In the present-day Australian armed forces, women are trained to use high-powered weapons, to drive trucks and tanks and aeroplanes, and to engage in combat. Women serve as officers and as ordinary soldiers, sailors and aircrew personnel.

In 1914, however, a woman's place was not considered to be on the battlefield, but in the home. No women at all served with the Anzacs, other than as nurses, but nurses did not have an army rank. During World War I, many women felt that they should be permitted to do more than serve as home-makers back in Australia. Women's organisations sent urgent petitions to the Government offering to serve as, 'cooks... ambulance scouts, stretcher bearers, motor-car drivers...' but all these pleas were rejected.

**The Angels of Mercy**

Nursing was the one occupation that was considered suitable for women to perform close to a battlefield. Even so, nurses (or 'Angels of Mercy', as they were called) were kept off the battlefield itself in hospitals and clinics behind the lines. The conditions under which army nurses worked were often dreadful, and they showed great courage and stamina to keep going. They saw everything that a soldier in the trenches saw – every sort of wound, everything that an exploding shell or a bullet or poison gas could do to a human body. And they often worked very long hours at a single stretch.

Women on the homefront

Back in Australia, women were asked to take on a different sort of war occupation. They were given the job of encouraging men to enlist. Organisations such as the Australian Women's Services Corps and the Australian Women's National League took part in recruitment drives. They often tried to shame men into enlisting, by suggesting that only cowards and 'shirkers' stayed behind when their mates were fighting and dying. Women didn't take over many of the jobs left by men who had gone to fight. At that time it was not considered proper for women to do 'men's work'. Except in such occupations as teaching and shopkeeping, women found few new employment opportunities. Even factory owners were reluctant to take on women, although in some cases the shortage of men meant that they had no choice. Fundraising to assist war widows, and knitting socks for 'the boys at the front' were considered the ideal ways for women to help the war effort.