

Silent Partners

In the early years a century ago, conflict would take hold across a world stage

The *Spirit of the Anzac* would be conceived and come of age

An army of eager volunteers and nervous conscripts would be assembled

As tears would flow from mothers' eyes, humbled

To foreign lands this great army would travel with messages wired

In times of extreme hardship a folklore, legend inspired

Shattering experiences endured and embedded in the minds of the young

All the while maternal comfort and healing offered with a kind word sung

In a country left behind, time was not to stand still

An enthusiastic workforce would emerge, a steel will

Occupations diverse from weaponry to services for the community

The labour of proud women, working in unity

To bridge the tyranny of distance, virtually communicative free

Ingenuity and defined strategies would have to be

Biscuits and knitted socks were sent with messages of hope

Initiated by all those dedicated women folk

For them, those silent partners, home and abroad

The foundations of change and respect would be ensured

Democratic rights, recognition, equality in time a guarantee

Another aspect of the *Spirit of ANZAC* a "fait accompli"

Today, post many conflicts and years combined

Women and their roles have been clearly identified

To all those grandmothers, mothers, daughters, wives and sisters

Lest we forget

Annotations

Throughout the First World War thousands of women and men alike were conscripted into the army whether they volunteered or not. A contingent of nurses, numbering 2,200 from the Australian Army Nurses Service (AANS) went to war. These women served in British hospitals, Australian hospitals and on naval ships. In addition to this 20 fully qualified female doctors joined the war effort traveling overseas to the battlefield. Like the men, both the nurses and doctors were enthused by the idea of travel and serving their country whilst also broadening their work experiences.

After the men and women left for the war many of the jobs were vacated and needed to be filled in order to keep the country and economy stable. The jobs needing to be filled were mainly manual labour which women had not previously been exposed to. These jobs included: railway guards, ticket collectors, bus drivers, tram conductors, postal workers, police, firefighters, bank tellers and clerks. During the war Australia relied heavily on agriculture and farming. Since many of the farmers left for the war many jobs like controlling heavy machinery, engineering, horse led carts on farms and working in civil services and factories needed to be filled. This drastic change in work was made more difficult due to limited resources and the trauma of losing loved ones. Even after all this, the women were able to endure these circumstances and ensure the country's safety and prosperity in the plight of war.

By 1917, after the women had spent time learning the necessary skills for manual labour, ammunition factories were developed. These factories mainly employed female workers and were responsible for producing 80% of the weapons and shells for the British army. These women, known as canaries, dealt with TNT (chemical compound of trinitrotoluene). The effects of working with such a dangerous chemical caused the women's skin to turn yellow and even resulted in the death of 400 workers. These women showed great courage risking their lives working with such dangerous chemicals without proper protective clothing or safety measures.

To overcome the limited communication with the soldiers, the families at home had to think outside the box to create new ideas and ways to communicate with the soldiers. Mothers and wives would make Anzac biscuits and include other things like letters and knitted clothing in care packages to send to the troops. This enabled communication whilst also giving the troops something that they could eat that wouldn't mould or rot. This example of communication represents ingenuity as the women found different ways to communicate with the troops.

Items included in the care packages were knitted socks, letters and Anzac biscuits. My Great Grandmother, Cecilia Margaret McCarthy, and her best friend hand knitted socks for the troops. On one of the days they sent the care packages away Cecilia's best friend dared her to leave her name and her address in the socks and sent them away. My Great Grandfather, Francis Geelan, received her package and they continued to send letters until he returned from Egypt where they met in Sydney for the first time and later got married. My Great Uncle, Robert Geelan, was not as lucky. Robert Geelan was fighting in Belgium where he was hiding in a foxhole and had a direct hit from a bomb. He died on impact. He was memorialised at the Blenheim Gate. The way his mother and other family became aware of his death was through a blunt letter accompanied by his belongings. 1x bible and 1x pocketbook. This example of limited and blunt communication displays the importance of the care packages and how they were a fundamental form of communication.

The Anzac Spirit was shaped by women stepping up and doing what needed to be done to keep the country from falling apart while the men were at war. Through this initiative the women showed the characteristics of the Anzac spirit: mateship, courage, ingenuity, good humour and endurance shaping the Anzac Spirit into something that was not only displayed by the troops away at war but also the citizens still at home

supporting the troops. This shaped the Anzac Legend into something shared across all citizens male and female, away at war and at home. Nevertheless still serving their country

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