

Traralgon & District Historical Society

Incorporated

BULLETIN

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The GA Airvan - manufactured by Gippsland Aeronautics

***Mr. David Wheatland spoke at the 45th Annual Dinner of the TDHS on
September 11th 2007. His subject was :***

“Aviation in Gippsland since WW2, and pertaining to Latrobe Aero Club”.

The full report commences on Page 6 of this Bulletin

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From the Chair

Traralgon memorabilia received from the Latrobe City, thanks to Jim.

Trip to French Island last March was a success thanks to the support by the members and friends.

Upcoming trip to Churchill Island next March 1st 2008.

2008 calendars are selling very fast.

Open days have been very successful with tea and biscuits.

The Society's Annual Dinner was very successful in September with David Wheatland's talk on Gippsland Aeronautics.

The Society is getting 200 copies of the book “Traralgon, A Tableau in Time” reprinted.

The Society has donated \$500.00 to the Latrobe City Library microfilm of the Traralgon Journal from 1923 to 1932.

A wreath was laid at the cenotaph on Anzac Day in remembrance by the Society.

From the Chair

Terry

The Traralgon and District Historical Society 2008 Calendar is now available. Be sure to get your copy soon as the number printed is limited. A great gift idea.

Only \$7.00 each

Special !!!! 2007 Calendar

We still have a limited number in stock, for sale now at only \$3.00 each. They feature twelve “collector’s items” photographs from our archives, printed on high quality card - very suitable for framing.

Phone Secretary Thelma on 0429 901 948 to purchase your calendars

COMING EVENTS :

December 11th 2007 - Dr. Barbara Johnson (nee Dunbar)

"Reflections of the Traralgon Agricultural Society Annual Show"

Barbara is a former president of the show committee, continuing a long family tradition of the Dunbar family. The address will be illustrated and include relevant memorabilia.

Parade: Ladies and Men's Fashions – early 1900's – 1980's

February 12th 2008 – Mr. John Hewson - "History of Gippsland Post Offices".

John has been interested in local postal history for 20 years. His topic extends from stamp collecting to the areas of Post Office openings and closing of branches, and information that is on envelopes. A large range of memorabilia will be on display.

March 1st 2008 (Saturday) - Coach Trip to Churchill Island and Phillip Island

The coach will leave the Kath Teychenne Centre at 7.30 am. Cost will be \$45.00 per person, and this includes coach travel, morning tea, lunch, entry to all the venues, and a guided tour around Churchill Island.

Churchill Island is a working heritage farm with original orchard trees and a mammoth Norfolk Island Pine. There are historic buildings including the Mayor of Melbourne's holiday house dated 1872. Animals on the farm are Clydesdale horses, Highland cattle, sheep, ducks, chickens and peacocks. The cafe and restaurant features spectacular bay views and delicious home cooked meals from the island produce.

*After lunch we visit the **National Vietnam Veterans Museum**, where there are over 5,000 photos, exhibits, dioramas and models from all Services on display.*

*Then we explore **The Nobbies Marine Centre**, and experience the amazing seal viewing of the seals at Seal Rock, and walk the boardwalks to the stunning Blowhole. If time permits we may visit the Phillip Island Vineyard and Winery.*

**All interested members and friends please contact the Secretary, Thelma,
Phone: 0429901948, or P.O. Box 697, Traralgon Vic. 3844.**

March 11th 2008 – Annual General Meeting preceding talk by Rob Youl

"Rob Remembers"

Rob, a former Traralgon resident, returns to recall and recount his marvelous memories of growing up in Traralgon.

April 8th 2008 – Mr. Gerry Kennedy -

"Cinema and Theatres of the USA".

Gerry is president of the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society and has recently returned from touring the east coast of America, taking in New York and New Orleans.

May 13th 2008 – Miss Claire Wood -

"Convicts on the Run"

Claire is system co-ordinator with the Traralgon City Library. She has researched this subject extensively and explored the amazing exploits and survival of convicts in early Australia.

June 10th 2008 – Mrs. Lyn Grasby -

"World Travels and Tours from the 1950's to Today"

Lyn is an experienced traveller, having sailed on the most luxurious liners for over 50 years, and recently as a passenger on the QE2's final cruise. The QE2 is still the fastest ocean going liner in the world.

Get Well Greeting -

A "Get Well" greeting to Ron Hore, who is in hospital recovering from open heart surgery after suffering a heart attack.

Our best wishes, thoughts, and prayers are with Ron and his family at this time.

Donations Received -

1. Book - "Gippsland Heritage Journal" No. 30. 2006. by Wilma Keir.
 2. 60th Wedding invitation of Ethel and Bert Thompson held on April 16th 1981, at the City Hall, Traralgon. Also "The Entertainment Booklet" . Both donated by Ray Waack.
 3. Three large black and white photos of St. James Church before it was demolished in 1970. Donated by A. Johnston.
 4. Cigarette case and lead pencil (wooden) capsule donated by Geoff Proudfoot.
 5. Ten picture rail hooks donated by Roy Hodgens.
 6. Three albums full of greeting cards donated by Bon Thompson.
 7. One year Internet access subscription for the TDHS donated by Wally Pickering
-

Traralgon and District Historical Society -

During 2008 Sunday openings from 2pm - 4pm, schedule as follows:

February 24th	March 30th	April 27th	May 25th
June 29th	July 27th	August 31st	September 28th
October 26th	November 30th		

Working Bees -

Working bees will be held on the second and fourth Monday afternoons in each month, excluding public holidays.

February 11th, 25th	April 14th, 28th	May 12th, 26th
June 23rd	July 14th, 28th	August 11th, 25th
September 8th, 22nd	October 13th, 27th	November 10th, 24th

Come when you can, between 1pm and 4pm - Everyone welcome !!!

From THE TRARALGON RECORD 100 years ago.

Tuesday November 12, 1907 - The Street Lamps. On more than one occasion, the street lamps have failed to fulfil the purpose for which they were erected, and are a constant source of worry and annoyance to the gasworks manager (Mr. T. Price). On Saturday night last, the one at the intersection of Franklin and Seymour streets appeared to have contracted a bad attack of influenza, for it occasionally groaned aloud, as if in agony, while the light was miserable.

