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**WORLD WAR ONE  
COMMEMORATION PROJECT**

**NELSON NURSES of WORLD WAR ONE**

**Biography of Ethel Watkins TAYLOR  
NZ Army Nursing Service number 22/47**

**Full Name:** Ethel Watkins TAYLOR  
**Birth:** 17 March 1882<sup>1</sup>/1880<sup>2</sup> Onehunga  
**Marriage:** 5 July 1921 to Albert PRITCHARD of Manutuke  
**Death:** 19 July 1960<sup>3</sup>/1964<sup>4</sup> at Gisborne



Compiled & Copied by: Cheryl Camahan from  
NZ Biography vol. 5, 2000 by Marie E. Burgess  
Date Completed: 2013



Ethel PRITCHARD

<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/en/photograph/2772/nurse-ethel-pritchard-photographed-while-serving-with-the-new-zealand-army-nursing>

[Nurse Ethel Pritchard, photographed while serving with the New Zealand Army Nursing Service during the First World War](#)

## Ethel WATKINS

### Chronology

1880	Born Onehunga
1910	Registered as a nurse no. 971
1911-1915	Christchurch Hospital & private nursing
06 April 1915	Attested from Nelson NZANS
08 April 1915	Embarked on <i>Rotorua</i>
1915	No 15 General Hospital in Alexandria, Egypt NZGH Hornchurch Hospital No.1 NZGH Brockenhurst, Hampshire, England
1919	Back in NZ, native health nurse near Gisborne, NZ
22 June 1922 <sup>5</sup>	Discharged from NZ Army Nursing Service
1949	MBE
19 July 1964	died at Gisborne

Adapted from a biography written by Marie E. Burgess. 'Pritchard, Ethel', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012

[URL:http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p38/pritchard-ethel](http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p38/pritchard-ethel)

The reason Ethel is included with the Nelson Nurses is because her mother Mrs Major C.M.Taylor,<sup>6</sup> College Hill, was living in Nelson at the time of Ethel enlisting, also from Nelson. Her mother and step father both died in Nelson and are buried at Wakapuaka Cemetery, Nelson.

### Origins

Ethel Watkins [later Taylor] was born on 17 March 1880 in Onehunga, the daughter of Madeline [Magdaline] Ratahi Cochrane and her husband, Bazett [Barrett] Watkins, a millhand. Her mother was the grand-daughter of early Hokianga settler F. E. Maning and Moengaroa of Te Hikutu, a hapu of Nga Puhi. Her parents divorced, and after her mother's remarriage in 1902 she was known as Ethel Watkins Taylor.

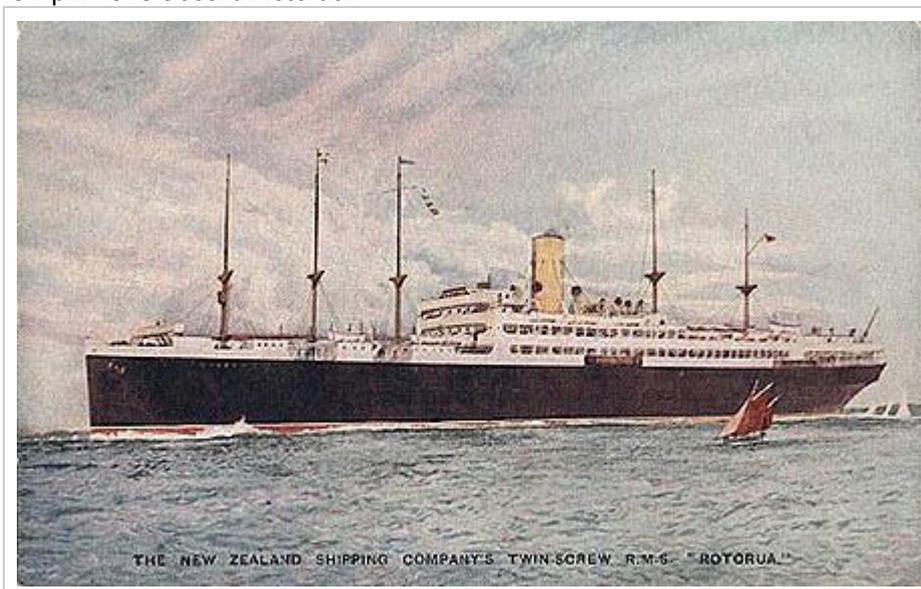
### Nursing Service

Ethel began her nursing career in her mid 20s. She started with midwifery, completing her training in Wellington in 1906 and beginning nursing training at Hawera Hospital. Although she did not have the benefit of a tutor she passed her primary examination with honours then went on to complete her training at Christchurch Hospital, where she passed the final examination in 1910, again with honours.

