JMVH Article: *'John Keith Henderson: First Australian to Provide Dental Treatment to Troops on Active Service'*
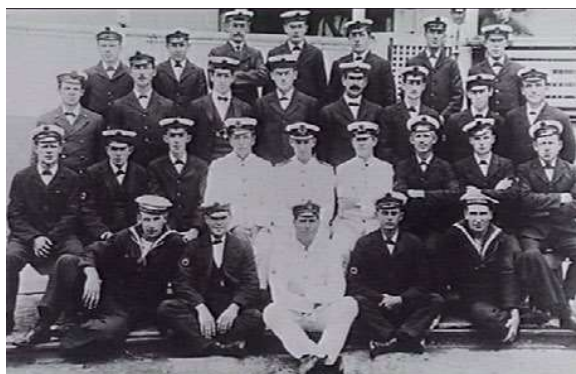
N Westphalen

Dear Sir/Madam,

The July 2022 JMVH article regarding John Keith Henderson, the first Australian to provide dental treatment to personnel on active service, is important because it expands on an otherwise rarely-examined component of Australia's military medical history. While commending the author's work to that end, the article requires further elaboration regarding the medical detachment that supported the Australian Military and Naval Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) at the beginning of World War I.[1]

The author's statement (as is the reference upon which it is based) that 'the medical detachment of the ANMEF comprised four medical officers, one Warrant Officer and 35 other ranks' is factually incorrect. These figures only include the Army medical component aboard the troopship *Berrima*, not ANMEF as a whole.[2] The author's statement that ANMEF had no nursing staff is likewise only true in that none came from Army.

In fact, besides the Army component (and again, contrary to the original reference used by the author), the 600-man RAN contingent aboard *Berrima* had its own medical officer (Surgeon Jack Skeet RAN), while Surgeon Jack Willis RANR was appointed to the store ship *Aorangi*, and Surgeon Frederick Kenny RANR to the submarine depot ship *Upolu*.[3,4,5] In addition, the medical staff aboard the ANMEF hospital ship *Grantala* comprised six surgeons, seven nurses (the first women to serve at sea with the RAN), 26 men for dispensary, radiology, pathology and orderly roles and nine non-medical sailors for disciplinary, clerical, signalling, carpentry and boat-handling duties.[6,7] *Grantala*'s medical team was led by Acting Fleet Surgeon William Nichols Horsfall RAN, who had served with the British Royal Navy as (probably) its first Australian-born medical officer (from Fitzroy Victoria) from 1904 to 1913.[8,9,10,11]

Grantala's professional medical, nursing and chaplaincy staff, August 1914.[12] The nurses all came from Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital; who, with the surgeons, were employed as 'special service' civilians rather than uniformed officers, which led to disciplinary problems with the orderlies. Horsfall is in the centre of the front row.

Grantala's medical orderlies and supporting non-medical sailors, August 1914.[13] The orderlies came from Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital or the civilian NSW St John Ambulance Brigade, the latter including several tram drivers. Horsfall is in the centre of the second row.

These ships were escorted from the Louisiade Archipelago to Rabaul by the battlecruiser *Australia* (I), the light cruisers *Sydney* (I) and *Encounter* (I), the destroyers *Yarra* (I) and *Warrego* (I) and the submarines *AE1* and *AE2*, which therefore were also part of ANMEF.[14,15,16] The first three of these ships likewise had their own RAN medical staff.

John Henderson's role fully deserves the recognition sought by the author, especially if he provided his services for the RAN as well as the Army ANMEF component four years before the first RAN dental officer (Surgeon Dentist Milton Spencer Atwill) was appointed in April 1918.[17] To that end, I trust this letter provides better context to his story.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil Westphalen

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