Interest Reduced to 4 1/2 percent. The Commissioners of Savings Banks are now granting loans at 4 1/2 percent in sums of 50 to 2000 pounds on pastoral and cultivable lands in Victoria. Title must be Freehold, or Crown Leasehold. Apply for forms at any Post Office or Savings Bank, or by letter to: The Inspector General of Savings Banks, 20 Market Street, Melbourne.

Annual Dinner - 11th September 2007

Speaker - Mr. David Wheatland.

Introduction:

The presentation consisted of a talk about the general aviation history of the Latrobe Valley since WW2, a brief history of the Latrobe Valley Aero Club, and the foundation of Gippsland Aeronautics, where the GA8 Airvan utility aircraft is manufactured.

The talk was accompanied by a slide presentation illustrating some of the people, locations and aircraft that have featured during this period..

David answered questions relating to the presentation, and his aviation background, at the conclusion of the slide show. A small quantity of David's aviation memorabilia collection was available on display for inspection.

Biography - Mr. David Wheatland

David was born in Mildura, in September 1956, with convict ancestry in both families of his parents. His father, Rupert Wheatland, worked for Murray River County Council at Mildura powerhouse. Rupert learned to fly on scholarships, through the Royal Victorian Aero Club at Mildura, 1953. Rupert, his wife Helen, and their children, David and Sue moved to Latrobe Valley in 1959, when Rupert took up a position at the Morwell power station. The Wheatlands lived in Morwell where David and Sue attended Collin Street Primary School until 1966, when the family moved back to Red Cliffs near Mildura. Whilst in Gippsland, David's father had transferred to the Latrobe Valley Aero Club, and continued to fly locally, taking David with him.

After two years in Red Cliffs, the family once more returned to Gippsland, where Rupert re-joined the Latrobe Valley Aero Club, and David joined the Boy Scouts 1st Yallourn Troop and began to fly with the Latrobe Valley Gliding Club in order to meet the requirements for his Air Experience and Air Glider Proficiency badges, the only badges he ever qualified for as a scout. As soon as he was old enough he joined the Air Training Corps of the RAAF where his Flight Commander was Flight Lieutenant Bernie Hansford, a WW2 fighter pilot. During his time in the ATC, David achieved the rank of Cadet Under-Officer, the highest attainable as a cadet, in record time, and won an RAAF Flying Scholarship which enabled him to fly at the Latrobe Valley Aero Club in 1973, under John Willis, the young Chief Flying Instructor. During this period, David attended Maryvale High School in Morwell and then the Engineering School of the GIAE in Newborough.

David's interest in motorcycles during this time lead him to take up Speedway, or Dirt Track, racing where he travelled throughout Victoria and interstate to compete at A Grade level. He also travelled to the United Kingdom and raced in the British League for the Glasgow Tigers Team, before being offered a position at Wolverhampton Wolves in the first division. A serious racing accident at the Brooklyn Speedbowl caused him to return to his first passion of aviation.

David went on to achieve a Commercial Pilot's licence, an Agricultural Pilot rating, a Qualified Flight Instructor rating, formation flying, and aerobatic Instructor Endorsements, a Command Instrument rating, and multi engine and gas turbine ratings. He has also flown, (and test flown) ultralights, is a qualified Glider Pilot, and has completed a military parachute training course. He has accumulated close to 10,000 hours of flight time in 90 different types of aircraft, and has flown in 15 countries around the world.

He has worked for AG Airwork, Superspread Aviation, Northern Aerial Services, Latrobe Valley Aero Club, Aerial Extras, Skyfarmers, and since 1993 with Gippsland Aeronautics as their senior test pilot.

David currently works in the aircraft sales and demonstration department of Gippsland Aeronautics, and is also responsible for delivering the locally manufactured GA8 Airvan aircraft to foreign countries and training the pilots who will be flying them. He is fortunate to have a very understanding partner in Faye. In his spare time he enjoys riding his Harley Davidson.

Gippsland Aeronautics has carved its place in the modern history of the Latrobe Valley, during the last 30 years. It is a fascinating success story of which many of us may not be aware. The chronological account of this history below, encapsulates this success story.

1977 - Peter Furlong establishes Gippsland Aeronautics as an aircraft maintenance and modification business.

1984 - George Morgan joins Peter to form Gippsland Aeronautics Pty. Ltd. as an incorporated entity.

1985 to 1991 - Agricultural aircraft operators approach the company to design an agricultural aircraft with better lifting and handling capabilities than other available aircraft. In response Gippsland Aeronautics develops the GA200.

1991 - The GA200 is Type Certificated by the Australian Civil Aviation Authority. The company begins selling the aircraft in Australia and internationally. To date 50 of these agricultural aircraft have been manufactured with 28 exported to countries which include USA, China, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil and South Africa.

1993 - The company sees an opportunity to develop a new aircraft that will fill a niche market between the six seater Cessna 206 and the ten seater Cessna Caravan, and commences researching a new design.

1994 - The company begins the development of the GA8 Airvan, an eight seat, high wing utility transport aircraft.

1995 - a "Proof of Concept" aircraft makes its first flight in March 1995, and attends the Australian International Air Show at Avalon.

1996 - The prototype aircraft makes its first flight August 1996.

2000 - October - Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority certifies the Airvan to FAR 23 Amendment 48

- December - First customer delivery to Air Fraser Island (Queensland).

2001 - Airvans are sold to Australian tour operators, Alligator Airways (Western Australia), Slingair (Western Australia) Wrightsair (Central Australia). The first export Airvan is sold to Maya Island Air in Belize, Central America, and delivered in December 2001.

2002 - February - An airvan is flown to Singapore to attend the Asian Aerospace 2002 International Airshow.

- March - The first Airvan for the newly appointed Indonesian distributor, Airvan Dirgantara Indonesia, is delivered.

