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Health services of the Royal Australian Navy

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN)'s role in advancing the nation's interests requires a range of supporting elements ashore and afloat. The thesis on which this presentation is based fills significant gaps in the Australian military health historiography as to how its health services supported the RAN's peacetime and warlike operations between Federation in 1901 and the instigation of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in 1976. The imperative for the thesis pertains to how the existing historiography has been distorted by its focus on the Army. This has neglected how the RAN's health services supported its peacetime as well as warlike military, diplomatic and constabulary missions, as described by international relations theorist Ken Booth. The need for this support conflicts with the longstanding misapprehension within Defence and elsewhere that the RAN's health services only need to treat seagoing battle casualties on the same terms as their Army and Air Force counterparts. Yet, Arthur Graham Butler's seminal First World War official history explained how military health services have three inextricably linked 'purposes': besides providing treatment services, they entail facilitating operational capability, and returning service personnel to civilian life. The thesis analyses how and why, despite having been neglected since, Butler's 'purposes' remain relevant between and within military services, in peace as well as in war. To this end it uses three themes, the first pertaining to how and why the RAN's health services 'facilitate operations' purpose differed from the other services. The second theme refers to how the RAN's health services applied these 'purposes' to support the RAN's peacetime and warlike operations. Finally, it explores why the RAN had a greater

imperative for medical interoperability with the Royal Navy than the other Australian services, until the British withdrawal from east of Suez in 1971.