As a preliminary my train lay two miles outside the town of Ypres as there was no siding vacant for us. The fighting front was almost parallel with the railway line and about six or seven miles away.....We watched till dusk and then the train was drawn forward into the railway station.....Very little light; all the platforms crowded with refugees; shells falling with a terrific noise in a distant part of the town: all the entrances and waiting rooms full of stretchers and wounded



Operating Theatre of an Ambulance Train
Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

on them, and every available corner crowded with wounded who could walk...By 10 p.m. we had completely filled the train and evacuated nearly 400 cases, one third of which were stretcher cases. Off we moved to our destination and began the work of washing, re-clothing, dressing wounds, re-setting fractures and last, but by no means least, feeding our patients. Twelve hours later by the time we had reached our base, every wound was dressed and a nominal roll of patients was ready."

On 31st May 1915 Staff Nurse Reid was mentioned in despatches by Field-Marshal Sir John French *"for gallant and distinguished service in the field"*. Confirmation of this honour was printed in the London Gazette dated 22nd June 1915. In December 1915 she was transferred to No.2 General Hospital at Le Havre where, in March the following year, she was promoted to the rank of Sister.



Sister B.J.D. Reid

In September 1916 Beatrice moved to Doullens to take up the post of sister-in-charge of No. 41 Casualty Clearing Station. Although they were quite large CCS's moved quickly and on 24th September 1916 the Matron-in-Chief recorded in her official war diary that *"41 CCS...is shortly closing down whilst moving forward"*. Within a few days the station had established a base at Wanquetin, a village approximately 7 miles west of Arras and approximately 3 miles north of Beaumetz. It remained in this position until February 1917 when

it moved to Agnez-les-Duisans, about 5 miles west of Arras. About 6 months later it moved again to Godewaersvelde, about 9 miles south-west of Ypres and about halfway between Poperinge and Hazebrouck.

Sister Reid was granted two weeks leave in December, reporting for duties again on Christmas Eve. She was now to take up the post of sister-in-charge of No. 54 Casualty Clearing Station, currently based at Merville, about 15 miles north of Bethune and 12 miles south-west of Armentieres. In March of 1918 the CCS was forced to move first to Haverskerque and then Aire, as fighting in the area became intense. Beatrice, herself, experienced a "near miss" as recorded in the official war diary.

"16th March 1918 – Town shelled for the first time. A shell fell a few yards in front of the Sister i/c when she was out shopping, but fortunately only covered her with dust etc."

On 1st May 1918 No. 54 Casualty Clearing Station received a visit from the Matron-in-Chief. In the war diary she recorded:

"No. 54 Casualty Clearing Station, Officer Commanding Lt. Colonel Frankau and Sister-in-charge, Miss Reid, QAIMNSR, with 12 others. This is a first-rate working unit, very full, very orderly and very comfortable in every respect. All the wards were warm, well managed and clean and the patients looked well cared for. They are in need of two Theatre Sisters here. They take in officers as well as men. All the cooking, both for the hospital, officers and Sisters, is done in the hospital kitchen, the cook being a solicitor. I had lunch there and it was extremely good in every way."

In August 1918, Sister Reid left the clearing station and returned to the 2nd Stationary Hospital at Abbeville, where she remained even after hostilities had ceased. A report on her work at this establishment, dated 6th January 1919, shows that she had been entrusted with greater responsibility and was being considered for further advancement.

"During the five months Sister BJD Reid has served under me as Assistant Matron I have formed the opinion that she is in every way up to the standard of her rank. She is even tempered, tactful, energetic, punctual and most reliable – her influence generally is excellent. During my 14 days leave she performed my duties to my entire satisfaction. I consider her in every way fitted for promotion."

On 21st January she applied for transfer to a home establishment. The reason for her request was that she needed to attend to the affairs of her younger brother George, who had been killed on the Somme, on 25th August 1918. She was, instead, granted one month's leave and was only finally demobilized on 6th May 1919.