- April - A distributor for Southern Africa, Airvan Africa, is officially appointed with their first Airvan sold and delivered to Rani Africa in Mozambique.

- July - an Airvan flies 16,000 kilometres from the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, across the Pacific Ocean to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA, for its debut at EAA Air Venture 2002. The Airvan is on show at the EAA AirVenture Oshkosh Convention, one of the world's largest aviation events.

- August - Gippsland Aeronautics participates in flight evaluation trials by the Civil Air Patrol in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. The company was then invited to tender for aircraft supply to the CAP. Also in August, the Airvan passes the most rigorous of tests - the Flight Flutter Test (FFT), at the National Test Pilots Schools at Mojave, California.

- September - The first dedicated parachuting Airvan is delivered to Tandem Skydive, Airlie Beach, Queensland.

- October - A North American distributor, Airvan USA is appointed. Also in October, an Airvan is flown direct across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, where it undertakes a demonstration tour of both islands.

- November - The first New Zealand sale is made to Air Safaris at Lake Tepako.

- December - The Airvan passes US FAR Part 36 noise tests.

2003 - January - Airvan gains Type Acceptance in the Republic of Botswana.

- February - Airvan goes on show at the Australian International Airshow 2003.

- March - The Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority upgrades Airvan type certification to FAR 23 Amendment 54 status, as a precursor to US and Canadian certification.

- April - Airvan gains type certification in Canada and Avalon Aircraft Corporation of Richmond, BC, is appointed as Canadian representative for Gippsland Aeronautics.

- May - US Federal Aviation Authority grants type certification for Airvan.

- July - First Airvan for CAP is flown across the Pacific Ocean to the USA. Also in July Gippsland Aeronautics wins Telstra Victorian Government Small Business of the Year Award.

- August - Three Airvans present at Oshkosh EAA Air Venture at Oshkosh. Also in August the Airvan attends Abbotsford International Airshow in Canada, and the first Airvan for the USAF Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol is delivered to CAP.

- October - Airvan certificated for IFR.

- November - The first privately owned Airvan is sold to a Southern African customer.

- December - Two Airvans are flown to East Kalimantan for delivery to Perusda Melati Bhakti Satya, a regional company owned by the East Kalimantan Provincial Government.

2004 - February - Two further Airvans are flown to Indonesia to complete a five aircraft order for Perusda Melati Bhakti Satya.

- March - An Airvan is delivered to Lesotho Defence Force Air Wing.

- April - An Airvan is delivered to Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc., an indigenous community group that owns and operates aircraft in the Australian Northern Territory. Also in April 2004, an Airvan undertakes an extensive demonstration tour of Papua New Guinea.

- May - Gippsland Aeronautics inducted into the Victorian Manufacturers Hall of Fame. Additional factory floor space was also commissioned.

- July - An Airvan fitted with developmental cargo pod passes spinning and flight flutter test at the National Test Pilot's School in California. In July and August, Gippsland Aeronautics was present at EAA Airventure Wisconsin, USA. The Airvan is used as a Jump Ship for Liberty Skydive Team

- August - An Airvan attends the Abbotsford International Airshow in Canada, and the first Airvan is delivered to a Canadian operator, Wings Over Wilderness. The second Airvan for the USAF Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol is also delivered.

- September - The Mission Aviation Fellowship - Australia, accept delivery of their first Airvan. Also in September, a European demonstrator Airvan flies in the UK.

- October - Gippsland Aeronautics wins Regional Exporter of the Year Award category and receives commendations in both the Small to Medium Business category, and the Export Innovation Award at the 2004 Governor of Victoria Export Awards.

Also in October 2004, New Zealand tourist company Air Safaris take delivery of their second Airvan, and the Cargo Pod for the Airvan was certified by the Australian Civil Aviation Authority.

2005 - January - Gippsland Aeronautics loan an Airvan to the MAF to assist in the humanitarian relief efforts following the Tsunami in Aceh Province of Indonesia.

- March - Gippsland Aeronautics displays six Airvans at the Australian International Airshow at Avalon, Victoria. Also in March 2005, the Mission Aviation Fellowship - Australia take delivery of the first Airvan for operation in Papua New Guinea.

- April - The Mission Aviation Fellowship - Australia, takes delivery of an Airvan to provide air support for post tsunami rebuilding programs in Aceh Province of Indonesia.

- May - An Airvan is flown from Australia to Anchorage in Alaska, for display at the Alaska State Aviation Trade Show. Also in May 2005, Natron Air of Soldotna becomes the first Alaskan Airvan operator.

- June - Airvan is displayed at the Popular Flying Association Air Rally in UK - the European equivalent of the USA Air Venture

- August - Gippsland Aeronautics displays at EAA AirVenture for the 4th consecutive year with three Airvans present. Also in August 2005, the European Aviation Safety Agency certifies the GA8 Airvan - opening the door for sales in the 25 countries comprising the European Union. At mid September 2005, Gippsland Aeronautics had built 83 GA8 Airvans.

From THE TRARALGON RECORD 100 years ago.

Tuesday November 12, 1907 - Accident. We learn that while returning home from Morwell the other day, the local officers of the Salvation Army met with a bad mishap. When about a mile from the township, the horse, which is an ugly tempered brute and has always to be driven with a kicking strap, started playing up, with the result that the Army jinker was upset, and both shafts broken, in addition to other injuries, while the drum was also badly injured. Fortunately the officers escaped injury.

Tuesday November 19, 1907.

- Ourselves. It is not often we blow our own trumpet, but we have received so many congratulations on our show report, and there has been such a run on "The Record" that we may be excused for feeling pleased that our efforts have been appreciated by the general public.

