

The World War I Volunteer Aid Detachment

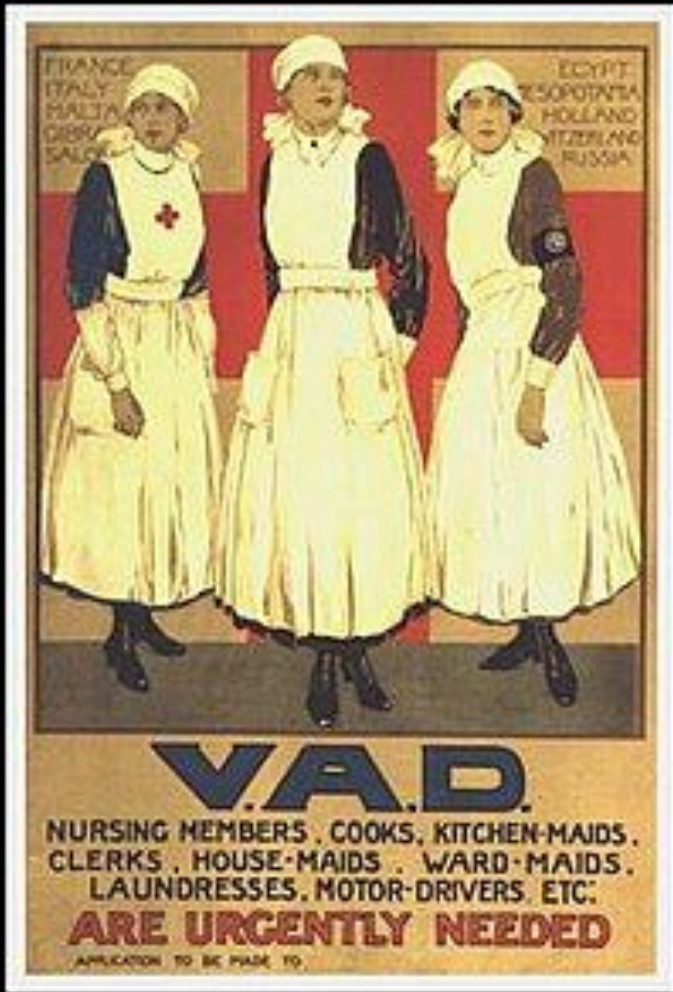


The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was established in 1909 by the Red Cross to provide additional nursing care for military personnel.

By the summer of 1914, there were 2,500 Voluntary Aid Detachments in Britain, with 74,000 volunteer members.



Over two-thirds of the VAD volunteers were women (from *Homefront Heroines*).



The Red Cross encouraged many women to join by saying:

“It’s the patriotic duty of every man, woman, and child to join the Red Cross. Why wait to be asked? Be a volunteer!!” (Northwest Labor Journal)

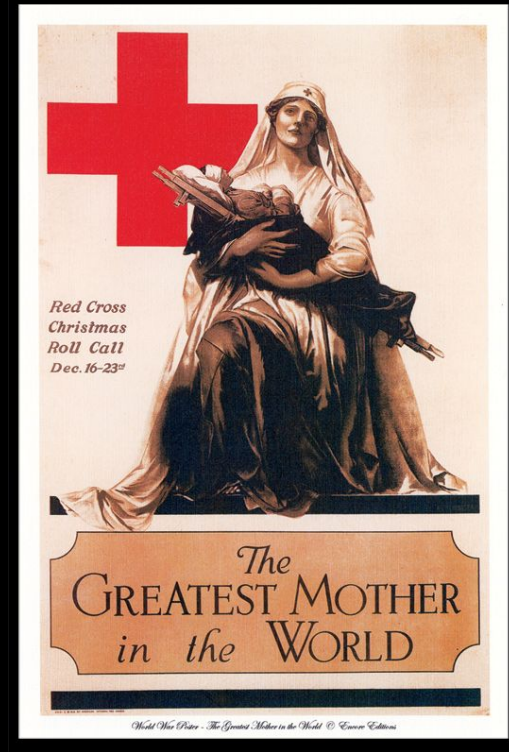


V.A.D.s were glorified back home in England, even though most of their friends and family had no concept of the reality of their lives.



The young women were hailed as virtuous heroes, and “self-sacrifice was a significant element” of their volunteer service, where they were expected to “alleviate the sufferings of wretched men” (Smith 89).

“There were more volunteers for the V.A.D. than spaces to fill; the young women's “patriotic upper-class families were proud to sacrifice daughters” and earn the right to say their daughters were sacrificing for the war effort. They were “doing their bit” (Marcus 243).





