Soon after the start of the First World War, hundreds of British women volunteered their expertise, as physicians, nurses, and in some cases simply as civilians who wanted to help, to the British War Office. The War Office declined their offer, saying it was too dangerous. The women were told they could be of use taking over the duties of men who had gone to the front, but their skills, intelligence and energy were not required at the front lines.

This did not deter these women. They went on their own. One country which benefited greatly from their persistence was Serbia. Many medical women joined established groups such as the Serbian Relief Fund units or the Scottish Women’s Hospital units set up by Scottish physician Dr. Elsie Inglis. Other, smaller, organized units included those which came to be known by the names of their chief physician or their administrators, including Mrs. Stobart’s Unit, Lady Paget’s Unit or The Berry Mission. Many of these women wrote their own accounts of their service.

Still other women went over independently. Dr. Dorothea Clara Maude (1879-1959) was just such a woman. Born near Oxford, educated at University of Oxford and Trinity College, Dublin and trained at London’s Royal Free Hospital, she left her Oxford practice in July 1915 to join her first field unit in northern Serbia.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a nation, Serbia had regained its independence from five centuries of Turkish rule only in 1878. By 1914, Serbia was a landlocked nation, bordered by a most powerful neighbour, Austro-Hungary, to the north, and otherwise surrounded by Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Roumania. In fact, some of these boundaries were newly defined as a consequence of the Balkan Wars, fought by the Serbs in 1912 and 1913. When, on 28 June 1914, 19-year-old Serbian student Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, an act which precipitated World War I, the Serbs had already suffered privations and losses due to war. The Serbs went to battle with a medical staff seriously depleted by previous conflicts and the situation would only become worse, due to starvation, disease and the 1915 Serbian retreat.

WAR, THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN THE UK AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN PHYSICIANS

Women had been campaigning for the right to vote for years when World War I broke out. Women professionals,
including physicians, had a particular role to play in both the suffrage movement as well as the war effort. By 1915, there were approximately one thousand qualified medical women in Britain. When many of these women offered their services to the War Office and were refused, they organized themselves, raised funds, gathered together supplies and personnel and went to Serbia, Salonika, Roumania, Russia, Corsica as well as to France and Belgium. Although some units, such as those of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, were staffed entirely by women, other units had women working alongside male physicians and surgeons. At times, there was resistance from their male colleagues, particularly within the Royal Army Medical Corps units. Women were seen as challenging male physicians even during the war. As historian Susan Grayzel explains, female nurses were seen as aiding the military and the nation but not challenging conventional gender roles the way women physicians did. By 1916, the War Office had relented and employed women both as Civil Medical Practitioners – employed mostly part-time in military or naval hospitals, orthopaedic clinics or on recruiting boards at home – or as civilian officers on yearly contracts. But despite this new opportunity, women who volunteered to serve in the field were not paid as well as men, they were not given uniforms, military rank or commissions and had no right to draw ration allowance.

**DOROTHEA CLARA MAUDE (1879-1959)**

Dorothea Maude was born in 1879, the middle of five girls of an Anglo/Irish family, in Newbury, near Oxford, England. One of the pivotal events in her life was her mother’s death when Dorothea was ten years old. She and her sisters were raised by their father, an equerry to the King, and a series of governesses. After completing her schooling at Cheltenham Ladies College in 1897, Maude went up to Oxford’s Somerville College to read science. Although she graduated first in her class — the only woman reading science — she was not awarded her degree because she was a woman. Despite this, like many of her male classmates, Maude went on to study medicine at London’s Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine for Women. She also earned a Master’s degree at Trinity College, Dublin before returning to the U.K. for a series of locum positions and, finally, established her practice in Oxford’s city centre in the first decade of the twentieth century. She was the first in her family to study medicine.

Maude travelled, first to Antwerp in the autumn of 1914, to join a Belgian Field Hospital. In January 1915, when the front shifted, she went as the only female physician to join a Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) unit in France. Later, she went on to set up the first Maude Hospital for battle casualties with her uncle, Alwyne Maude, in a converted amusement hall in Dunkirk. She left the Dunkirk Maude hospital that spring to return to England.