- Lost and Found. When returning home from the Traralgon Show last Wednesday afternoon, Mrs. Fullerton of Tyers saw two little girls on the road near the cemetery crying bitterly. As they looked so forlorn and tired, Mrs Fullerton pulled up and inquired what was the matter. The elder girl said her name was Freda Holmes, and her father lived at Morwell, while her companion was Violet Anderson, a cousin. They had gone gathering wild flowers and had got lost, Mrs Fullerton kindly drove the children to Traralgon and got them something to eat, after which she happened to meet Constable Gorman, of Morwell, who recognised the children., and they were escorted home by Mr. Pritchett by the evening train. It appears that Mr and Mrs Holmes and Mrs. Anderson had gone for a picnic to Maryvale, about two miles from Morwell, and the children wandered off in search of wild flowers. Having gathered a large bouquet, they decided to return to the picnic spot, but unfortunately took the wrong direction and wandered away. Their parents were greatly distressed when it was found that the children were missing, and after searching in vain, returned home. Needless to say they were greatly relieved to learn their little ones were safe.



John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

During the desperate days of the Battle of Britain, hundreds of Americans crossed the border into Canada to enlist with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Knowingly breaking the law, but with the tacit approval of the then still officially neutral United States Government, they volunteered to fight the Nazis.

John Gillespie Magee, *Jr.*, was one such American. Born in Shanghai, China, in 1922 to an English mother and a Scotch-Irish-American father, Magee was 18 years old when he entered flight training. Within the year, he was sent to England and posted to the newly formed No 412 Fighter Squadron, RCAF,

which was activated at Digby, England, on 30 June 1941. He was qualified on and flew the Supermarine Spitfire. Flying fighter sweeps over France and air defence over England against the German Luftwaffe, he rose to the rank of Pilot Officer. On 3 September 1941, Magee flew a high altitude (30,000 feet) test flight in a newer model of the Spitfire V. As he orbited and climbed upward, he was struck with the inspiration of a poem — “To touch the face of God.”

Once back on the ground, he wrote a letter to his parents. In it he commented, “I am enclosing a verse I wrote the other day. It started at 30,000 feet, and was finished soon after I landed.” On the back of the letter, he jotted down his poem, ‘High Flight’. Just three months later, on 11 December 1941 (and only three days after the US entered the war), Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, Jr., was killed. The Spitfire V he was flying, VZ-H, collided with an Oxford Trainer from Cranwell Airfield flown by one Ernest Aubrey. The mid-air incident happened over the village of Roxholm which lies between RAF Cranwell and RAF Digby, in the county of Lincolnshire at about 400 feet AGL at 11:30 am. John was descending in the clouds. At the enquiry a farmer testified that he saw the Spitfire pilot struggle to push back the canopy. The pilot, he said, finally stood up to jump from the plane. John, however, was too close to the ground for his parachute to open. He died instantly. He was 19 years old.

The poem, “High Flight”, by John Gillespie Magee, was read by Laurel Davey, as requested by Mr. David Wheatland and Mr. Jim Hood, at the 45th Annual Dinner of the Historical Society, on September 11th 2007.

***High Flight* - John Gillespie Magee, Jr**

***Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...
Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew —
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space.***

Monthly Meeting Report – 9th October 2007
Estelle Adams – “The Centre in the Sixties”

Estelle spoke on “Alice In The Sixties”

Estelle is a former Secondary School Teacher. She was born in Traralgon, and educated locally, completing her education at the Teachers College in Melbourne.

Estelle is involved with the Field Naturalists and other environmental groups. She frequently writes articles for magazines on related subjects.

At our meeting, she talked about her time working in Alice Springs during the 1960's, recalling the conditions and situations in Alice Springs at that time.

A word of warning--- this is not a travelogue, nor is it politically correct, but just the story of living for two years in Alice Springs in the 1960s, and life as it was then.

It was the start of a great adventure when we set out in the January to live and work in Alice Springs. With me went Lorrel Samson's sister Merril and our adventure started almost immediately. It was cheaper to travel by train so we travelled overnight to Adelaide, changed trains for Port Augusta where we sat on the station for ages until we caught the motor rail to Marree. As we rattled northwards a group of men opposite invited us to play board games with them and we whiled away the hours until one of the older men said something to the younger ones who quickly disappeared to come back a few minutes later in uniform. We had been travelling with the train crew and so we were well looked after for the rest of the way as we travelled northwards.

It was almost dark as we boarded the Ghan at Marree. Next morning I was amazed at the change in the landscape. I had grown up in Gippsland and even five years teaching in the Wimmera hadn't prepared me for the brilliant colours and the vast distances of stunted trees and very little other vegetation. There had been no rain for several years so it was very dry everywhere. Our carriage was air-conditioned but I soon found there was a half-door in the kitchen car and spent most of the day leaning over it watching the passing scenery. At each place we stopped there would be a crowd of people, mostly aborigines.

Those of you who travelled on the Ghan before the new track was put in, will remember how slowly it trundled along, as the old track wasn't always stable. There were no bridges and the train was eased down onto the river beds where the rails were laid on the sandy floor. The train was the life-blood of the centre as it kept us supplied with food and goods, so there were real problems when the rivers flooded. While I was in Alice Springs, the Finke River once flooded for three weeks. In the end, planes were sent in to airlift the passengers off the train to take them either south to Adelaide or north to The Alice and the RAAF ferried fresh food, mainly fruit and vegetables, into us.

From the photos I've been shown, The Alice now is vastly different from what it was then. Back then the streets were wide with a narrow strip of bitumen running down the middle. Most services were available, but rather limited, especially the hospital, though we could get all the essentials. Life was fairly laid back and casual, especially in the intense shimmering heat of summer when we first arrived. We were going to work in a hostel run by the Methodist church to provide cheap accommodation for school children who came in from the distant cattle stations to go to school. Anybody who was wealthy sent their children to boarding schools down south.

We were met by the hostel manager driving a green Fargo which was a bit like a very large combi-van but with only one window in the back part, and was the all-purpose transport for the hostel. Three others were employed at the hostel - and I looked after the girls; Lorraine, who was from Western Australia, supervised the boys; Gwen, also Victorian, was cook; and Elizabeth, who was considered a local because her family had a cattle station a few hundred kilometres northwest of Alice, did the laundry.

