

**City of Cockburn Deputy Mayor Lee-Anne Smith OAM**

**City of Cockburn ANZAC Youth Parade & Service**

**Wednesday 11 April, 2018**

**at approximately 10.00am**

**RSL Park & Field of Poppies, Spearwood Avenue,**

**Spearwood**

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Good morning one and all!

### **The ANZAC Spirit is Alive and Well**

How do we know that the ANZAC spirit is alive and well?

Across Australia and around the world on ANZAC Day thousands of people will gather at such memorials to pay their respects and to remember our Anzacs and all who have followed in their footsteps.

Today I want to take you to a place not far from here – along Cockburn Road and down O’Kane Court that leads to Woodman Point, the location of the former quarantine station.

There nestled in the bush is a small overgrown cemetery containing the gravesites identifying the last resting place of Sister O’Kane and Nurse Williams.

Who were these members of our nursing fraternity and why do they lay at rest in this somewhat isolated location, a location that was formerly known as Clarence?

What relationship do they have with keeping the ANZAC spirit alive and well?

Let me explain.

Sister O' Kane and Nurse Williams were in a party of 45 Australian Army Nursing Service nurses travelling to the battlefields on the SS Wyreema in 1918.

They had not proceeded further than South Africa when peace was declared.

However their peace was to be short-lived.

While they saw no action in the battlefields their names are immortalised for their contribution to the war effort.

Returning to Australia the SS Wyreema arrived at Fremantle in December 1918 by which time the effects of the worldwide influenza epidemic were being felt, 20 volunteers from the SS Wyreema nurses and elsewhere were called to work at the Quarantine Station Hospital to care for the returning soldiers.

Amongst the volunteers were Sister O' Kane, Sister Thompson, Sister Ridgeway and Nurse Williams.

These four were to die from influenza in a relatively short time in service to King and country.

They were buried with full military honours in the cemetery adjoining the Quarantine Station Hospital, as were some twenty plus soldiers who also died in the epidemic.

In 1958 the War Graves Commission re-interred all military personnel buried there at the Perth War Cemetery with the exception of Sister O'Kane and Nurse Williams.

Sister O'Kane's grave was not moved because her relatives would not agree unless the memorial obelisk marking her grave was re-erected in the War Cemetery.

As this was against the War Graves Commission policy in that all grave markers were to be of a uniform size and appearance Sister O'Kane remains buried in what I consider to be a place of tranquillity and great beauty.

In the case of Nurse Williams it is not, at this time, known why her grave still remains there.

The Memorial on Sister O'Kane's grave stands about 3 metres tall and reads:

*For Valour  
In Honoured and Revered  
Memory of  
Sister Rosa O'Kane  
A.A.N. Service. Late of  
Charters Towers, Queensland  
Died here 21st December 1918  
of Pneumonic - Influenza  
Only Daughter of Mrs J.C. O'Kane  
R.I.P.  
Erected by the Patriotic Committee  
Charters Towers Comrade Nurses  
and Queensland Friends*

These members of the nursing fraternity could well have returned to their former places of work and put behind them the call to duty when the SS Wyreema birthed in Fremantle.

Instead, they chose to use their nursing experience to help those returning service men to recover from illnesses that were life threatening and that eventually would take their lives as well.

As volunteers who stepped forward in our hour of need, Sister O' Kane, Sister Thompson, Sister Ridgeway and Nurse Williams personified the ANZAC spirit.

Is it any wonder that red poppies adorn those grave sites today and their memories live on through family members, friends and on occasions like this, when momentarily, we can all share in a moment of reflection.

On ANZAC Day itself, I urge you to think of the brave and gallant efforts of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice and for those who brought back the wounds of war; some visible and some not so visible.

Even today, there are thousands of young men and women, serving in theatres of war and carrying out peace keeping duties in far distant lands, away from family and friends, away from home, fighting for our freedom and that of others, most of whom we will never know or meet.

That is why the ANZAC spirit is alive and well.

We must never forget the sacrifice that they are making and the fact that we live in Australia in relative safety; largely because of their efforts.

Lest we forget!