



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WAR SERVICE FINALLY RECOGNISED

91 years after the first military bravery awards were awarded to Australian women, the story of Australian women's service from the Boer War to now has been immortalised in a publication launched today by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin.

Mr Griffin said *Australian Women and War* explores the rich, but often untold, story of women in the services and on the home front in wars, conflicts and peace operations.

"Women have always played a strong part in our wartime history yet too little is known of their contribution," Mr Griffin said.

"Since the first nurses and teachers left Australia to serve in the Boer War, we have seen women as divers and war artists, doctors and signallers, wing commanders and soldiers.

"During more than a century of service we have seen the gender barriers dismantled, with women serving in key operational positions and today being among the leaders in the Australian Defence Force," he said.

The book also chronicles the vital contribution of women on the home front, as fund raisers, in voluntary organisations, in taking on traditionally male occupations and in supporting the families of those in theatres of war and the men who didn't return.

"Illustrated with some 300 images, the book is a fascinating account of the determination of women to serve and their remarkable achievements."

More than 100 people attended today's launch, including women who served on the home front and many former and current servicewomen who feature in the book.

Mr Griffin said first bravery awards to Australian women were awarded for actions 91 years ago today.

"Sisters Clare Deacon, Dorothy Cawood and Alice Ross-King and Staff Nurse Mary Derrer each received the Military Medal for risking their lives to rescue patients trapped in burning buildings after a German air raid on the Western Front on 22 July 1917," he said.

157 women have died serving in Australia's defence forces, with the first in the Boer war.

Women now make up 13 per cent of the Australian Defence Force.

Australian Women and War was written by Associate Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, and is published by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Copies can be ordered from the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.

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