The hostel was a very large old building. Downstairs had thick concrete walls and floor with a huge central hall. On one side were the kitchen, dining-room and store-rooms. On the other side, offices, sick bays and a couple of sitting-rooms. Upstairs, where the girls slept, it was wood and fibro-cement with glass louvres - hot in summer, cold on winter nights. Outside the back door was a quadrangle with the boys' rooms forming two of the other sides. The yard stretched the whole block.

Beyond the laundry was our vegetable garden, carefully watered each evening; and, in one corner, the old Methodist church, now the youth hall for the John Flynn Memorial Church, for they had led the way in forming a united congregation, long before it was thought of elsewhere in Australia.

To one side of our block were the police station and fire brigade, both accessible from our yard and both urgently needed while I was there. We were one block from the main street, and opposite our front gate was the drive into The Residency where all important government people stayed when they visited.

Our work hours were long. Except for our one and a half days off each week, we were on duty all the time, though while the kids were at school we had some free time when we had completed our work list. We had to clean the whole place, and Merrill and I swept and mopped that central hall three times a week; that's why I remember how huge it was! We had about 40 children, all of whose lives were vastly different from what ours had been.

In Merrill's care were two sisters aged five and seven whose parents ran a cattle station way out west beyond Mt. Sonder. It was too expensive for them to go home for term holidays, so they were with us all year. Their mother tried to get in midway through the year to spend some time with them, the rest of the time their only communication was through their weekly letters. Their mother told us they needed to grow up knowing how to live amongst other white people as the only other people out there were aborigines who often went walkabout. The parents had waited until both were of school-age before bringing them in to us.

Two and Who, were half-aboriginal, half white, and were from one of the local tribes. When the tribe came into Alice, they camped down in the Todd River. The women would come to visit - mothers, aunts, grandmas, cousins. Their stepfathers had no interest in them, but they were much loved by the women who always came to collect them for school holidays.

Two older half-caste girls came from different tribes up north. Unwanted by their tribes, they had no homes to go to and stayed all year round. One had been adopted by an old, wealthy white man when he had found her being neglected and she had come to the hostel after he died. She had inherited his wealth, but it had little meaning for her when she wanted him and his love. The other girl's life was a mess, and this was reflected in her behaviour at times. They were placed with us by the Aboriginal Welfare Service.

One half-aboriginal family had both parents only half-aboriginal. They were well-educated, ran a property to the west, and were wealthy enough to send their children to boarding-school in Adelaide when they reached teenage. A grandfather, the tribal elder, had taken the first white man to see King's Canyon for when he realised that white people liked to visit such places he thought it would make a good tourist venue. The only way in was by plane at that time and the first tourists were flying in for day visits.

Most of the other children came from happy homes on distant properties, though there were also some part-aboriginal boys who always went home for holidays. Some were being paid for by parents who had good employment on properties, others were placed with us by Welfare.

There were two other older girls however, whose stories are different. The parents of one ran a station way out east on the edge of the Simpson Desert. The drought had been so severe they had run out of feed for the cattle some years before, so they had transported their cattle south by train and were driving them around the roads of South Australia to eat the grass on the roadsides. Her mother's job was to drive ahead each day and map the route they would take, to make sure there was grass and water, find a place to camp that night, set up camp and prepare the meals for the men, always sleeping out in the open with the cattle.

She also had to get permission from councils for them to pass through that area and liaise with local farmers who might have objections. When the rain finally came, she continually checked the rainfall reports and eventually sent a telegram to let them know that they'd had good rain. Her father flew up and they went out to inspect the property. There was enough grass for at least 18 months feed, so they organised a special train to bring the cattle back. It was my day off when they arrived, so I walked up to the top of Anzac Hill to watch them unload about a thousand animals and start the long drive back home. When I asked about their house, she said she'd peered through a window and it was full of dust, so they'd sleep outside until there was time to clean it, but if there were no follow-up rains they wouldn't even bother. They were used to living out where the cattle were.

The other girl's father was the foreman of a road gang, working on the roads a day's drive north of Alice. Home was a pair of large tents tucked out of sight in the bush. One was a communal kitchen, dining and sitting-room; the other was divided into three — her parents and her bedrooms and a bathing room. The men had their own sleeping tents. Bathing arrangements consisted of two tin dishes on stools, one for washing and one for rinsing. Once a week her mother would drive to the nearest township to pick up food supplies, mail, papers, magazines, etc. Their water came out in tanks so when they needed water one of the men would go with her. All food was bought in bulk, as it was for us at the hostel, huge bags of flour and sugar and cartons of tinned and dry foods.

At the hostel, we had the luxury of a large refrigerated room, but all they had out at the camp to keep food cool was a coolgardie safe set up in the shade of a tree. When the road-work was about 30 miles away from their camp, her father would drive on the same distance until he found a suitable place to camp and they would pack-up and move everything. As her mother was alone all day, they had to find a place that couldn't be seen from the road. They would put everything in place, dig deep drains around to prevent flooding when it rained, tie up a rope for a clothes line and go back to work.

The tents did not have floors back then so her mother would sweep the ground clean and put down the mats. She spent a lot of time reading and writing letters to the women she met through the magazines. At weekends the gang of men would head to the nearest town with a pub. If they didn't come back on Sunday night her father would drive in and collect them from the pubs or the lock-up and take them back to camp. Home for her was wherever her parents were and she became more and more excited when holidays approached and her mother would come to collect her.

When the rains came, Elizabeth, our laundress, read out to us her mother's letter. There had been no rain out on their property since they'd gone to that station five years before. They had found a good area of flat ground on a slight slope, which meant that the water should drain away when the rains came, and there they had built a small house out of mud bricks. Well, they discovered that their nice bit of flat land was right in the middle of a water-course and was a dried-out clay pan. So, they'd picked up everything and dumped it on beds, etc, then opened the front and back doors and let the water rush straight through. "What about the floors?" I asked. There were no floors to worry about, just the bare ground, and they were thankful the walls hadn't washed away. They found out where the roof leaked! Made of recycled corrugated iron, the holes in it hadn't mattered until it rained, so her Mum was kept busy emptying all the containers she had everywhere.