**SERBIA, JULY 1915**

On 6 July 1915, Maude made her third expedition of the war, this time travelling to Serbia. She offered her services to the Serbian Relief group and was recruited into the Number 5 Unit of the Second British Farmers’ Ambulance as an anaesthetist and assistant surgeon. Her destination was a small town in northern Serbia, Požarevac, where another woman physician, Dr. Milne Henry, was posted with her doctor husband. To prepare, Maude and her travelling companions spent the journey reading up on, and inoculating each other against diseases new to them and rampant in Serbia, including typhus, smallpox, malaria, and relapsing fever, and other potential dangers such as plague and cholera. The Serbian offensive, which was the reason for Maude being sent to northern Serbia, had been delayed because of the Russian retreat. In fact, most of her work in and around Požarevac would be combatting disease instead of treating battle casualties. The field hospital staff included: four doctors, sixteen nurses, female orderlies including a young Canadian woman engineer, Josephine Whitehead, who would become Maude’s best friend in Serbia, three “very good lady cooks” and “several other useless encumbrances.”

One of the challenges faced by Maude and her British colleagues was based in the cultural differences between Serbia and England, particularly as they impacted on the declining health of the population. For example, in her diary, Maude wrote: “These people are full of superstition. One of our nurses paid some attention to a pretty child in the village. That night it had a pain in its tummy. The mother was certain the nurse had used the ‘evil eye’ and came up to
the hospital to demand redress. She required some of the nurse’s spittle to apply to the child’s face. The nurse, being modern trained, was scandalised at such treatment and refused it. Fortunately, the pain departed of itself.”

As word of the new fully staffed medical facility reached further afield, the hospital grew. Maude wrote how, “The outpatients department flourishes exceedingly and is now the largest. The patients are very grateful and bring large maize cakes to show their thanks. There are no Serb doctors, except those in the hospital for miles round, most having been killed off.” An excellent horsewoman, Maude divided her time between outpatients in Požarevac and riding out three miles to another camp hospital to administer anaesthetics.

In September 1915, Maude left the field hospital to accompany nurses sick with typhoid back to Britain. There had been some concern, with the political situation in Serbia becoming more heated, that unless she and the nurses left Serbia quickly, they might be trapped by an Austro-Hungarian offensive. While the nurses regained enough strength to travel, Maude spent three weeks working in fever wards in Belgrade. At the same time she also wrote a pamphlet on tuberculosis, in which she advocated fresh air, which was translated into and published in Serbian. On 4 October 1915, Maude and the nurses departed for the UK on the **Yarra**, arriving in England on 27 October 1915.

### RETURNING TO SERVE SERBIANS IN EXILE

In accompanying the sick nurses back to England, Maude missed the great Serbian army retreat over the mountains to Albania and the coast. The Serbs who survived the retreat were evacuated to Corfu, which was under French military rule. By early 1916, there were 64,000 sick and wounded in Corfu, and exiled Serbs were dying at the rate of one hundred each day, mostly from starvation and illness. Maude’s hospital unit in Požarevac had been captured by the Austrians and Maude had returned to her practice in Oxford. She writes: “Everyone who ever worked for the Serbs became devoted to them. I was no exception and I was aching to return to their succour. Uncle Alwyne was aching to do the same thing and he persuaded a body named the Wounded Allies that he was just the man for the job of starting and running a hospital for them in Corfu. For starting it he certainly was: for running it, not so good. Anyway it was my only chance and I again joined up with him ...

So Maude made her fourth crossing of the English Channel to journey to Corfu. Alwyne Maude had decided to locate the Second Maude Hospital on the grounds of the Villa San Stefano, high above sea level, twelve miles from Corfu town. He had stables and cowsheds converted into medical wards and had two large barrackements constructed as well as marquee tents set up for fever patients.

The exiled Serbs continued to struggle to survive. As Maude writes, “Every day now transports take away Serbs to Salonika. They are personally conducted by torpedo destroyer boats, but they expect to lose fully ten percent by submarines on route. … Poor broken men, … looking twice their age, worn to the bone. The French are cleaning them out of their hospital fast now, having no use for men who will never again make soldiers. … Some of my Serbs are dying because they do not wish any more to live. … Many are quite incurable and must slowly die of inanition because they can never digest the simplest food. An overdose of morphia would be the kindest treatment for them and the many, many hopeless [tuberculose] ones. … How many poor Serbs will be left to inhabit Serbia?”

### SALONIKA

The next phase of Maude’s time abroad began on 14 September 1916 when the Maude Hospital was transferred to Salonika. Salonika, Maude writes, now had Russians, Italians and Portuguese and was more cosmopolitan than ever. Unfortunately, it was also a “plague ridden haunt” full of malaria and dysentery. Despite remaining largely healthy during her time in Serbia and Corfu, Maude fell ill of malaria within two weeks of arriving in Salonika. She recovered, post-quinine treatment, after ten days.