As a registered nurse Taylor moved to Gisborne, where she was a sister at Cook Hospital for two years.

### Military Service

On the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Ethel volunteer her services enlisting at Nelson, where her next of kin was recorded as Mrs Major C M Taylor College Hill Nelson. She was selected as one of the first 50 nurses to serve overseas with the New Zealand Army Nursing Service. Ethel's first day of military service in NZ Army Nursing Service was 6 April 1915 and after a hurried uniform fit out, the nurses left on 8 April 1915 aboard *Rotorua*.



### TSS Rotorua

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Ethel Taylor was first stationed at No 15 General Hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. She supervised nine orderlies, tending some 240 patients housed in tents. No. 15th General was the first of the new hospitals to be opened by the Imperial authorities on the outbreak of hostilities in the Dardanelles. It was in an Egyptian Government school, and the large classroom dormitories, and kitchen made it easily adaptable as a hospital. A great deal had been done in fitting up operating theatres, X-ray rooms and administration offices. A separate building was used for officers and a large number of patients were in tents and marquees."

The arrival of big convoys of casualties from Gallipoli meant doing up to 190 dressings a day. Dysentery, diarrhoea and typhoid fever were common, and there were terrible gunshot wounds. But worst of all were the cases of frostbite: 'With a gunshot wound one felt that something could be done, but some of the frost bites were hopeless'. By the end of February 1916 she had tended 3,500 patients. Ethel also served on hospital ships and in army hospitals in England, firstly the convalescent unit at Hornchurch and then No. 1 NZGH, Brockenhurst.



No. 1 NZGH, Brockenhurst

While in London she joined the Legion of Frontiersmen, in which she maintained a lifelong interest. She was awarded the 1914/15 Star, Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

### Post War

Back in New Zealand by 1919, Ethel was appointed native health nurse for the Te Karaka district [near Gisborne], where she spent two years. She soon became known for her willingness to turn out at any time to attend those in need. She travelled to outlying areas by horseback, by horse and gig, and later by car.

She married Albert Pritchard [of Manutuke Ed], a farm manager, at Napier on 5 July 1921. A son born in 1924 died at six days old and an adopted son was killed in an accident in 1951.

*Sister Ethel Watkins-Taylor, who was one of the first 50 nurses leaving for active service, and who since her return has been Native Health nurse at Te Karaka, was married on July 5th, at Napier, to Mr. Albert Pritchard M.M., of the Otago Mounted Rifles. Mrs.Pritchard's home will be about eight miles from Te Karaka.<sup>7</sup>*

*Sister Ethel Watkins-Taylor, late N.Z.- A.N.S., and since her return from active service native health nurse at Te Karaka, near Gisborne, was married on July 5th to Mr.Pritchard Maddren, near Te Karaka<sup>8</sup>*

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As a result of her marriage, Ethel resigned as district nurse. She was farewelled by the local community, with presentations from grateful settlers, returned servicemen and the Legion of Frontiersmen. She continued to provide nursing services to Maori at two nearby settlements and to other residents in the community.

*Mrs. Pritchard (Sister Ethel Taylor, late N.Z.A.N.S.) writes that her husband is now manager of the Te Hau station, Whatatutu, Poverty Bay. There are two Maori pahs near, and she visits the Maoris when they are ill and gets them to carry out treatment just as she did when a District Health nurse<sup>9</sup>.*

A social function was held to honour her at the Whatatutu Hall in 1926 when residents paid tribute to her self-sacrifice in attending accidents and illnesses at any time of the day or night without accepting any payment. They presented her with a cabinet gramophone and records and two easy chairs.

*Mrs. Pritchard, who was received with great applause, and who was obviously overcome by the warmth of the reception, said that she had merely done what anyone with her training would have done, and her work in the district had been a very real pleasure to her. It would have been impossible for her to render assistance on many occasions if it had not been for the fact that Mr. J. King was always ready at any time of the day or night to take a car out to the scene of the accident. She thanked them all for the very handsome gifts they had given her, and hoped that she would always be able to be of some use to the district.<sup>10</sup>*

After moving to Matawai in 1928, Pritchard served the community for around 20 years. In 1949 she was appointed an MBE and awarded a long-service medal from the Legion of Frontiersmen. There were several sawmills operating in the Matawai–Motu area during this time and she was often called to attend severe injuries.