Fortunately they had a water-proof caravan in which was stored their food to protect it from ants, mice and other marauding animals or creatures. The rains brought good feed for the cattle and with the improvement in their income they were able to afford to erect a new, weather-proof home. Elizabeth was very excited about this. So, they bought a new, large, corrugated iron shed and erected it. The walls were lined inside with mud-bricks for insulation and more walls of mud-brick divided it into rooms with a few small extra windows put in place. It had the two main essentials- being water-proof and safe from white ant attack.

I spent my first work-free days exploring Alice Springs and its surrounds, alone and on foot. There was an old bicycle at the hostel which I then borrowed and rode further afield. There were funny little rocky hills rising dramatically out of the flat ground and I climbed each of them in turn. I rode south through The Gap in the MacDonnell ranges to climb Mt. Blatherskite. Only a few hundred metres high, it was beside the road to the airport. There was very little other development out there then but it was beginning to go ahead before I left almost two years later. During the summer, after school each day we'd take the children to the swimming-pool and sometimes that is where we'd also spend our time off. However, gradually we began to make friends outside the hostel.

There were many young people working in Alice Springs and living in government or church hostels. It was an adventure, their pay was good and we paid virtually no tax. Some of these had days off during the week as we did and we would join forces to do things on our free days. They knew we had little money so provided the transport (most had cars) and we would take food. The two I spent most time with the first year were Colin who worked for the meteorological department and Graeme who was the caretaker at the John Flynn Church. This was quite a civilised posting for Colin as he had spent some years working at the meteorological place in the aboriginal reserve near the border of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

We visited all the tourist places such as Simpson and Emily Gaps, Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge, then went further afield.

Sometimes it was just a place marked on a map with no roads and we'd set off across country, following our wheel tracks to find the way back.

At weekends when the weather cooled we would pile the children into the Fargo and take them out into the countryside. You wouldn't believe how many we could pile into the Fargo! We adults and the bigger students would sit on the seats that ran along each side, then we began piling children in layers on top until they were bending their heads over so that they wouldn't hit the roof when we went over a bump. They loved showing us their part of the world, which the local children knew well. I wasn't game to go with them as they crawled through a narrow tunnel of caves in a rock wall, but thoroughly enjoyed being taken beyond John Flynn's grave and shown their secret way up to the top of the MacDonnell Range. It was a hands and knees climb in places, but "It's easy!" they'd say and we'd renew our efforts. Some of those places are now restricted as they are sacred sites, but in those days neither the children nor their tribal families had any qualms about us being there and I sometimes wonder now what's changed it all.

I made other friends in the town as well. One young married woman told me her husband was an American working at the US base just outside of Alice. After I'd been seen talking to her I was warned to never ask about her husband or his whereabouts, otherwise she wouldn't speak to me again. He was a courier, flying back to the United States on a regular basis with a locked bag manacled to his wrist. It contained information too highly secretive to be risked by mail. The bag was locked in place at the base and he did not have the means to take it off until it was delivered to the right people in the States who would then remove it. I was also warned that if I did ask too many questions they would probably investigate me. As I didn't have much to hide it didn't worry me much. I met her husband only once, at a school concert. On the surface he seemed to be just an ordinary young man, but when we were introduced it was obvious he knew quite a bit about me.

I hadn't understood the significance of the American base until the Cuban crisis. Do you remember the Cuban crisis? President Kennedy commandeered all radio and TV stations in the United States to announce that the USSR had sent a ship to Cuba carrying inter-continental missiles to be aimed at the USA. If they didn't turn back, Kennedy said, American planes would bomb the ship. They were on the brink of war. The children at the hostel were really frightened. When I asked why, they told me that Alice Springs was the fifth place in the world that would be attacked by the Russians if war broke out. We all gave heartfelt thanks when the ships turned back to the USSR and the crisis was finally over. Probably the people in the Alice took far more interest in what was happening than any other ordinary Australians did. Other than that, the locals seemed quite accepting of the presence of the base. It certainly improved the prosperity of the town.

We were there for the very first Henley-on-Todd put on by the Rotary Club to raise money for some project. I think half the town was praying for rain for they had insured against there being any water in the river and thought they'd probably get a lot more cash from the insurance than they would from the actual event. The Americans said they would put in teams if possible, but couldn't guarantee it because it would depend on what was happening at the base. The first sight of the teams running up and down the sand carrying their bottomless boats was a lot of fun. If I remember rightly, the Americans won that inaugural America Cup at the Henley-on-Todd. That day the only ones there were the locals and the few tourists who were in town. It was lots of fun, but I doubt if anyone there realised that in the future it would become a major sporting event that attracts large crowds and is featured annually on TV stations all across Australia.

It was very easy to find out what was happening in Alice. We only had to wander into any of the shops and ask a few questions to get all the latest gossip, and we were considered part of the local community.

If there was a suitable film on, we would take the children to the movies on Saturday nights. The theatre had no roof and on warm summer nights we'd lay back in the canvas deck chairs under the stars and enjoy ourselves as the night cooled down around us. During the winter it was a different story altogether. Even if the days were warm, because it was a desert area, as soon as the sun set it would begin to freeze. So, we'd put on our warmest clothes and each take a blanket. We'd place this on our deck chair, pull it up over our heads at the back and tuck the rest around us so that only our eyes were visible. I remember going to the movies one night with a friend on my night off. Outside the theatre we met his cousins who were staying a few days. It had been a glorious winter's day and they were still dressed in shorts. Nothing we could say would convince them they should go home and change, so it wasn't long before we had passed over a blanket to keep them warm. At interval they went home to change and brought their own blankets and we all saw the rest of the film wrapped in comfort in our cocoons. Of course courting couples put one blanket underneath them both and one on top, and who knew what went on beneath the blanket!

