

Presentation of the Lemnians Reproduction Painting to Mayor of Lemnos 19 April 2015

In February this year Liz Kaydos, the coordinator of the Lemnos 1915 Commemoration Committee, accepted my invitation to visit Canberra so we could discuss Navy's support to the commemorative events on Lemnos this week. I was grateful during that meeting for her explanation of how we could assist the Lemnian community in New South Wales to mark the shared history of their homeland and Australia. Liz provided excellent background on Lemnos and some delicious Baclava.

I was impressed by the New South Wales Lemnian community's wish to leave something tangible from Australia in Lemnos after we all depart. Some of you will know the background to this presentation but for others I want to mention that last year, Dr Stavros Kyrimis, the Consul General for Greece, resident in Sydney, approached the Director of the Art Galley of New South Wales and asked about the possibility of having a reproduction made of the original Lemnians painting bought by the Gallery in 1925.

This request was readily agreed to. So without further ado: (*CN takes cover off painting*), a reproduction of Sir William Russell Flint's painting, "The Lemnians". I was happy to agree to it being moved by "safe hand of Navy" from Garden Island Naval Base in Sydney to Lemnos. I was then relieved to learn that the reproduction is not the size of the original in the Art Gallery which is five metres long and two metres high! Moving

something that size in the helicopter hangar of a ship might have ruled out flying operations and made it much more difficult to move between our ships underslung from a helicopter!

With my background as a navy pilot I was interested to learn that there is a naval aviation connection to the artist. During WW1 Russell Flint served as a Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve officer working on the development of rigid airships for the Navy. These RNVR officers were civilians given wartime commissions. Flint went on to be knighted and to be a most highly regarded artist and the finest water colourist of his generation. He died aged 90 in 1969. His works are now highly sought after.

At our meeting Liz explained the significance of the choice of this painting for Lemnos during these Centenary of Anzac commemorations. It is about the empowerment of women. As we can see the powerful Lemnian amazons of 5000 years ago depicted by Flint could certainly be said to have taken matters into their own hands when they slew their menfolk for not 'walking the line' when it came to marital fidelity. Matriarchal bronze age civilization was clearly not a particularly forgiving way to run a society.

In 1915 the empowerment of Australian, Canadian and British military nurses on this island resulted in the saving of thousands of men's lives that would otherwise have been lost to battle wounds and sickness. Like the Amazons of antiquity these women had a point to prove. The nurses faced senior officers' opposition to being sent so close to the fighting on

Gallipoli. They had to demonstrate that they were tough enough to live as the men they treated did, under canvas, in all weathers. They rose magnificently to the occasion and pioneered for those who came after them the role of the military nurse in forward operating areas as we still practice it. Above all these women earned the respect, admiration and gratitude of the men they cared for and restored to health.

This bold painting will be a very fitting reminder to people who see it here on Lemnos of the century of gratitude and remembrance which links Australians and Lemnians. I am very pleased that the Navy brought it to you in one piece, and am equally pleased to now hand it over to the Mayor on behalf of the New South Wales and Sydney Lemnian community.