

**NORTHERN MIDLANDS RSL SUB BRANCH (INC)**  
**ANZAC DAY 2026**  
**ADDRESS BY**  
**HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC**  
**GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**  
**VILLAGE GREEN, LONGFORD, SATURDAY 25 APRIL 2026**

Good morning.

May I acknowledge all veterans with us, and their families and friends. I also acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have served in the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

May we recognise that Anzac Day is a day of remembrance. May we also reflect on the human cost of war, its impact on people, women and children, and communities.

More than a century has passed since the dawn landing on 25 April 1915. Then, Australian and New Zealand troops came ashore at Gallipoli as part of the campaign against the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. That landing, and the long months that followed, formed part of a broader campaign, with a cost of “untold suffering and sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup> More than 8,700 Australians lost their lives at Gallipoli.

As we reflect on the images of Gallipoli where soldiers operated along steep ridgelines and in narrow trenches, we should also remember that our Anzac story has never belonged to men alone. From the very beginning, Australian women stood with them, in uniform or at home.

As your second female Governor, I am pleased to have been asked to talk about Australian women who participated in our war efforts. May we recognise the significant contributions made by women.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hawke, Speech at Lone Pine Ceremony, Gallipoli-25 April 1990, PM Transcripts.

Women first became involved with our Australian armed forces when around 60 nurses from the colonies served in the Second Boer War from 1899 until 1902 as part of the New South Wales Army Nursing Service. The Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) was formed in 1903 as part of the Australian Army Medical Corps.<sup>2</sup> During the First World War, nearly 3,000 Australian women in the AANS served overseas. Women worked in field hospitals, on hospital ships, and in casualty clearing stations, often under fire. They treated the wounded from Gallipoli, from the Western Front, and from campaigns across the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> They helped save lives “even though their own lives were sometimes in great danger, due to shelling, bombs and gas attacks.”<sup>4</sup>

About 80 Tasmanian nurses served in WWI.<sup>5</sup> May I mention the contributions of Clare Deacon, an army nurse, born at Piper’s River, Northern Tasmania. She enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in 1914 as a nurse. She served at Mena throughout the Gallipoli campaign. In 1917, she was stationed at Trois Arbres near Armentieres. She was one of four Australian nurses who risked their lives to rescue patients from bombed and burning buildings. "For acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire," she and the three other nurses were awarded the Military Medal<sup>6</sup>. These were the first Military Medals awarded to members of the Australian Army Nursing Service. Clare was the only Tasmanian woman to receive this award.<sup>7</sup>

Let us remember that at home, thousands more women sustained the war effort through voluntary organisations, such as the Australian Red Cross, Voluntary Aid Detachment, and the County Women’s Association, and through fundraising, munitions work, farming and community support. Their labours ensured that Australia could wage the War abroad while maintaining life and industry at home. Women continued to care for our children and the elderly.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [anzacportal.dva.gov.au](https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au), accessed 22 April 2026.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war> accessed 25 Feb 26  
<https://165anzacs.org/women-in-world-war-1/accessed> 10 March 26

<sup>4</sup> Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, 2018 Rusi Tasmania Blamey Oration, *Australian Women at War* p6.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.utas.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history](https://www.utas.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history), accessed 20 April 2026.

<sup>6</sup> [Great War nurses | Australian War Memorial](#)

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[https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/sharedstories/tasmanian\\_nurse\\_awarded\\_the\\_military\\_medal](https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/sharedstories/tasmanian_nurse_awarded_the_military_medal), accessed 23 April 2026.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/newsroom/anzac-day-remembering-when-women-held-down-the-fort>, accessed 3 March 2026.