During school holidays the manager and his wife would look after the children remaining at the hostel for three days while we went out camping. We would pool our resources to hire a Holden station wagon, load it with food, a bed-roll or sleeping-bag each, water, and a few personal things and head off. If the two part-aboriginal students, wanted to come with us we would take them too. One trip we headed west. Once off the north-south road the roads were only dirt. Over many years the surface had ground into a fine powder labelled bull-dust. We drove fairly fast so that we could leave it behind, for as soon as we stopped it would float down around us until we also were covered in it. Driving over the stones in the dry creek beds was rough, but for a few minutes we were free from the dust.

Our first stop was Corroboree Rock, now a sacred site they tell me, then on to the ghost gold-mining town of Arltunga. The ground there was so stony there was no dust, but it was also so arid and dry it looked as if it was centuries, not years, since any rain had fallen and the few trees around were struggling to survive. The first building we passed was the police lock-up, still with its grilled metal door hanging there. Finally we stood amongst the emptiness of the tiny crumbling stone houses and rusting machinery and I had a strong feeling of desolation as I thought of those who had struggled to find wealth in that hostile landscape. How could even the lure of gold bring people to that barren place?

We planned to stay the night at Trepina Gorge. The track in had disappeared beneath feet of bull-dust and the man from whom we hired the Holden had made sure we knew how to let the tyres down if we became bogged in it. We decided it would be easier for the passengers to get out and stamp around to find the hardest areas of land. Unfortunately Pam fell face down in it and was grey from head to toe. Luckily there was a permanent water-hole at the gorge and she was able to clean up. Our first job was to gather fire-wood and cart it out into the river-bed, about 30 feet from the bank, where we intended to sleep.

The sand was cleaner than dirt and we were less likely to be troubled by ants or scorpions (and we did find a large scorpion while gathering wood). Then we were free to explore the magnificent red rock walls and hills.

After we'd cooked tea, all food was locked away in the Holden and we made sure we had enough wood to keep the fire burning all night to keep any prowling dingoes away as Elizabeth knew of camp sites that had been attacked by hungry dingoes during the night. For our beds we dug holes in the sand for shoulders and hips, built up a pile of sand for a pillow and rolled out our sleeping bags.

Next morning we returned the unused firewood to under the trees, covered our ashes with sand and drove west to Ross River Homestead. We intended to try and find N'dala Gorge. The brave man from whom we hired the Holden always checked where we were going so he knew where to send the search parties if we didn't return. As there was no track of any sort to N'dala Gorge he asked us to call in at Ross River to let them know where we were going. When we arrived at Ross River, we discovered they had their very first party of tourists staying there. One was an American woman. The way she spoke about the journey there, you'd have thought she'd landed on the moon for it seemed just as remote to her. When she realised we were on our own, she kept looking at us and shaking her head and saying, "Six girls!" She thought we were incredibly brave. The owners of Ross River didn't think anybody had been to N'dala in years, but they told us where to find the particular rock to start off on our trip, so off we went heading across country.. Elizabeth had been there once years before and thought she would recognise the particular outcrop of rock. We passed several before she said in a doubtful voice, "I think this is it." It was just a jumble of reddish-brown rocks that rose up out of the plain, hardly any different from any of the others, and we had to clamber up the sides of the gorge and crawl into it before we knew for sure we'd found it.

Along the sides of the gorge are amazing carvings dug into the rock that must have taken the aboriginal artists many, many hours to create. It was much harder to find wood for our fire that night and the ground was much harder to sleep on. Next day on our way back to Alice we called in at Ross River to let them know we were safely out.

They tell me there are bitumen roads out there now, but I think our adventure was much more exciting especially as there was always the uncertainty of not knowing what would happen to us next.

I had soon discovered that my ordinary slacks weren't suitable for those sorts of adventures and had gone down to the big store in Alice that stocked all the goods required on the cattle stations and bought myself a couple of pairs of jeans. What's so unusual about that? It was long before they had become a fashion item and I had only ever seen them in films before. They were the only jeans I have ever bought, for why would I want to wear them as a fashionable piece of clothing when I had worn them because they were a necessity?

On one trip we travelled north of Alice. We called in to see the licensees of the Aileron Hotel as one of our boys was their son. It was a hot day and we were disgusted to find that the only drinks we could buy at the small shop were not refrigerated as they were for the aborigines. It was against the law for the indigenous people to be sold alcohol.

We camped that night at a large waterhole some miles east of the highway, a very pretty place. Next morning it was still hot and I really wanted a cool drink so suggested that we go into the bar to buy one, something absolutely unheard of for nice women to do at that time.

There was no-one else around so we chatted to the barman as we had our drinks. We spent the next two nights at Central Mt. Stuart, exploring and fossicking for gem stones, though we didn't find much.

On our way back it was again hot, for the Holden didn't have any air-conditioning and we again called in at the pub for a drink. When we pulled up, there was a woman sitting in a car and also a number of trucks there, but that didn't deter us. The looks on the men's faces were rather stunned as we walked up to the bar and asked for five lemon squashes. While we were being served and the barman was asking about our trip, one man put his half-full glass down and walked out. I thought he couldn't cope with the sight of five young women in the bar, but no! Within a few minutes he was back with the woman from the car and bought her a lemon squash, too. What was good enough for us was good enough for her! It wasn't long before all the men were talking to us, quite intrigued by that unusual happening?

Legally the aborigines were not allowed to be sold or given alcohol. However, whenever they came into Alice to camp in the Todd River, some of the local taxi drivers, all white men, would buy cases of alcohol and take it out to sell to them. It was a lucrative side business for the taxi-drivers. The shopkeepers and others in the town were somewhat bitter about the double standards of the police; the police and the publicans knew what was happening but did nothing to stop it, yet just a few years before the aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira, who had been given Australian citizenship and could legally buy alcohol, gave some to his family and was arrested, tried in court and jailed. The aboriginal men often got drunk and caused damage to shops for which the shopkeepers had to foot the bill. During one night a couple of drunk aborigines came to the hostel. They broke into the boys' rooms and molested them, but were after the girls, of course. We were wakened when they bashed down the back door, but by that time some of the boys had raced to get the manager and the police and they were arrested before they found their way upstairs to us. Within days there was a strong, high wire fence and other security in place to give added protection. A male teacher from the high school also took up residence at the hostel and became part of our lives.

