

## YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 39 TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



*Welcome to 2021 The series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories.*

*The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open three days per week, Wednesday through Friday. Recruiting of new volunteers and roster planning is underway to hopefully re-establish a 5 day open schedule in February/*

### A SIMPLE RED TIE



The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia has recently acquired for its collection, an object of extraordinary simplicity but one redolent of emotional and social significance. Few of these items long survived the war when their original purpose passed but they remained a reminder of painful wounds (both physical and mental) and convalescence for numberless veterans. They were also a reminder of social stratifications existing at the time even in the most egalitarian of societies.

The object in question is a length of red cotton fabric, fashioned as a necktie and on our example stamped with the broad arrow ordnance marking and the date 1917. It is the red necktie which formed part of the so called Convalescence Blues uniform ensemble worn by Australian wounded in military and convalescent hospitals in Britain during World War One. The photo above shows Martin O'Meara wearing such a tie at Wandsworth Hospital while recuperating from wounds received in 1916.



## CONVALESCENT BLUES

Made of a flannel and flannelette combination, the convalescent soldier's outfit and its lounge-jacket counterpart resembled ill-fitting pyjamas. The uniform was designed so that a handful of sizes would fit all. This meant that it fit poorly because soldiers had to 'flap' or 'cuff' their trouser legs and shirt sleeves.



A standardised hospital uniform served a number of useful military functions. It was a means of establishing and maintaining cleanliness in military hospitals, where soldiers usually arrived in dirty, worn-out and infested uniforms requiring sterilization and disinfection.

The outfit also served to help improve the administrative efficiency of returning soldiers to duty. At convalescent facilities, soldier patients fell into four categories, which were identified by combinations of the convalescent uniform and different-coloured armlets. The 'worst cases' wore white armlets. Cases well enough for one to six months of retraining wore pink armlets. Section three, including ranks who required less than one month of retraining, light blue armlets. Finally, section four men, those 'practically well' wore convalescent blues with dark blue armlets



## SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS

Regulations required that the garment be worn at all times by soldiers of non-officer 'other ranks' who were receiving treatment in military hospitals and convalescent facilities.

Officers however were exempted from wearing the 'Blues', They were provided instead with a white armband decorated with a red King's Crown, with a personal clothing allowance, or with pyjamas donated by the public and voluntary-aid agencies.

## VERNON LORIMER COLLECTION

2960 Vernon Lorimer enlisted at Maryborough on 31 March 1915 and embarked on HMAT A31 Ajana on 31 May 1915 as a member of 5 Field Ambulance. During the war, he transferred to the Artillery and was commissioned as a 2/Lieutenant just after the Armistice. On enlistment he gave his profession as Artist.

While serving in WWI Lorimer painted a number of watercolours and sketched hospital scenes featuring soldiers in convalescent blues. The Army Museum is fortunate to have a number of his artworks in its collection.

These works are currently being prepared for exhibition in the Temporary Exhibition Gallery to coincide with the reopening of the Victoria Cross exhibition.



<http://www.glensidemuseum.org.uk/beaufort-war-hospital-home-page/hospital-blues/>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1423422>

<https://www.qaranc.co.uk/Army-Hospital-Blues-Uniform-WW1.php>

<http://blog.wellcomelibrary.org/2010/06/the-convalescent-blues-in-frederick-cayley-robinsons-acts-of-mercy/>