May we also remember that “the death toll from the war left many women to mourn sons, brothers, husbands, fiancés, friends and community members. Other women welcomed family members home, to find they were not necessarily the same men as had left for war.”<sup>9</sup>

In the Second World War, women’s service expanded significantly. However, it was not until 1941 that Australian women were permitted to serve their country other than in a nursing service role, even though, I quote, “Large sectors of society felt that a woman’s place was in the home, while others feared that inclusion in military life would compromise a woman’s femininity as well as the natural order of life.”<sup>10</sup>

By 1941, Australia’s armed forces were facing serious manpower shortages and turned to Australian women. The formation of the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force, the Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service, and the Australian Women’s Army Service enabled women to serve in vital operational roles.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of 1941, women in uniform were everywhere.<sup>12</sup> They worked as signallers, drivers, mechanics, clerks, radar operators and intelligence personnel. More than 70,000 women enlisted in the auxiliary services during WWII.<sup>13</sup> Their contributions to Australia’s defence at a time of direct threat to our shores were indispensable.<sup>14</sup> Many served overseas, in the Middle East and in New Guinea, some were interned as POWs, some were killed in the line of duty.<sup>15</sup>

Australian women also worked on the land. Over 3,000 Australian Land Army members went out to farms to help maintain food supply for our country.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/women\\_and\\_war](https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/women_and_war), Women and World War I.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/103/a-victory-job> Meghan Adams, *A Victory Job*, 6 July 2023, accessed 23 April 2026.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww2/experiences/australian-women>, accessed 20 April 2026.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.awm.gov.au/wartime/103/a-victory-job> Meghan Adams, *A Victory Job*, 6 July 2023 accessed 22 April 26.

<sup>15</sup> Op cit Oppenheimer p5.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/newsroom/anzac-day-remembering-when-women-held-down-the-fort>, accessed 3 March 2026.

More than 12,000 women served as health and medical professionals overseas and at home. Nurses faced many challenges, having to look after patients with horrific injuries and diseases that they had never seen before.<sup>17</sup> Some nurses were killed at sea when their ships were torpedoed. Some suffered severe deprivation as Japanese POWs.

Two Launceston nurses, Sister Jessica Simons and Sister Shirley Gardham, both served together in Malaya in 1941. As the Japanese forces advanced on Singapore, these two Tasmanians were evacuated aboard the *Vyner Brooke*. On 13 February 1942, *Vyner Brooke* was attacked by Japanese aircraft and sunk. After hours in the water, some survivors made landfall on Japanese-occupied Bangka Island. Sister Vivian Bullwinkel was the sole survivor after an horrific massacre of the other 21 nurses who came ashore. Sister Simons and Sister Gardham made it to shore on another part of Bangka Island. After three and a half years of incarceration in different camps and in dreadful conditions, 24 Australian nurses survived, including Sister Simons. Sadly, Sister Gardham died in April 1945. Sister Simons arrived back in Tasmania in late October 1945 and spoke on her experiences in the camp in Sumatra. She said, "There were things you couldn't imagine. And I wouldn't want you to know..."<sup>18</sup>

Over time, the role of women in the Australian Defence Force has undergone enormous change. Today, women serve across the Navy, Army and Air Force in operational, command and specialist roles. They serve in peacekeeping missions, humanitarian operations and coalition deployments. They lead units and aircraft and contribute at every level of strategic decision-making.

Incoming Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Susan Coyle, will be the first woman to lead one of Australia's armed services.

As we remember with gratitude the many men who have served and laid down their lives for us, and who continue to serve, let us recognise and pay tribute to the contributions of women, past and present, for their service and sacrifice.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww2/experiences/australian-women>, accessed 20 April 2026.

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/shared\\_stories/the\\_prisoner\\_of\\_war\\_experiences\\_of\\_two\\_Launceston\\_nurses](https://www.centenaryofanzac.tas.gov.au/history/shared_stories/the_prisoner_of_war_experiences_of_two_Launceston_nurses). Article originally published by the Department of Veteran Affairs on the Anzac Centenary website. <https://www.anzaccentenary.gov.au/site-information/copyright-notice>.

We also thank the families who support and have supported those who serve or have served, and who have made sacrifices for the service of their loved ones.

On a personal level, may I remember my mother and my aunt, both of whom served as translators in the Army's Censorship Section. May I remember my father, who served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Navy. He was in Darwin and also in Ora Bay, Papua New Guinea, during the Japanese bombings in 1943.

Many others here, I know, will have their own personal and family stories of service and of sacrifice to remember.

We remember those who served and those who did not return.

Lest we forget.