In January 1917 the London Gazette had carried the official announcement that Beatrice had been awarded the Royal Red Cross. Now back in England, on 10th December 1919,



she went to Buckingham Palace where she was invested with this award by the King. She was also to be re-united with Dr. Girdlestone, at the Ministry of Pensions Orthopaedic Hospital, near Oxford where she was appointed to the post of Matron. She later said:

"Although this hospital was supposed to be entirely for officers and men incapacitated by war service, we managed to fill a ward or two, with children

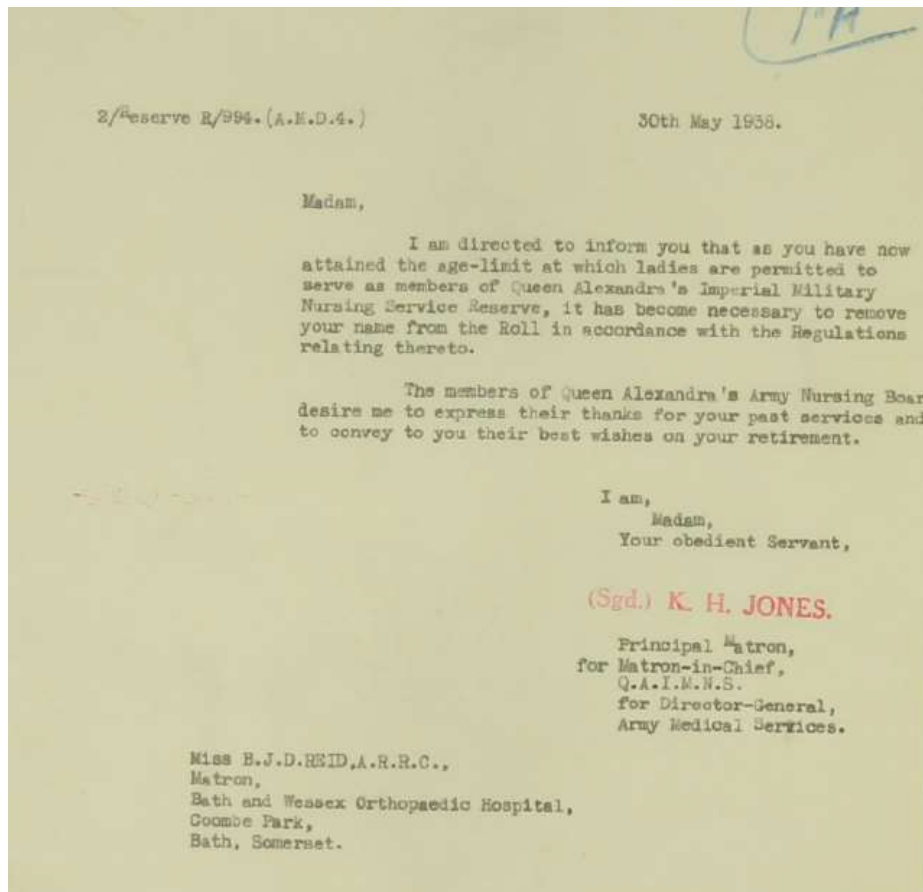


Lt. George Reid RFA

requiring orthopaedic treatment and somehow managed to start a troop of Scouts."

Beatrice Reid was later to be appointed Superintendent of the Children's' Rest in Liverpool. She then went on to spend two years travelling abroad in Palestine and Egypt, then on to America where she had the opportunity to visit a number of American hospitals. Returning to England, she took up the post of Matron of the Bath & Wessex Children's Orthopaedic Hospital where she remained until her retirement on 28th April 1938.

