

HEROIC NURSES.

Pneumonic Influenza Victims.

(By M. S. Rossiter.)

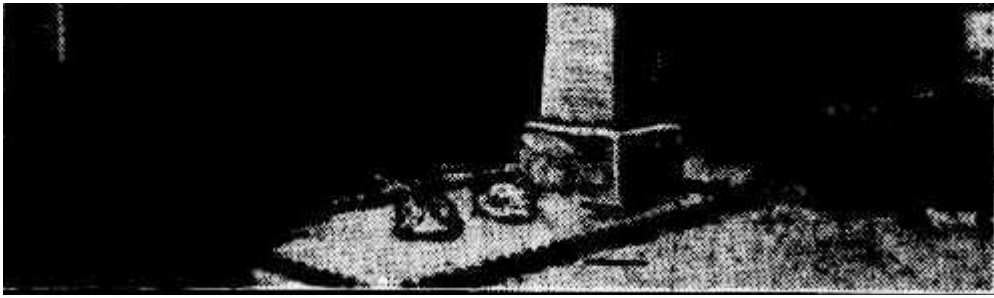
On Anzac Day when our thoughts turn to those whose memories we honour, how many men or women think of a tiny cemetery hidden in the bush at Woodman's Point, where are a score of graves of men and women who died actually "on active service."

The story of the nursing sisters buried at the quarantine station, simply told in a letter from Lieut.-Colonel P. M. McFarlane, writing from the Victoria Barracks in 1919: "It is desired to bring to notice the magnificent self-sacrifice of the nurses doing duty at the Fremantle (W.A.) Quarantine Station, particularly those who volunteered from the troopship Wyreema, which was recalled from Cape Town owing to the signing of the armistice. I was officer commanding troops on the ship referred to. She carried a detachment of 40 Australian Navy nursing sisters as reinforcements for Salonika. The troopship Boonah was two days behind us and we picked up her wireless messages nightly, detailing the daily increasing number of men suffering from pneumonic influenza. The West Australian Commandant asked me to land 20 nursing sisters to help nurse the Boonah patients at the quarantine station. Volunteers were called for, and there was not only a ready response, but so many offered that it was necessary to place the names in a hat and draw the 20 required. They knew perfectly well the enormous risk they were taking. Yet they were eager to undertake the work, and those whose names were not drawn were disappointed.

The Supreme Sacrifices.

"They commenced duty on December 10 at Woodman's Point quarantine station. Three of them have already made the supreme sacrifice, whilst 12 others contracted the disease and are still suffering from its effects. In a letter recently published from Chaplain Rev. J. A. Ford, of the Boonah, we have been told of the





The monument on Sister McKane's grave at the quarantine station at Woodman's Point.

tenderness and attention of these nurses to the stricken men.

"To me this striking case of courage and devotion to duty equals the action of a body of soldiers ordered to go over the top in trench warfare, the casualties being equivalent to those sustained in such an action, viz., three killed and twelve wounded out of a detachment of 20. I count it an exceptional honour to have been associated with such a gallant band of sisters, and would lay my tribute of praise at the graves of those who have fallen."

The three nurses mentioned in the foregoing letter were Sister Rosa O'Kane, Nurse Hilda Williams and Nurse Ridgeway. Later a fourth nurse succumbed. A touching picture is conveyed in a letter from one of the quarantine sisters, describing the burial of Sister O'Kane:—"Between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. on a beautiful moonlight night," writes Sister Morris, "four sailors carried the body (wrapped in a winding sheet of the Union Jack) to the mortuary out in the scrub. Later in the day the burial took place at the quarantine station. The nurses made little wreaths from West Australian wild flowers, which were placed on the coffin with the Union Jack. I did not leave the graveside till the 'Last Post' was sounded."

Over Sister O'Kane's grave is a granite column erected by her friends in Queensland and upon the other nurses' graves, as well as on the 17 or 18 graves of the soldier victims, are the simple white crosses which mark our soldiers' graves the world over. The men buried here are from the Eastern States and New Zealand.

Let us, then, on Anzac Day, think for a moment of that lonely little cemetery in the bush and those white sanded graves lying in the sunlight in the sound of the murmuring sea.