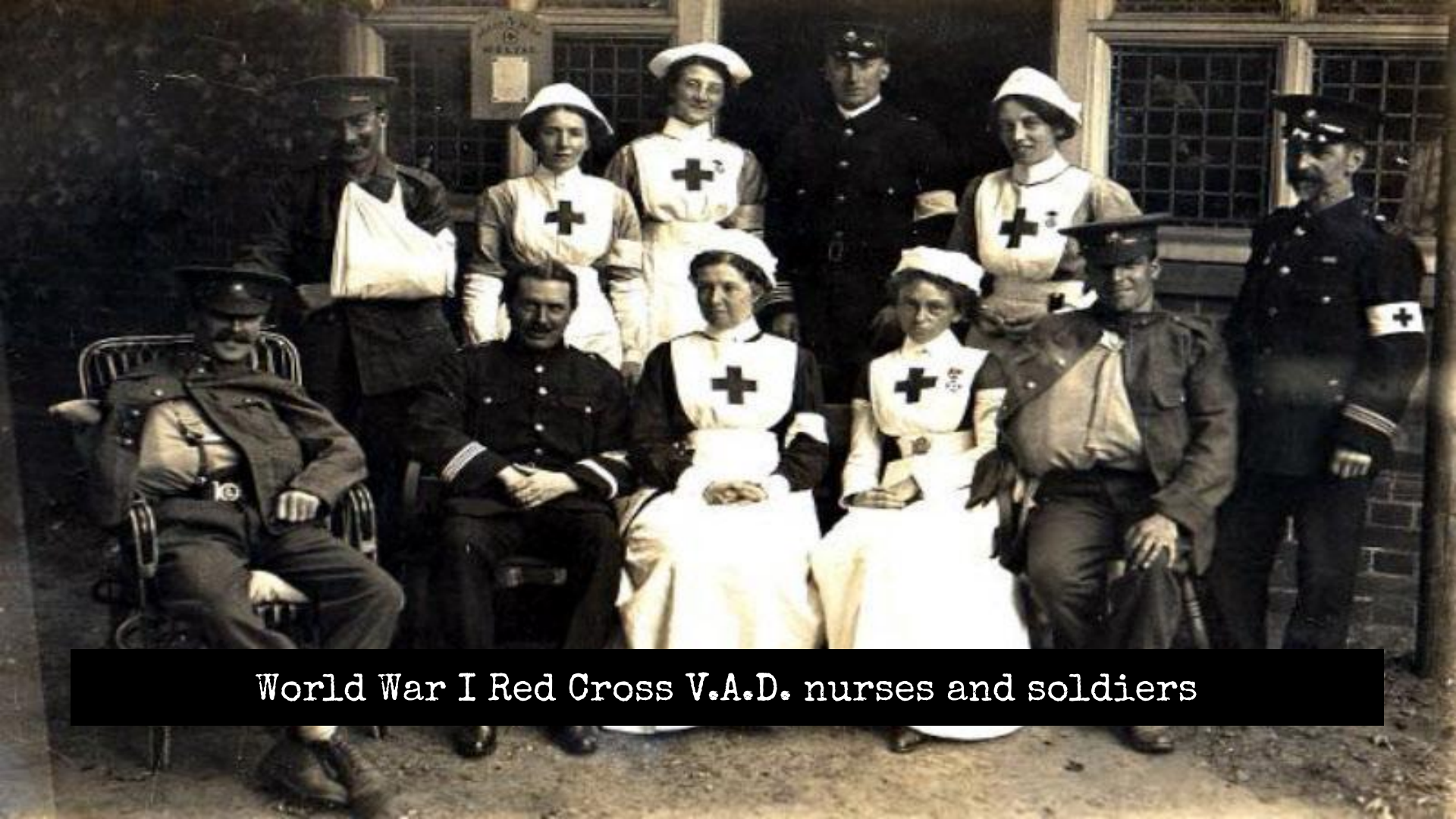
“In stiff, upper-lipped long-suffering bravery, the [V.A.D.] women had to be superhuman, driving for weeks on three hours of sleep a night, eating spoiled food, and very little of that (no decent rations for volunteers)...



“V.A.D. volunteers were often from aristocratic backgrounds, and had been imbued with the confidence that a ‘ladylike’ upbringing brought with it.”

--C.E. Hallet





World War I Red Cross V.A.D. nurses and soldiers

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