YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 73
TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit 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 four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus <u>Sunday</u>. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

Australian Hospital Ships 1914 – 1919

In 1914, Australia was well supplied with modern passenger ships available to convert to hospital ships. During World War One, after an initial experience, five liners were used at various times as troop ships and as hospital ships, with two being lost to submarine attack.

Grantala

Australia was quickly into the provision of a hospital ship with the charter of the coastal passenger liner *Grantala* for support of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) involved against various German Pacific colonies. *Grantala* was found to be too small for regular use in this role and was soon returned to her owners.

She was quickly replaced as Australian authorities realized that the range and extent of anticipated injuries for Australia's soldiers, both at Gallipoli and elsewhere in the Middle East and in Europe itself, would need larger ships.

HMAHS Kanowna

Built in 1902, *Kanowna* was of 6,993 gross registered tons (grt), owned by the Australian United Steam Navigation Company (AUSN) and used on the Sydney to Fremantle passenger service. In September 1914 she was requisitioned to take about 1,000 soldiers to German New Guinea as part of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force.

On 1 June 1915 *Kanowna* was used as Troopship A61, to Egypt. After completion of this run, she continued to Britain where she was modified as a hospital ship. In her new livery she worked around the Mediterranean and made regular voyages back to Australia carrying up to 452 seriously wounded with a medical staff of 88. This was her role for most of the next four years. In October 1918 *Kanowna* was used to collect some 900 British and Commonwealth POWs released by Turkey. She was returned to her owners on 29 July 1920.

HMAHS Karoola

Built in 1909, *Karoola* was 7,391 grt. Her owners McIlwraith and McEacharn Ltd used her mainly on the Fremantle run until she was requisitioned by the British Government in May 1915. She was converted to a troopship in Sydney and was given the number A63. After carrying troops to Egypt, she continued on to Britain where she was converted to a hospital ship with funds provided by the Australian public. In her new role she made four voyages from Britain to A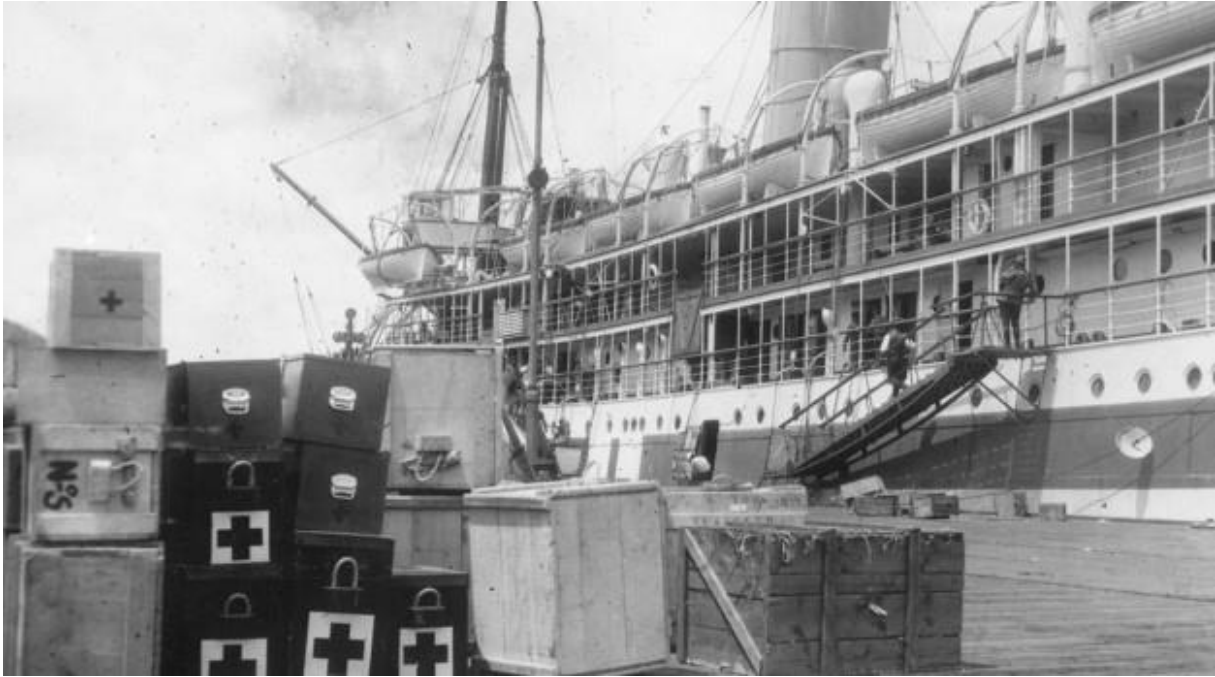ustralia carrying severely wounded Australians and another four voyages from Egypt before the war ended. She was handed back to her owners on 27 June 1919.

