

ANZAC Day Speech by Brian Trickey

Hi my name is Brian Trickey from the Sub Branch at the Gympie R.S.L.A. I served in the Australian Army for thirty years. I am very fortunate to have never gone to war. I have been invited here by your school today to talk about why we as a nation should never forget the brave men and women of our armed forces who laid down their lives so that you and others can enjoy a life free of hatred and oppression.

Just over one hundred years ago in 1914 a bullet from an assassin's gun in Sarajevo sparked a war that ignited the globe. Men and women from all walks of life, including our indigenous Australians, stepped up to enlist. Among some of the most dedicated to the war effort were our brave nurses led by Matron Grace Wilson. These nurses often put the lives of our wounded soldiers above their own safety. They worked extremely long hours and were often under-resourced, demanding of them very high levels of physical strength and efficiency. They lived in some of the harshest conditions that were often substandard and afforded little protection from the elements of the weather. A typical work load consisted of 1000 patients in a makeshift hospital with hundreds of tents attended by only one matron, fifteen sisters and thirty staff nurses.

When war broke out, public attitude towards women was "a woman's place was in the home," also expressed by the AIF's director of Medical Services Major General Neville Howse. The cream of Australian women soon proved the general wrong, as nurses, of the Australian Army Nursing Service rapidly won recognition as "Front-line Angles."

Matron Grace Wilson from South Brisbane joined the Australian Army Nursing Service in 1914 then transferred to the AIF in 1915. Grace's unit 3 Australian General Hospital was deployed to Lemnos Island, to deal with the greater than expected casualties from the Gallipoli campaign.

Grace with her 40 nurses were appalled with what confronted them at Lemnos, 150 men were dumped in error with no protection from the sun and no water. In the next three weeks hundreds more arrived. The nurses had little or no supplies including the lack of tents, morphine or medical equipment to speak of. Delivery of supplies was expected within a short time but they never arrived. Grace pleaded with her superiors for much needed supplies and assistance; however British High Command were not concerned with a colonial hospital run by colonials for colonials. Despite these conditions and the treatment of her superiors Grace led by example.

Within a month, Colonel Bertie Fetherstone Assistant Director General of Australian Army Medical Corps, visited Lemnos and he was appalled by the conditions and treatment of the nurses and threatened to pull out all Australian medical staff. Finally British High Command conceded the Gallipoli situation was hopeless and withdrew all forces in late December 1915. During this period her unit treated 7400 patients of whom only 143 died the lowest mortality rate of all hospitals on Lemnos. Grace received several honours and awards through-out her distinguished career including the Royal Red Cross, First Class and the Florence Nightingale medal.

Miss Wilson also served in WW2 as Matron-in Chief of Army Medical Services. In 1953 Grace was the first woman to receive Life Membership of the Returned and Services League.

Some vital facts about The Great War

1. Gallipoli landing ANZAC Cove 25 April 1915.
2. Final withdrawal 20 December 1915.
3. The terrible loss at Gallipoli was horrendous over 120 000 men died. This included 26 111 Australians wounded and 8 141 deaths.
4. WW1 commenced 4 August 1914.
5. WW1 ended with the German Government Armistice on 11 November 1918. A total of over 9 million lives were lost.
6. 61 512 Australians died from wounds or disease and 152 000 were injured.

LEST WE FORGET