

Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences  
Research Seminar Program 2022

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> August (12-1pm)

To be held in person  
Melb Room 460.3.01  
and via Teams Meeting

**Jason Smeaton**

Jason is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, supervised by Prof Joy Damousi and Dr Mary Tomsic. His research focuses on Australian women's history, war and gender, with particular interest in the history of nursing. Jason is set to submit his thesis for examination at the end of the year.

***'Nurse or not? Voluntary Aids and the Australian Army Medical Women's Service during World War Two'***

An auxiliary service supporting trained nurses in the Army, the servicewomen known as Voluntary Aids (VAs) and then Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS), have largely been omitted from the story of Australia in World War Two. One reason for the VAs/AAMWS being overlooked is the difficulty in differentiating the female nursing orderly from the trained nurse. While clear distinctions do exist, such as their technical nurse training, their uniform in the early years of the war, and the hierarchy enforced by the military, this paper explores how women serving in these roles during World War Two came to assume the unofficial role of nurse trainees in military hospitals. The issue, however, was that the expectation for VAs/AAMWS to assume this role was placed on them by others, and effectively dictated that they were nurses. As such, VAs/AAMWS had to contend to create a separate identity for themselves – a problem that has continued to envelope their story and shadow them in the historiography. This paper is an extract from Jason's PhD thesis which traces the work, training, and opportunities provided to women in the Army as VAs/AAMWS during World War Two and the effect that this had on the nursing profession in Australia more broadly.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART24373

AWM: ART24373, [*Private Hazel Lugge, AAMWS*] *Sponging a malaria patient*, Nora Heysen, Cairns, Qld, Oct-1945.