

Recruitment and propaganda

Throughout Australia's military history, recruitment posters have been used to persuade men and women to join one of the wartime services. Images and stories of nurses have been successful in influencing Australian society during times of war.

Maurice Bramley, *Join us in a victory job*, colour photolithograph on paper, 48.2 x 60.4 cm, 1943, [ARTV00332](#), AWM Collection.



The above poster is a good example of the recruitment posters aimed at women during the Second World War. The six women depicted in the poster include members of the women's services, a nurse and a factory worker. The imagery and the wide range of occupations make the poster all-encompassing, implying that there is a job for every Australian women and that she must take it up.

Recruitment

“Recruitment” refers to the action of finding new people to join an organisation or a military service.

- Were women allowed to join military services before the Second World War? Would these roles have been familiar to women living in Australia during the 1940s?
- Examine the female figures in the poster. Can you tell how old they are? Their social standing? How are they represented? Why?
- How has the artist used elements of 1940s advertising and popular culture to attract Australian women to the services? Make note of colours and imagery.

This document is available on the Australian War Memorial's website at <http://www.awm.gov.au/education/resources/nurses>

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- What message does the poster portray to women? Men? What is the attitude towards women in the poster? Would this attitude have been permanent or would it only have lasted throughout the Second World War?



Bob Whitmore, *Work, save, fight and so avenge the nurses!* (1943–45, photolithograph, coloured inks on paper, 50.2 x 63 cm, [ARTV09088](#))

At 4 am on 14 May 1943, the hospital ship *Centaur*, which was brightly lit and clearly marked with red crosses, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine off the Queensland coast. It sank for the loss of 268 lives, including 11 of the 12 nurses on board. It was the greatest loss of life from a Japanese torpedo attack in Australian waters during the Second World War. The sinking was widely deplored by the Australian public as an atrocity.

Propaganda

“Propaganda” refers to the use of information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, to promote or publicise a political cause or point of view.

- 1) The sinking of the *Centaur* was a common subject for recruitment posters after 1943. Why do you think it was so used?
- 2) The poster depicts two victims of the attack struggling in the water while their clearly marked hospital ship burns in the background. Why has this moment been chosen?
- 3) Who is the intended audience for this poster? How can you tell?

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- 4) What emotions would this poster evoke in its audience? How might this affect people's decision to enlist in the Second World War?

Ellen Savage

Sister Ellen Savage of the Australian Army Nursing Service was on board the *Centaur* when it was hit. She was the only nurse to survive the sinking of the *Centaur*. As the ship was going down, she grabbed hold of some floating wood on the surface of the water and scanned the sea for her friends. Realising with a jolt that they had perished, she turned her attention to the men struggling around her and vowed to do whatever she could for them. She did her best to keep them alive, and their spirits up by singing to them. When she was finally rescued, Savage was suffering very badly with broken ribs and bruises. She was awarded a George Cross for her courage.

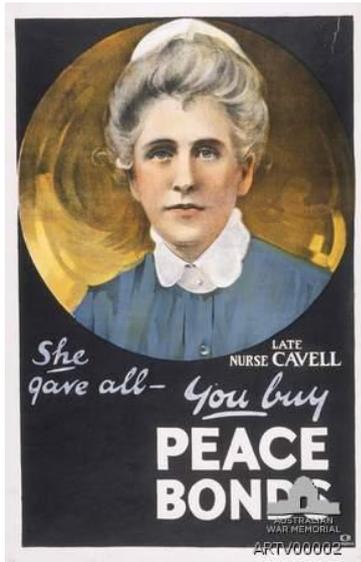
Is the story of Sister Ellen Savage represented in the poster? Why/why not? If so how?

Sister Ellen Savage, 1943. AWM
[044427](#)



Using tragic and emotive events involving nurses to motivate and manipulate the public was not a new concept in the 1940s. During the First World War, British nurse Edith Cavell and her story was used in propaganda posters. Cavell had helped hundreds of allied soldiers flee occupied Belgium for the Netherlands and had also saved the lives of many soldiers, both allied and enemy. After she was captured by the Germans, she was charged with harbouring allied soldiers and executed.

Edith Cavell's story became well known in Australia and a memorial was built in her honour in Melbourne.



Unknown, *She gave all*, (1915, chromolithograph on paper, 77.3 x 50.6 cm, [ARTV00002](#))



Captain Vivian Bullwinkel and Lieutenant Betty Jeffrey lay flowers at the Edith Cavell Memorial in Melbourne, 1950. AWM [P04585.002](#)



A 1916 cartoon by T. Carnell depicting the execution of Sister Cavell. The top right hand corner reads “Miss Edith Cavell cowardly murdered October 12th 1915”. AWM [P03087.002](#)

- 1) When Cavell died she was 49 years old. How is she represented in the poster? Why?
- 2) Who is the audience for this poster? How do you know? What techniques does the poster use to capture its audience?
- 3) How is the poster similar to *Work, save, fight and so avenge the nurses!*? Note visual techniques, audience emotional response and social knowledge.

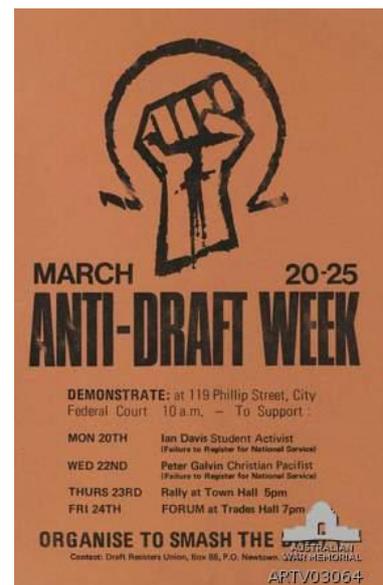
- 4) Cavell's story was not only used in posters, but it was also illustrated in cartoons of the time. What is the purpose of the cartoon (see above)?
- 5) Would it be effective? Why? Why not?
- 6) What message is it intended to convey?
- 7) Compare the cartoon with the poster.
- 8) If this story was well known and commemorated in Australia during the Second World War, would Second World War recruitment poster have been influenced by the story?

Research activities

Use the Memorial's website to find other propaganda posters made during different periods of time. What tactics have been used to influence the public? (For example, emotional imagery, patriotic phrases, and so on.) What effect would this have had on the public?

Compare the following anti-conscription poster from the Vietnam War with the previous Second World War recruitment posters. How/why are they different? Consider the various social/technological changes (for example, the introduction of television in Australia) that occurred between the time of the Second World War and that of the Vietnam War. Did propaganda posters still have the same role/purpose in the Vietnam War? Why/why not?

Draft Resisters Union, *March 20–25: anti-draft week* (1971, screenprint on coloured paper, 45.8 x 29.2 cm, [ARTV03064](#))



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