### The Practical Train

A sturdy vehicle was needed to cope with the back-country roads and her first car was a six-cylinder, brick-red Chevrolet with a door in the back for stretchers. But where practical she travelled by train, which she used to transport patients needing hospital care the 3½-hour journey into Gisborne.

Saturday, March 14 1959 was the running of the last scheduled freight train on the Moutohora branch line, now closed. The train left Gisborne at 8 a.m., arrived at Moutohora at 11.30, left again at 12.15, and was back in Gisborne by 3.30 p.m. Small groups of people, mainly women and children, gathered at level crossings and stations, and a few enthusiasts travelled on the train or followed its course by car, but in general the line, and with it Gisborne's hopes of a through railway connection with Auckland, died a quiet death. Sister Ethel Pritchard was one of those who was present at Gisborne station to welcome the train home again. She is seen here with Mr Prentice, the guard. Sister Pritchard was district nurse at Matawai from 1921 to 1949, and travelled on the train frequently in the days when passenger traffic was at its peak. She recalled with gratitude the help which the railway men always gave in cases of accident or sickness in the district.



**Ethel with train Guard and The Train at Moutohora**

Ethel Pritchard was actively involved in a number of organisations, including two years as president of the Matawai–Motu branch of the RSA. She was a foundation member of the Country Women's Institute of New Zealand (Matawai) and of the local children's health camp organisation, and belonged to the Victoria

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League, the National Council of Women of New Zealand, the Women's Division Federated Farmers of New Zealand, and the St John Ambulance Brigade. She was elected to the Cook Hospital Board in 1950, and at her retirement in 1956 received tributes for her work as a district nurse and for her service as a board member.

Ethel died at Gisborne on 19 July 1964, aged 84 years, survived by her husband. Forthright, and at times dogmatic and domineering, she was nevertheless much admired for her long and devoted service as a district nurse and for her contribution to many community organisations.

Ethel was laid to rest 21 July 1964 at Taruheru Cemetery Gisborne.



Ethel Pritchard's Memorial Plaque

### Sources

the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand  
Papers Past web site [www.paperspast.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.govt.nz)  
Kai Tiaki NZ Nursing Journal  
National Archives, Wellington, NZ [www.archway.archives.govt.nz/](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz/)

[www.aucklandmuseum.com/130/cenotaph-database](http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/130/cenotaph-database)  
[www.bdmhistoricalrecords.diagovt.nz](http://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.diagovt.nz)  
[www.nzans.org](http://www.nzans.org)

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> nzans.org Sherayl McNabb Military Nurse historian

<sup>2</sup> Cenotaph web page

<sup>3</sup> nzans.org Sherayl McNabb Military Nurse historian

<sup>4</sup> Biography by Marie E. Burgess, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand,

<sup>5</sup> War file final discharge 22 June 1919. Archives Reference AABK 18805 W555 0112307.

<sup>6</sup> 1925 Nelson Electoral Roll. NZSG Nelson branch library Ancestors Attic, Nelson. Her mother Madgeline Ratahi "Rangimarie", Waimea Road, Nelson a widow. Also at this address was Phyllis Hermione Taylor "Rangimarie" Waimea Road, Nelson a spinster and Ratahi Lane Taylor "Rangimarie" Waimea Road, Nelson a spinster. Madgeline Ratahie Watkins married Colin McKenzie Taylor 1902, he died in Nelson 6 May 1904 aged 60 and is buried Wakapuaka Cemetery, Nelson. Colin Taylor late Lieutenant in H.M. 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment and Major in NZ permanent artillery. Ref. headstone transcription. Madgeline died 21 August 1933 and is buried next to her husband Colin Taylor.

<sup>7</sup> Kai Tiaki : the journal of the nurses of New Zealand, Volume XIV, Issue 3, July 1921, Page 161

<sup>8</sup> Kai Tiaki : the journal of the nurses of New Zealand, Volume XIV, Issue 4, October 1921, Page 213

<sup>9</sup> Kai Tiaki : the journal of the nurses of New Zealand, Volume XVI, Issue 4, October 1923, Page 189

<sup>10</sup> Kai Tiaki : the journal of the nurses of New Zealand, Volume XV, Issue 3, July 1926, Page 132