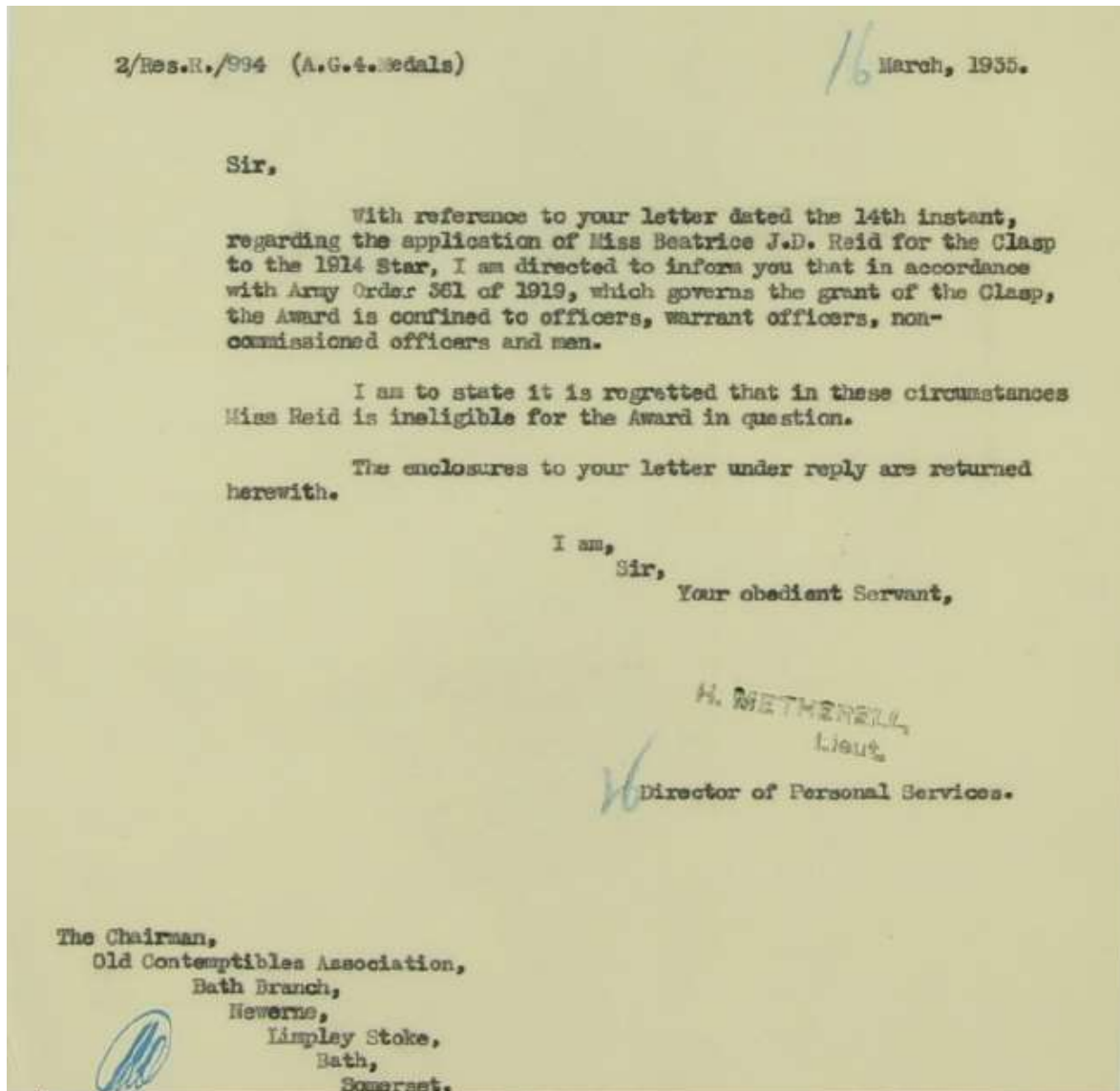
Beatrice also remained a member of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service Reserve until 1938, when she received notification that she had reached the age-limit for service.



She did, however, continue as an active member of the local branch of the "Old Contemptibles", who obviously held her in very high regard. In 1935 the Chairman of the Old Contemptibles Bath Branch had written to the war

office to request that the 1914 clasp be awarded to Beatrice. This was a bar clasp inscribed "5 Aug. to 22 Nov. 1914" and was given to all those who qualified for the 1914 Star and who had served under fire. They received the following reply, which stated that Beatrice was not eligible as:

"the Award is confined to officers, warrant-officers, non-commissioned officers and men."



On 8th December 1948 Beatrice died at the age of 70. She had lived a remarkable life of service to others and her war time efforts, in particular, should not be forgotten.

©Pamela M Willing

Sources:

Border Counties Advertiser 26th November 1914
Border Counties Advertiser 7th July 1915
Dundee Courier 7th September 1918
Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 23rd September 1933
Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald 26th March 1938
National Archives Document WO 399/6923
National Archives Document WO 95/3990