

MEDIA RELEASE

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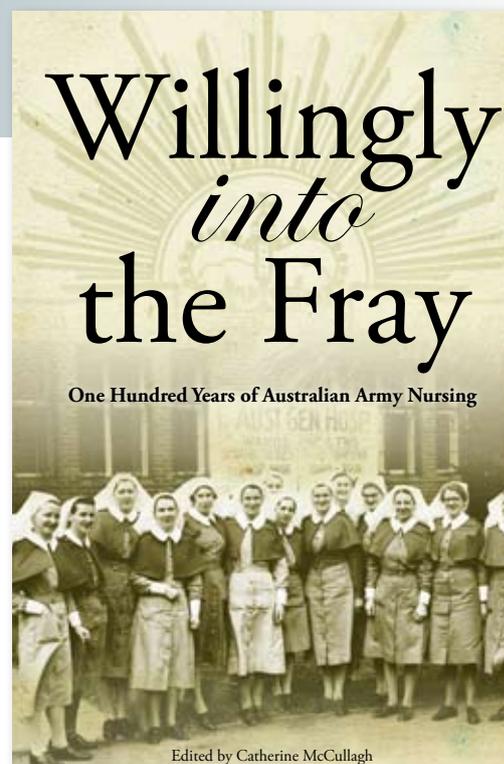
Willingly into the Fray

One Hundred Years of Australian Army Nursing

Edited by Catherine McCullagh

"We were stunned into silence as we watched the small figure of a woman, sitting there amongst all of that terrific death and destruction holding her head up high, and ready to take charge at a moment's notice ... I will never forget Ellen Savage (Nurse) as long as I live."

Letter describing Ellen Savage in the wreckage of the hospital ship *Centaur*, 1943



The role of the Army Nursing Officer is unique. They serve close to the fighting, often in harm's way and in extreme conditions. Whether posted overseas with deployments and humanitarian assistance missions or within Australia our nurses are integral to the Australian Defence Force.

Willingly into the Fray, published in conjunction with the Australian Army History Unit, uncovers what it's really like to be an Army Nurse from the early days of our first nurse Lady Superintendent 'Nellie' Gould in 1899 in the Boer War through to subsequent conflicts including World Wars I and II, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam right up to the current conflict in Iraq.

These are ordinary Australians who are taken far from the comfort zones of their normal lives. What they experience abroad is often a life-changing experience. This book is a collection of first-hand accounts from sixty-five Australian male and female nurses. Many of the stories are told for the first time, particularly those of the more recent campaigns such as the second Gulf War. Their stories are sometimes confronting but always showcase the great Aussie spirit.

There are many things which have changed over the last one hundred years. Nurses no longer simply care for wounded soldiers like they did in the Boer War and World Wars but also now treat refugee children and inhabitants of war ravaged countries and provide relief aid after natural disasters such as the tsunamis in Banda Aceh.

Certainly medicine and nursing techniques have evolved dramatically; uniforms have changed as have the titles of matron and sister. However, in every campaign and on every deployment, nurses mention having to 'make do'.

- 1915: Grace Wilson and her nurses in Lemnos tore up their clothes to make bandages
- 1933: Norma Hinchcliffe in Cambodia built a cardboard house from boxes for street children
- 1999: Vicki Smith in East Timor made a tiny humidicrib from a plastic food bin

Australian Army nurses are renowned for their compassion and commitment to provide quality medical care. The stories in *Willingly into the Fray* display the extreme strength and dedication required when working in devastating circumstances, and even though the battles may have changed significantly, these attributes have remained constant.

Catherine McCullagh and a selection of Army Nurses retired and still serving are available for interview.
Available at all good book stores or online www.bigskypublishing.com.au

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"There was a nameless woman who will remain a part of me forever, and who, but for a quirk of birth, could have been me. She had AIDS and had been given a blanket by the British hospital but, as she was incurable, there was no bed for her ... All I had to give her was my water bottle and my hope that the next day she would be dead. The gods were cruel until the last. She did not die for three days. ... This dying woman comforted me as I lived. I never knew her name, but I will always remember the 'woman with the blanket' who had a dignity far greater than I will ever have."

Lorna Todd, Rwanda, 1993–4



About the Editor

"I have listened to their stories and read their descriptions of the 'the fray' and I am not sure that I would have gone so willingly..."

Catherine McCullagh, Former Army Officer & Editor

Catherine McCullagh is a Canberra based freelance editor who counts military history as one of her specialties. She grew up in Tasmania, completed an Arts Degree at the Australian National University in Canberra and then joined the Australian Regular Army where she served for twenty years in a variety of appointments ranging from the study and teaching of Mandarin Chinese to Senior Editor at the Army's doctrine publishing cell and Research Editor at the Land Warfare Studies Centre (the Chief of Army's 'think tank'). She left the army in 2004 and established her own freelance business, working primarily for the Australian Army History Unit, and working on manuscripts that ranged in subject from the tunnellers of World War I to chemical warfare in World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War and the modern peacekeeping and operational deployments of today's military. *Willingly into the Fray* is her first compilation. Catherine is an avid reader, bushwalker and lover of the fine arts and lives with her family in Jerrabomberra.

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