

Humble hero remembers

By RACHEL TOUNE

TOWNSVILLE-born Olive Weston has inspired the nation with her autobiography on life as a nurse during World War II.

The 84-year-old has returned to the city as she has for the past 30 years, escaping the winter chill of her Adelaide home for three months in the warm climate.

Her memory of the war effort was jogged with recent mention of speculation of munitions and mustard gas leftover from the war being located under Castle Hill.

Mrs Weston joined the US army at the age of 15 during World War II, putting her age up to 18, while she was studying as a medical missionary caring for soldiers under the direction of General MacArthur in the American 12th Station Hospital in Townsville.

She served for four years during the war, including a stint in New Guinea, before returning to Australia suffering from malaria and dengue fever.

Mrs Weston said being in Townsville brought back memories, especially hearing of the rumours about Castle Hill and the remnants of the war.

"We were there when they did experiments and treated the soldiers for blisters (from mustard gas)," she said.

"There were tunnels between here and Ingham along the spurs—all the equipment which was coming from America landed at the Rock Pool.

"There were crates of supplies and things which were sealed up and forgotten about.

"The men involved are in their 90s and scattered all over the world



MEMORIES ... Olive Weston believes it's important to pass on history to future generations

Photo: BRYAN LYNCH

so that information is lost."

She married husband Frank, who is now deceased, after being discharged from the army and, after their first and only child Steven was born intellectually disabled, has been heavily involved in campaigning for special schools in New South Wales and South Australia.

Mrs Weston was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 1988, and is also a proud member of the Australian American Associ-

ation in South Australia.

Federal member for Kingston Amanda Rishworth told parliament in May Mrs Weston had 'served this country with great distinction and quiet dedication'.

But while she has been called a living hero, Ms Weston prefers to shy away from the spotlight, still humble about her efforts.

Her autobiography *Olive: The Heroic Life of a World War II Nurse*

was released in 2003, penned by Peter Fenton.

While she was reluctant to tell her story, she said it was important to pass on the history to future generations.

"I still go out to schools and try to explain to them the freedom they've got today and the sacrifices which were paid for them," she said.

The book is set to be released shortly in an electronic version online.