



**SUPPLY
LINE**

Artifact Backgrounder

Nursing Sister's Apron

DEFINITION

The nursing sister's apron is a white garment worn over top of the nursing sister's service dress uniform.

DID YOU KNOW?

The First World War claimed the lives of more than 50 Canadian nursing sisters. While some of these casualties were due to disease, others were victims of enemy action. In two separate instances, nursing sisters were killed in France when German aircraft bombed Canadian hospitals. Fourteen nursing sisters were drowned when a German submarine attacked and sank the Canadian hospital ship *Llandoverly Castle* in June 1918.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) was a vital component of Canada's overseas forces during the First World War. In addition to providing medical services for Canadian and Allied troops and enemy prisoners of war at the front, the CAMC operated treatment facilities and hospitals in the rear areas in France and Belgium, as well as in the United Kingdom, Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean theatre of war.

A Canadian Army Nursing Service was formed in 1901. At the outbreak of First World War in 1914, however, there were just five nursing sisters serving in Canada's small professional army. An additional 80 nursing sisters were members of the Reserve Nursing Service at the time.

The Canadian Army Nursing Service expanded dramatically between 1914 and 1919 as the scope

DID YOU KNOW?

Nursing sisters were not members of any religious order — as the term may suggest — but the name likely refers to an era when churches provided care for the sick and wounded. The term was used to identify nurses in the CAMC up until the end of the Second World War.

of the war increased. Some 3,141 nursing sisters served in the CAMC during the war, including 2,504 who were posted overseas. With the exception of the most forward battle lines, nursing sisters could be found wherever the CAMC operated.

EVOLUTION/DEVELOPMENT

The service dress uniform for nursing sisters was made up of a blue double-breasted blouse with open collar, and a long blue skirt, worn with either a white veil or a wide-brimmed hat. The colour of

DID YOU KNOW?

Nursing sisters were given the rank of lieutenant to discourage fraternization with the soldiers in their care and to give them seniority over their patients.

the uniform earned them the nickname: "bluebirds." The **nursing sister's apron** was worn over top of the service dress uniform. A dark blue cape or overcoat was worn as required.

Nursing sisters also wore formal dark blue uniforms for ceremonial functions. Like all other Canadian officers, nursing sisters were required to purchase their own uniforms, and they received an allowance to help cover this cost.

VOCABULARY LIST

British Empire forces:

In the context of the First World War period, this term refers to all military forces associated with the British Empire, including troops from colonies, self-governing nations (such as Canada or Australia), and various other territories under British influence or protection. Soldiers of many nationalities and ethnicities served with the British Empire forces, including English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African, Indian, Egyptian and Chinese personnel, as well as Aboriginal peoples from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Nursing sisters:

These were female medical professionals who served overseas in the Canadian Army Medical Corps during the First World War. Nursing Sisters treated casualties in various types of military medical establishments, ranging from forward evacuation points adjacent to the battlefields, to fully equipped hospitals far away from the battlefields. Contrary to what the title implies, Nursing Sisters were not members of any religious order, but were military officers who served in the normal chain of command.

Service dress uniform:

The uniform intended for everyday wear in the British Empire forces during the First World War period.

Theatre of war:

The geographic area of conflict.