Maude writes how the exiled Serb troops now numbered 120,000 with forty to fifty percent out of action due to disease or malnutrition. Morale was poor – the Serbs were
bitter about lack of Allied support. As Maude writes, the Serbs felt they were left to do all the fighting, suffer all the losses and pay for everything the French did – the French, in turn, saw Serbs as “food for cannon”. She cites the case of the 18th Regiment, Danube Division which numbered 16,000 strong in October 1916; by January 1917, their ranks had been reduced to just three hundred.

In mid-October 1916, Maude was told to leave the Villa and open a hospital 60 miles north of Salonika in Vodena. This new hospital, which would be Maude’s last, was in a large house, filled with lice and bugs – it had previously been used as a typhus hospital.

Maude’s diaries are filled with references to available facilities, conditions, and personal reminiscences of specific cases, such as: “A poor old man, a walking skeleton, has come to hospital with a fat little boy of five, his grandson. They have escaped … come through the lines and often lived for days in cellars but this old man has cared for the little chap well. He is as fat as butter. The old man will die of TB [tuberculosis] from his privations, but he seems content to go, having accomplished his end, and trusts us implicitly to look after the child. It is pathetic to see the faces of the men in the wards who have children of their own in Serbia when they see this baby. They just gloat over him.”

Maude had developed a deep and abiding affection for the Serbian people. In her diary, preparing to depart for Britain, she wrote: “Leave Vodena with many, many regrets for the dear Serbs whom I can never forget… All the possible patients and all the Serb soldiers whom we had brought from Corfu were lined up to say goodbye. Shook hands with all latter, who saluted and shouted ‘Spogum’ (goodbye) in unison. It was a dreadful moment.”

On 30 April 1917, Maude sailed for the UK. Maude would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia. She and her husband, Lt. Hugh Nasmyth, a member of the British Army Service Corps who would never return to Serbia.

The final word on Dr. Maude is reserved for her uncle, Alwyne Maude, with whom she worked in France, Belgium 1959.

REFERENCES

1. Fedunkw is based in Toronto, Canada, email: fedunkw@hotmail.com. This research began as a project for one of the newly established Wellcome Trust public outreach awards which resulted in a three-act historical play titled The Influence of Beauty. This drama had its debut as a dramatic reading in February 2006 at Osler-McGovern House, in Oxford, under the auspices of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine (WUHMO) at Oxford, where I held a post-doctoral fellowship from 2001 to 2003. The play had its Canadian debut reading at York University in May 2006. I would like to thank the Wellcome Trust and WUHMO for their support and gratefully acknowledge Mr James Nasmyth, for allowing me to use material from Dr Maude’s diaries and personal papers. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the assistance and support of Mrs Rosemary Young.

2. The only secondary source which deals solely with women physicians who served in Serbia is Monica Krippner’s The Quality of Mercy: Women at War, Serbia 1915-1918, (London: David & Charles, 1980).

3. Like the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, the Serbian Relief Fund was set up in 1914 to raise money for Serbian relief, part of which included outfitting and staffing field hospital units that would be sent specifically to Serbia.

4. The Scottish Women’s Hospitals (SWH) were originally set up with monies from the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and the American Red Cross. The SWH subsequently raised funds and personnel for their field units through branches in Britain, Canada, India, Hong Kong, Australia and Africa. Inglis’ original goal was to raise £20,000. By war’s end, the SWH had raised close to £450,000, equivalent to more than $9 million (Cdn.) today. The earliest history of the SWH was edited by Inglis’ sister, McLaren, Eava Shaw, ed. A History of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals. (London: Holdred & Stoughton, 1919).

5. Mabel A. St. Clair Stobart, an English journalist, had been to Serbia before with the Scottish Women’s Hospitals (SWH) on a trip to Serbia 1916; E.P. Stebbing, The Scottish Women’s Hospitals (SWH) were originally set up with monies from the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and the American Red Cross. The SWH subsequently raised funds and personnel for their field units through branches in Britain, Canada, India, Hong Kong, Australia and Africa. Inglis’ original goal was to raise £20,000. By war’s end, the SWH had raised close to £450,000, equivalent to more than $9 million (Cdn.) today. The earliest history of the SWH was edited by Inglis’ sister, McLaren, Eava Shaw, ed. A History of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals. (London: Holdred & Stoughton, 1919). More recently there is Leah Leneman’s monograph, In The Service of Life: The Story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women’s Hospitals. (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1994). There are also three autobiographies of Inglis: Frances Balfour, Dr Elsie Inglis. (London: Holdred & Stoughton, 1918); Margot Lawrence, Shadow of Swords: A Biography of Elsie Inglis. (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), and Leneman, Elsie Inglis: Founder of Battlefield Hospitals Run Entirely by Women. (Edinburgh: NMS Publishing, 1998).

