



Brisbane Women's Club
Est 1908

Anzac Day Speech

Sunday 25th April, 2010

By Bronwyn Conway, President of the Brisbane Women's Club

Welcome everyone.

It is because we have such great pride in the Australian women who have served our country in the past that we gather together today. We want to acknowledge those who have given so much in so many world conflicts.

From the records we know that

60 nurses went to the Boer War – many at their own expense!
2,139 women served during WW1. 29 of those died on active service.
3,477 women served during WW2. 71 lost their lives
And the numbers continue to grow.

This shows us that for centuries women have stood tall in the war zones of the world, mostly as administrators; intelligence officers, cryptanalysts, drivers; cooks; wireless telegraphists or nurses on hospital ships and transports. Traditionally there was a gender based boundary which denied women the right to be soldiers, sailors or airmen but which didn't stop our women from going to war. There are now few jobs within the armed services that are not open to women.

I get the sense that the women in those roles did not see themselves as anything other than members of the armed forces. They considered themselves "soldiers:

This is evidenced by a letter written by Sister Narrelle Hobbs who was with the Australian forces at Gallipoli. She wrote:

I've been a soldier now for nearly three years, and please God I will go right to the end...if anything happened, and I too passed out, well, there would be no finer way, and no way in which I would be happier, than to lay down one's life for the men who have given everything.

Sister Hobbs died five months after writing this letter, in May 1918.

Recognition of women's war service with the military has not always been extended to them however there are 3 women who served in WW1 that were recognised and who I'd like to mention. These three received the first Military Medals won by Australian Nurses in the service.



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Sister Clare Deacon, and Sister Dorothy Gwendolen Cawood served at Mena throughout the Gallipoli campaign. Sister Alice Ross-King served throughout the Somme offensive. From these battles they travelled to various locations, finally meeting at the 2nd Australian Casualty Clearing Station at Armentieres, France. On the 22nd July 1917 the station was bombed and these 3 remarkable women risked their lives to rescue patients trapped in the burning buildings. They were awarded Military medals for their "coolness and devotion to duty".

There are countless other stories of the bravery shown by Australian women in the face of the devastation that is war. It is important that we commemorate and honour the efforts of our servicewomen and the supreme sacrifice some made.

We are proud of those who served in the past and we are proud of those who serve us now.

I'd like to introduce Captain Tracey Watts and thank her for attending our celebration of the women who embody the spirit of ANZAC. Captain Watts stand as testament to the radical progression of women in all areas of the armed forces and will tell us more of the Anzac story.