



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Australian Army Nursing  
Service: Lieutenant Olive Weston**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 13 May 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Thursday, 13 May 2010  <b>Page</b> 3643  <b>Questioner</b>  <b>Speaker</b> Rishworth, Amanda, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House  <b>Proof</b> No  <b>Responder</b>  <b>Question No.</b></p>
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**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (12.23 pm)—I rise today to recognise the extraordinary contribution that Australian nurses have made to our nation's history—in particular their contribution to the history of Australia's involvement in world conflict. Australian troops have marched into war zones over many different conflicts, but they have been supported by personnel such as nurses, who have stood alongside our troops providing support. In the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War the same Australian spirit, determination and courage that distinguished Aussie service personnel was also evident in the nurses and other service personnel who served alongside them.

Take, for example, the achievements in World War II of a constituent in my electorate, Nurse Lieutenant Olive Weston, of Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL. She is one example in my electorate of a woman who has served this country with great distinction and quiet dedication. She is part of a succession of Australian women whose history of selflessness took them off to places where their charity, efficiency and good cheer made all the difference in circumstances of unimaginable pain and suffering.

In her 84 years, Lieutenant Olive Weston has served the country in a variety of contexts that would have tested the moral fibre of the best of us. She joined the army at the age of 15 during World War II and her experience in tropical medicine was put to use in caring for soldiers in the 12th Station Hospital in Townsville. Her four years of service included a stint in New Guinea before she was repatriated to Australia after suffering from malaria and dengue fever. Personal hardship has made little difference to the commitment that Olive has shown in her ongoing years. She explained her attitude to hardship in her biography: 'We didn't really have fear; that's why we were doing what we were.' This is a very good book and I would suggest everyone read it to learn about the experiences that people such as Olive Weston had and about the sacrifices they made on behalf of the country.

In World War II alone, 3,477 Australian women signed up to the Australian Army Nursing Service and, of those, 71 made the ultimate sacrifice while caring for troops overseas. In early 1942, when fighting on the Malay Peninsula reached its climax and retreat became unavoidable, evacuation by hospital ship was not a possibility so the wounded soldiers and Australian Army service sisters returned to Australia via a number of vessels. En route to Sumatra, the *Vyner Brooke* was sunk by Japanese bombers in the Bangka Strait. A group of 22 survivors made it to Bangka Island but, tragically, when the Japanese found them they were ordered to walk into the sea and were machine-gunned from behind by the Japanese patrol. All of these women were killed except one, Sister Vivian Bullwinkel—she has a very remarkable story to tell.

I want to take this opportunity to commemorate these nurses because they are not necessarily often remembered. I also want to congratulate everyone in South Australia involved in remembering these women through the annual Bangka Day service held at the memorial in the Women's Memorial Playing Fields. It is a significant memorial service. Further, I want to talk today about something very special that the Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL has done. I was very pleased to attend the launch at the Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL of Australia's first ever honour roll dedicated to nurses. As far as they are aware, this is the first such honour roll in Australia. They have put together a wonderful honour roll and memorial for the nurses who served.

I would particularly like to congratulate the Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL for pursuing Olive's idea and actually putting money behind it to ensure recognition for some of the nurses that were killed. I would like to particularly pay gratitude to the committee that was involved in organising the project: Olive Weston OAM, Steve McInnis, Harry Rollinson, John Fakes OAM, Gary Maynard, Kath Ramsden and David Goodman. The Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL has made a commitment to these nurses by providing funding and in assisting the collection of photographs and names on the honour roll. The president of the Port Noarlunga/Christies Beach RSL said that the RSL chose to fund and support the honour roll 'because we believe it is important to recognise the contribution that women have made in our national history'. (*Time expired*)