5. Mabel A. St. Clair Stobart, an English journalist, had been to Serbia before with her Women’s Convoy Corps during the Balkan War of 1912. In 1915, she became famous for leading her Serbian field hospital unit, for which she had served as administrator, through the mountains to the coast during the Serbian retreat. Her unit was the only one to make the arduous journey with no losses to illness or desertion. Her account of this is described in The Flaming Sword in Serbia and Elsewhere. (London: Holdred & Stoughton, 1916). Other personal accounts of their service in Serbia include: James Berry et al, The Story of a Red Cross Unit in Serbia. (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1916); Caroline Matthews, Experiences of a Woman Doctor in Serbia. (London: Mills & Boon, 1916); E.P. Stebbing, At the Serbian Front in Macedonia. (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1917); and I. Emslie Hutton, With a Women’s Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928). There is also Barbara McLaren’s, Women of the War. (London: Holdred & Stoughton, 1917) which profiles a number of women in various roles, including Inglis and the Paget sisters as well as the accounts of women who served as nurses, cooks and orderlies alongside the female physicians such as Isabel Ross, Little Grey Partridge: First World War Diary of Isabel Ross Who Served With the Scottish Women’s Hospital Unit in Serbia. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988).

6. In fact, it took until 1918 for women over thirty to get to vote in the UK. All British women, irrespective of age, could vote only in 1928. This was considerably later than many other countries including Australia, New Zealand and Norway.

7. In 1916, existing local associations of registered medical women in Britain joined together to form the Medical Women’s Federation (MWF). The first local association was set up in London in 1879 and was followed by groups in Manchester (1907), Liverpool (1909), Northern region (1911), and Leeds (1912). Other local groups formed during World War I included: Birmingham, Ireland, Northeastern England, Yorkshire, Scottish Eastern and Scottish Western. The MWF is still in existence with headquarters in Tavistock Square, London.

8. By December 1914, the RAMC had 5,144 male doctors serving in various capacities. This number more than doubled to 12,720 by January 1918.

9. Susan R. Grayzel, Women and the First World War. (London: Longman, 2002), p. 37. Grayzel points out that wartime propaganda often showed nurses helping in the field as examples of a role suitable for women, in the spirit of the work done by Florence Nightengale during the Crimean war. Grayzel’s monograph deals with women, including nurses, orderlies and physicians, serving during the First World War. David Mitchell’s Monstrous Regiment: The Story of the

10. As Dr Letitia Fairfield points out in her article, “Medical Women in the Forces: Part I – Women Doctors in the British Forces, 1914-1918 War”, Medical Women’s Federation anniversary booklet, (London, 1967, pp. 99-102), eighty women physicians took up these yearly contracts, being paid 24 shillings per day, to serve in Malta and another twenty to serve in Egypt. Dame Louise McTroy, for example, served as a contract surgical specialist in Constantinople. Fairfield herself served as Woman Medical Director of the Women’s Royal Air Force unit set up in 1918. During World War II, Fairfield became the first woman advisor to the War Office with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

11. The first woman to train and qualify as a doctor in Britain was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in 1865. But almost immediately, medical schools reverted to the old system and closed their doors to women. The London Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine was the first women-only medical college set up in the UK in 1874 by Dr Sophia Jex-Blake. Jex-Blake was among the first women allowed to practice in England. Other early women physicians in England included Louisa Atkins, Frances Morgan, and Edith Pechey. All of these medical pioneers took their medical degrees in Bern, Paris or Zurich. By 1914, the Royal Free had expanded and had more than 300 female students including women from other countries in the British Empire such as India and Australia. Along with Dr Flora Murray, Garrett’s daughter, Louisa Garrett Anderson founded the Women’s Hospital Corps which was given permission by the British War Office in 1915 to set up a military hospital in London. The Endell Street Hospital, near Covent Garden, saw more than 26,000 patients until it was closed in 1919. Flora Murray also wrote an account of her wartime experiences, Women as Army Surgeons, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920). The Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine moved to a new site, near Hampstead, in 1974 and in 1998 merged with University College London to form a new school, the Royal Free and University College Medical School.

12. All of the quotations attributed to Dr Maude are taken from her Serbian war diaries, 1915-1917.

Author Biography
Having completed a postdoctoral fellowship at WUHMO, University of Oxford, Marianne Fedunkiw was awarded a Wellcome Trust Alchemy Award in 2004. She used this award to write an historical play, “The Influence of Beauty”, based upon the diaries of Dr. Maude. Fedunkiw’s other works include Rockefeller Foundation Funding and Medical Education in Toronto, Montreal and Halifax (2005) and articles about motion pictures as health propaganda tools.