

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA OPENING THE AUSTRALIAN
WAR MEMORIAL EXHIBITION "NURSES FROM ZULULAND
TO AFGHANISTAN" AT THE QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY LAUNCESTON,
FRIDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2013.**

This exhibition, "Nurses from Zululand to Afghanistan," was curated by Robyn Siers, a senior education & public programs officer at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, who I am pleased to say is with us today. Australian nurses first saw service on the battlefield in 1879 in the Zululand wars. You might well ask what on earth were Australian nurses doing in Zululand? Well, they were there because Australian soldiers were fighting with the British as they invaded the Kingdom of Zululand in Africa. The King of this independent Kingdom opposed the expansion of the British Empire. So, with the intent of instigating a war with the Zulus, on 11 December 1878, the High Commissioner of Southern Africa for the British Empire presented an ultimatum to the Zulu King Cetshwayo with which the King could not comply and in consequence the British troops, assisted by colonials and supported by colonial nurses, went to war in Zululand. We all know only too well that Australian troops and nurses are in Afghanistan but you might still ask the same question what on earth are Australians doing there or at least ask the question, why are they still there?

However, this exhibition does not set out to give you any answers to such questions, but it does depict with graphic clarity the incredible service that Australian nurses - male and female - have

given on and near the battlefield over the last 134 years. To quote from the Exhibition's web site it is an exhibition of "personal stories of army, air force and navy nurses who have served overseas; their difficulties and challenges, along with determination to care for the sick and wounded"¹ no matter what were the difficulties they had to overcome.

The Queen Victoria Museum here in Launceston has had a long and close association with the Australian War Memorial and this relationship led to the Launceston museum being invited to launch a national tour of this wonderful exhibition that was mounted in Canberra and which will now tour across Australia. This tour is supported by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government Programme supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia.

Nursing the wounded on, or close to the fighting not only calls for extraordinary skills, and tremendous strength and endurance but it also calls for vast reserves of internal fortitude to battle the psychological trauma inflicted by daily witnessing horrific injuries and daily watching those injuries claim the lives of the injured, despite the patient and gentle nursing given with commitment, care and professionalism. That this is so is evident from the letters of two nurses, Ella Tucker and Lydia King who were working on the ships

¹ <http://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/nurses/>

taking the wounded soldiers from Gallipoli to the Greek Islands of Imvros and Lemnos:²

“Every night there are two or three deaths, sometimes five or six; ... each night is a nightmare, the patients’ faces all look so pale with the flickering ship’s lights.

I shall never forget the feeling of hopelessness on night duty. It was dreadful. I shall not describe their wounds, they were too awful. One loses sight of all the honour and the glory in the work we are doing.”

Speaking in the New South Wales Parliament on Remembrance Day 2008 the Honourable Kayee Griffin said:³

“Nurses have made a crucial contribution to Australia's war effort over the past century in conflicts since the Boer War of 1898, caring for and comforting the sick, the wounded and the dying.” (Actually, as the exhibition witnesses, the first overseas nursing involvement was a little earlier than 1898.) Ms Griffin continued, “The role of nurses in wartime is sometimes overlooked but is one of heroism and courage. Australian nurses have served in Australia, in war zones all over the world, and on hospital ships and transports

² Cited <http://stspyridon.nsw.edu.au/content/pdfs/ANZAC%20Day%20Speech.pdf>

³ <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20081111044>

for the past century. The Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps [RAANC] has given more than 100 years of service, dedicated to caring for Australian servicemen in times of war and its aftermath. The history of the corps dates back to 1898 when a small nursing service was formed in Sydney consisting of one lady superintendent and 24 nurses.”

The importance of nurses’ contribution to Australia’s overseas military operations often goes unreported and is perhaps not properly recognised. This exhibition will help rectify this state of affairs for it depicts the heroism and courage of nurses in times of war and in service on peace-keeping missions. It will touch your emotions and stimulate your intellect. It will make you pay tribute to the nursing profession and it may cause you to think that all too often war is a shockingly wasteful and cruel business.

I welcome you to this important exhibition, which I now declare open and wish it well on its journey around our country.