HMAHS Karoola departing Southampton 6 May 1919 on last voyage as transport to Australia

ART03190

HMAS Kyarra

Built in 1903, *Kyarra* was a sister ship of *Kanowna* but was rated at 6,953 grt. *Kyarra* was requisitioned by the British government in October 1914 and converted for use as a hospital ship at Brisbane. As HMAT A55 she was used to carry Australian medical units to Egypt. Surprisingly she was not in hospital ship use for long as in March 1915 she was converted to a troopship. In May 1918 she was released from Commonwealth control and sailed for Britain where she again reverted to the role of a hospital ship. On 26 May1918, she was torpedoed and sunk. Five engineers were killed.

Medical supplies being loaded onto Kyarra, 1914

HMAHS Wandilla

Built in 1912, *Wandilla* (7,785 grt) and her sister ship *Warilda* (7,713grt) were the newest and largest ships used as hospital ships by Australia during WWI. *Wandilla* was taken over by the Australian military for use as a troopship on 18 May 1915.As such she made two round trips from Australia to Egypt during which time, she was also used to carry wounded troops to Britain

She was then sent to Liverpool for conversion to a hospital ship. *Wandilla* made voyages around the Mediterranean and to both sides of Africa before being converted back to austerity accommodation to repatriate Australian troops after which she was refitted for passenger service.

Model of the Wandilla at the Geelong Maritime Museum

After wartime service, the Wandilla progressed through several owners and name changes. Under Italian ownership, as the Arno, she was requisitioned as a hospital ship by the Regia Marina during World War II. The ship and its crew members were featured in the 1941 Italian propaganda film The White Ship (Italian: La nave bianca).

The Arno was sunk by aerial torpedoes from the Royal Air Force on 10 September 1942 about 64 km north-east of Ras el Tin, near Tobruk. It was claimed by the British, that a German radio message decoded on 31 August 1942 showed that the ship was being used to carry supplies to Benghazi in violation of the Hague Convention, making it a justified attack.

HMAHS *Warilda*

Built in 1912, *Warilda* was soon carrying troops to war as HMAT A69. After three round trips, she was sent to the UK to be converted to a hospital ship. Later in WW I Germany no longer allowed hospital ships immunity from attack, and Britain decided to abandon painting them white and lit at night. Several vessels including *Warilda* were re-classified as ambulance transports. They were painted in camouflage and armed. On 2 August 1918 *Warilda* sailed from Le Havre escorted by two destroyers. She was carrying 660 wounded soldiers as well as 60 medical staff, including nursing sisters, and 115 crew. Early the following morning she was torpedoed in the engine room and sank. Of those on board 123 lost their lives including 102 of the wounded soldiers. *Warilda* had completed 180 trips between France and Britain, successfully carrying over 80,000 casualties.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL   RELAWM00277

A 1/30 scale full hull shipbuilder's model of H.M.A.T. 'Warilda', painted to represent its service as an Ambulance Transport, with sawtooth dazzle camouflage.

No. 1 Aust. Hospital Ship, 'Karoola' 1918 - 1919
Auth. Australian Imperial Force
Order 1051, 1.1.1918.
Raised June 1915

No. 2 Aust. Hospital Ship, 'Kanowna 1918 - 1919
Auth. Australian Imperial Force
Order 1051, 1.1.1918
Raised June 1915

4