

Discovering Greta – Initial Objects

These articles along with Greta Towner's service record began the process of inquiry into the life of Sister Greta Norman Towner, a First World War nurse from Blackall in Central Western Queensland.

Sister Greta Towner arrives home in Blackall with her brother, Lieutenant Edgar Towner VC MC

Source: '[No heading].', *The Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central-Western Districts* (Barcaldine, Qld. : 1892 - 1922), 26 July 1919, p. 14, viewed 15 September, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page7586370>

Article text reproduced

Lieut. Towner, V.C., had a rousing reception in Blackall, his native town. The train was two hours late, but that was nothing unusual. Rather did it help to swell the crowd, until "there was a surging mass of people and many brilliantly lit motor cars." Lieut. Towner was accompanied by his sister, Nurse Towner. As he stepped down he was greeted in a strange but awesome silence. The crowd was too solemnly thrilled at the sight of the brave soldier to find their voices. It was not until a lorry was driven to a convenient spot under one of the lamps in the railway yard that the crowd found its voice and gave the V.C. hero a hearty welcome. The Mayor (Ald. A. F. Johnston) presided, and briefly welcomed the Lieut. Mr. C. M. Pegler spoke "with feeling and vehemence, and called for cheers for Lieut. Towner, which were given over and over again. In acknowledging the ovation. Lieut. Towner said:—Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, I must say that I am very proud at this really spontaneous welcome by the people of Blackall. As you know I am a native of Blackall, (Cheers.) I am very proud to be able to bring honor to your town. Though Blackall is not a very big city, we have many men from here who made names for themselves—not only a credit to themselves but also a credit to the town. I don't know what you would like me to say. —Lieut. Towner stopped suddenly and smiled his broadest smile, and remained in silence while the crowd urged "go on."—Mr. Pegler: Fighting is his game. (Cheers.)—At this stage several firework rockets were sent heavenwards and Lieut. Towner jocularly remarked he was pleased to see they were not a S.O.S. signal.—After more cheering Lieut. Towner was carried shoulder high to his car and with his sister motored to town.

Description of Lt Towner VC and Nurse Towner in Blackall, 1919. (Source: *The Western Champion* 26 July 1919)

Mems From Blackall

We abridge from "The Barcoo Independent," failing a letter from our correspondent, who continues non est:

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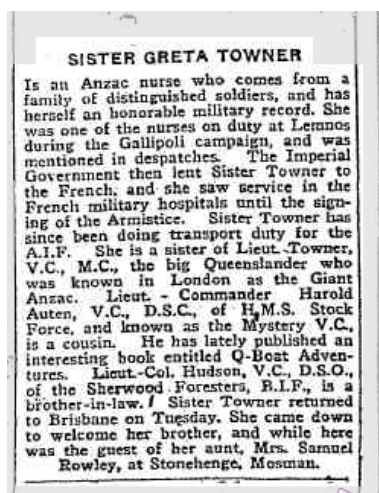
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Sister Greta Norman Towner and accompanying news article

Source: 'SISTER GRETA TOWNER.', *Sunday Times* (Sydney, NSW : 1895 - 1930), 29 June 1919, p. 11, viewed 15 September, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article123233563>



Article describing Sister Greta Towner's war service and those of male relatives (Source: *Sunday Times* (Sydney, NSW : 1895 - 1930), 29 June 1919)

Article text reproduced

SISTER GRETA TOWNER

Is an Anzac nurse who comes from a family of distinguished soldiers, and has herself an honourable military record. She was one of the nurses on duty at Lemnos during the Gallipoli campaign, and was mentioned in despatches. The Imperial Government then lent Sister Towner to the French, and she saw service in the French military hospitals until the signing of the Armistice. Sister Towner has since been doing transport duty for the A.I.F.

She is a sister of Lieut Towner, V.C, M.C., the big Queenslander who was known in London as the Giant Anzac. Lieut. Commander Harold Auten, V.C, D.S.C, of H.M.S. Stock Force, and known as the Mystery V.C, is a cousin. He has lately published an interesting book entitled Q-Boat Adventures. Lieut-Col. Hudson, V.C, D.S.O., of the Sherwood - Foresters, B.I.F., 13 a brother-in-law.

Sister Towner returned to Brisbane on Tuesday. She came down to welcome her brother, and while here was the guest of her aunt, Mrs. Samuel Rowley, at Stonehenge, Mosman.

Comment on articles mentioning Greta Norman Towner

These two articles were the starting point for *Discovering Greta*. The articles were discovered during research into her brother, Major Edgar Thomas Towner VC MC FRGSA.

Starting with these and Greta Towner's war record researchers aimed to find sources of evidence to verify the information the *Sydney Sunday Times* article to develop an informed narrative of Greta Towner's service and in the process discovering Greta Towner, the individual.

Further searching in the National Library of Australia TROVE search engine revealed more newspaper references to her life.

Though her story is not yet complete... The mentioned in dispatches award (MID) has, at this time, not been verified with another source. The Australian War Memorial online records do not identify her with a MID and her medal set does not have the oak leaf indicative of a MID. This line of inquiry may not yet be fully exhausted as it may be that her war record is not complete. Perhaps family records that exist privately or a more thorough investigation into unit war diaries or official records not yet made available online may verify the newspaper report of her being mentioned in dispatches.

In addition, no supporting evidence of Sister Towner working French military hospitals has materialised, though her war record clearly evidences her serving Australian hospitals at Rouen, France. Research into her brother, Major Towner VC MC FRGSA revealed references to their mother Greta Towner (nee Herley) teaching her children French, however, verification of this would also require further research, especially into her education in Rockhampton. Perhaps with verifying her

French language education and an investigation into French Military Hospital records more may become known on her possible service in French Military Hospitals

Further historical inquiry and verification into the familial link with Harold Auten VC DSC Lieutenant-Colonel Hudson VC DSO was not pursued by the researchers, though warrants consideration in the future. If verified, it would indeed make for a distinguished family record of military service.

By Avril Fazel