British Red Cross & Voluntary Aid Detachment Service Record

90,000 volunteers worked at home and abroad during World War One. They provided vital aid to naval and military forces, caring for sick and wounded sailors and soldiers.

Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs)

County branches of the Red Cross had their own groups of volunteers called Voluntary Aid Detachments (often abbreviated to VAD). Voluntary Aid Detachment members themselves came to be known simply as 'VADs'. Made up of men and women, the VADs carried out a range of voluntary positions including nursing, transport duties, and the organisation of rest stations, working parties and auxiliary hospitals.

Training

At the outbreak of the war, many people were inspired to train to help the sick and wounded. Women needed to be taught first aid, home nursing and hygiene by approved medical practitioners. They also took classes in cookery. Men were trained in first aid in-the-field and stretcher bearing. Talented VADs could take specialist classes to become a masseuse or use an x-ray machine. VADs had to pass exams to receive their first aid and home nursing certificates.

Special, General, & Oversees Service

In February 1915 the War Office proposed that volunteers could help at Military Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) hospitals. These had previously been staffed exclusively by army nurses and orderlies from the RAMC. The first request from military hospitals for these "special service" VADs in England came early in 1915 and from France in May of the same year. These were quickly followed by demands from Malta and Egypt.   A "general service" section of the VADs was established in September 1915. As men went off to fight VADs were supplied in their place, carrying out their roles such as dispensers, clerks, cooks and storekeepers. By 1919, 11,000 men had been released for active service and replaced by women. VADs were sent abroad during both world wars to countries such as France, Italy and Russia. Male detachments were frequently sent to France to work as transport officers or orderlies in hospitals.

Working parties and work depots

On the outbreak of the First World War, local Red Cross working parties formed across the country with the co-operation of their surrounding villages. They organised the supply of hospital clothing including socks, shirts, blankets and belts for soldiers. They also made essential hospital equipment such as bandages, splints, swabs and clothing. Work depots were established in every major town to collate and despatch clothing from the working parties. Items were sent to Red Cross headquarters or directly to soldiers in auxiliary hospitals at home and abroad.

Air Raid Duty

VADs undertook air raid duty in London. The emblem of the Red Cross seemed to inspire a certain feeling of confidence in the crowds which gathered in the underground railway stations and other shelters. Armed with a respirator, the VADs performed first aid.

Rest Stations
At railway stations, VADs provided food and other supplies for soldiers arriving by ambulance train whilst they waited to be transported to local hospitals or to travel on to another destination.

Transport
The first ever motorised ambulances to transport wounded people were used in the First World War. *The Times* appealed for ambulance funds in October 1914, raising enough for us to buy 512 vehicles within three weeks. Male detachments were almost entirely in charge of transporting sick and wounded soldiers from ambulance trains or ships to local hospitals. They also ferried patients between hospitals. Male volunteers were also frequently sent to France to work as ambulance drivers, often coming under fire as they transported men away from the Front. Three hospital trains in France carried 461,844 patients throughout the war. Hospital ships and barges were also used to transport patients.

Women During The War: Female Volunteers
The war saw women entering the workforce in all sorts of different roles, ranging from medics and famers to teachers and bus conductors. Many women worked as VADs. As the number of injured servicemen rose, a call was made for women to join the medical profession. Medical degrees were opened up to women for the first time. Our VADs carried out duties that were less technical, but no less important, than trained nurses. They organised and managed local auxiliary hospitals throughout Britain, caring for the large number of sick and wounded soldiers. Many were also deployed abroad to help in field hospitals.

Surname	Given Names	Title/Status
Bowyer	Elsie	Miss
Residence		
Town	**Abode**	
Trowbridge	Western House	
Service Record		
Commenced	**Ended**	**Part Time**
May 1915	April 1919	1896 hours Feb 1916 – Feb 1919 War Hosp. Supply Depot Trowbridge
Particulars of Duties		
Wardwork, Cooking at V.A.D. Hospital, Trowbridge		
Volunteer Jurisdiction		
Wilts 42		
Additional Information		
May 1915-April 1919 V.A.D. Hosp., Trowbridge, Wilts. Feb 1916 – Feb 1919 War Hosp. Supply Depot Trowbridge Wilts. Honours awarded: none V.W. Badge		
Person Responsible for Volunteer		
Surname	**Given Names**	**Position**