

Embargoed until Friday, 22 April 2022



Tribute to war nurse and hospital trail blazer

A plaque commemorating the life of World War Two nurse Eliza Daisy Cargo has been rediscovered on a construction site at North Shore Hospital and returned to a place of honour in time for ANZAC Day.

Eliza, also known as Elvie, was the first matron at the North Shore Obstetric Hospital that opened in 1958 and stayed in the role until 1964.

The original block she worked in was demolished last year to make way for construction of Tōtara Haumarū – a new four-storey hospital building due to open in 2023.

The plaque was placed in the adjoining grounds by staff nearly 60 years ago but appears to have become obscured by vegetation over the decades.

It was recovered by contractors during the demolition earthworks and unveiled today in its new location – a garden for patients, staff and members of the public to enjoy on the shore of Lake Pupuke.

The unveiling was observed by a very small number of hospital staff this morning – in keeping with COVID-19 safety precautions. Representatives from the Birkenhead RSA also attended as did two former colleagues who worked with Matron Cargo in 1958 and a family member.

“Eliza played a prominent role in the history of North Shore Hospital,” Waitematā DHB Director of Midwifery Emma Farmer says. “We are also very conscious of her years in the New Zealand Army Nursing Service where she and her colleagues frequently risked their lives to help others during World War Two.

“As such, it seemed fitting to unveil the plaque in time for ANZAC Day.”

Eliza was born in 1909 and is believed to have spent the first years of her life in Manurewa. She completed her nursing training at Auckland Hospital around 1937 and served with the New Zealand Army

Service in Italy, Egypt and New Caledonia during World War Two. She also served with J Force in Japan after the war.

Eliza was in charge of the Devonport Obstetric Hospital for nearly seven years after finishing her military service and also worked in a hospital at Pukekohe.

Her appointment to the new North Shore Obstetric Hospital was reported by media in 1958 and she oversaw the training of many student nurses during her seven years in the role.

Brenda Vujcich was among the young nurses who worked with Matron Cargo when the hospital first opened and was present at the unveiling today.

“She influenced us greatly in our early training and was a very efficient and gracious sister who we all admired,” she says.

Eliza married late in life to Harold James Thompson and the pair lived at Howick where she died on 16 December, 1976.

Photo: *Eliza Cargo, pictured in New Caledonia during World War Two.* Photo courtesy of Alexander Turnbull Library (high resolution image available on request)

Ends.

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