

# PRIVATE MELVA MYRTLE FROMM - WILLIAMSTOWN

## Second World War

Melva Myrtle Fromm was born on 25 March 1920 in a private hospital in Tanunda. She spent her childhood in Williamstown, growing up in the family home in Fromm square. Melva attended Williamstown Primary School. However, when the time came to attend high school, there was no available transport and limited funds for her to travel to Gawler.

Instead, she worked alongside her parents and siblings in the family dairy, picking fruit, and helping in the vineyards. Later, she secured a job in Williamstown, working in the drapery store where she was responsible for bookkeeping and serving customers.

During the Second World War, the Fromm family would gather around the radio to listen to the news. Seven of Melva's cousins enlisted early. Melva became a Red Cross Aid, attending camps to learn how to bandage and care for the sick.

Upon turning 21, Melva was eager to leave Williamstown, seeing enlistment in the Army as an opportunity for adventure, not realising the challenges ahead. She travelled by bus to Keswick Barracks and enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Women's Service on 9 June 1944.

Very soon after, Melva and other nurses were transported in the back of a truck for six weeks of training at Largs Bay Army Camp. This was followed by further training at Daw Road Repatriation Hospital. While in Adelaide, Melva met her future husband, Len Guyatt, who was serving in the Royal Australian Navy. Before long, she was sent to an Army camp in Queensland and then boarded the Manora ship for Bougainville, New Guinea, in February 1945, stationed at the 2/1st Australian General Hospital.

Melva recalled working ten-hour night shifts nursing in the intensive care unit, caring for wounded soldiers. Penicillin had just started to be used, treating injuries and cases of jungle fever.

On one occasion, Japanese forces broke through the perimeter and were repelled, an act contrary to the Red Cross Convention. Following this, armed soldiers guarded the nurses, and gunfire could often be heard ringing through the oppressive jungle heat.

Melva found the hardest part to be caring for soldiers who had become amputees and witnessing the strain on the faces of conscripted men returning from the jungle. Melva's cousins, Doug and Gordon, were killed in action. Doug, a squadron leader, was shot down in Salybia, while Gordon died when a Japanese prisoner of war ship was sunk in the Coral Sea. Another cousin on her mother side of the family died when the ship The Sydney was sunk by Japanese off the coast of WA.

After returning to Australia, Melva was posted to Brisbane Hospital. During Len's two weeks' leave, they married. Melva was discharged from the Army on 13 November 1945.

Melva and Len returned to live with family in Williamstown before learning about the soldier settlement scheme in the Riverland. They applied for the scheme, hoping for a peaceful life in the country, as Len had been deeply affected by his wartime experiences.

Melva was awarded the 1939/1945 Star, The Pacific Star, War Medal and Australian Service Medal for her contribution during the war.

Lest We Forget.