During the tourist season, the local aboriginal artists were able to sell their paintings to the shops, where they could be sold to the tourists. When there were no tourists about, the shops did not want their art, so the artists would go around to the local businesses and see if they could make a sale. Sometimes they came to us too.

The paintings were sold by size, not quality! If I remember rightly, small were \$1, next size \$3, medium \$5, and large \$10. Their sales had to be okayed by the Welfare Office, so we would give the artists the money, they would take the money and the painting to the Welfare Office for the staff to see, then bring the painting back to us. It seemed a crazy system to me as the indigenous artists were all quite honest, and I was sure that they would have done it for themselves, without Welfare overseeing them. I brought home several paintings by artists quite well known then, and really love my paintings. Today however, they are worth very little money wise, as they are painted in the Western style, and not in the traditional indigenous style with dots and wavy lines.

During my first year there, Merrill developed medical problems that couldn't be treated properly in Alice, so returned home at the end of that year. The inadequacy of the medical services was highlighted when a young woman flew in from Asia and stayed a few days in Alice before going on to work on one of the cattle stations.

There she developed all the symptoms of typhoid. At that time the Territory was governed from Canberra and over there they were appalled at the thought of an epidemic of typhoid in Alice, so they decided to vaccinate the whole town. So, the three thousand or so inhabitants dutifully lined up in alphabetical groups and were vaccinated by the medics, some of whom had been flown in especially to bring the serum and help.

I don't know what the vaccination is like now, but then it was extremely painful, and they did all the hostel on the one day. All that night there were moans and groans every time someone turned over onto their sore arm, and all we had, to try to alleviate the pain, was aspirin. Imagine the furore when it was later discovered that she didn't have typhoid at all, and they had to beg us to continue to have the rest of the course of injections as they thought we could have further medical risks if we didn't. It was not a good idea to get sick enough to go into hospital. Services there were just adequate, probably because of the shortage of staff, but walking patients would make the beds and tidy wards and keep an eye those who were more ill. The native people had their own section, and relatives would come to camp with them. One young man we knew developed TB. As he had no family in Alice, we took it upon ourselves to visit and take him fruit and home cooked food. The others in the ward were older men who had lived in the Territory all their lives. They had no families and couldn't believe their luck when we started turning up to visit. Once we knew where to find them we just wandered in from the road.

During the second year June and Noelene joined the staff. June was from Swan Hill, but Noelene came from inner Sydney and much of her socialising was done in the Kings Cross area. To we ignorant country dwellers the tales of Sydney night-life were fascinating and from what I've learnt since I'm fairly sure all her stories were of things that actually happened.

On one of our three-day holiday breaks June and I went to Ayers Rock. We had sussed out a small local company run by a man and his parents. The son drove a four-wheel-drive small bus and was our guide while the parents ran the very simple campsite, situated about half a mile from the actual Rock. There were about sixteen of us on that trip. We spent a day exploring the Olgas and all who were fit enough climbed the Rock. There were no chains to give us support and our guide kept a very close eye on us. Coming down he made us wait until all the busloads of tourists had gone down then we all walked down together in threes with our hands and arms linked. He said that one day someone would be killed on the Rock. Six months later he was proved right. We were taken to all the sights around the base of the Rock, of which many are now off-limit. The parents had lived out at the Rock for years and they said that in all that time they had never seen any aborigines anywhere in the area. There was permanent water and all their native foods were still there, but it was much easier to live on the handouts at the government and church reserves or on the cattle stations.

All the aborigines in the Centre were free to move about whenever and wherever they wanted and were not locked away in their reserves. Some of the father's other comments gave food for thought. He said that while the government kept just giving everything to the indigenous people they would never take responsibility for their lives, and that it would cause hostility amongst the many poor whites struggling to survive in the Territory. One long weekend holiday when most of the children remained at the hostel we took them all camping, making several trips in the Fargo until everyone was transported out to Native Pine Canyon, somewhere amongst the hills where there were some spectacular outcrops of rock.

Everyone rolled out their swags on the ground and we cooked over the open fire. They enjoyed the freedom and made their own fun a lot of the time, though we organised some games and story-telling. Their choice of activity on the Sunday afternoon was amusing as they decided to act out the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. With one of the boys wrapped in a colourful blanket as leader, we also donned blankets and with them streaming out behind us followed him as he gave us his version of the story. I have never forgotten the sight of him standing atop one of the rocky outcrops and haranguing us about being disobedient.

Whenever we were going to be sleeping in the dry river beds we checked on the weather reports for further upstream as that was where the water would come from if the river was going to flow. I once managed to be on the footbridge crossing the Todd River when the water first started flowing down it. It began as a trickle, though it swiftly grew in volume. The locals talked of the times when they had the thrill of seeing a wall of water rushing down towards them. There were no road bridges across the Todd and police would quickly close the two causeways as the swirling brown waters were quite dangerous and cars could get washed away.

The gutters round the town were deep; the rain might come only occasionally but when it did the falls were usually heavy. We had monsoonal type rains one summer and once it stopped raining we put thongs on our feet and paddled up and down in the two feet deep gutters in front of the hostel.

While I was there the Queen came to Alice. Everybody was excited about it. For weeks before the visit, from our vantage point across the road we watched the extensions to and refurbishment of The Residency so that she had her own bathroom and sitting-room. It wasn't much larger than an ordinary house so it probably needed it. A few days before her arrival the enthralling gossip went around that her cousin had come into town. I didn't know she had an Australian cousin, did you? He was said to be the son of the Duke of Windsor and resulted from a trip he made here as Prince Edward. A very private person, the cousin had a property somewhere north of Alice and rarely came to town, so did this mean he was going to meet her? I won't relate here all the other titillating bits of gossip that went with the story, but they were able to name his mother and wondered whether the Duke had supplied some of his wealth. Incidentally, we never did find out whether he actually met the queen.

Everyone went down to the sports ground for the Queen's arrival and there were all the usual formal proceedings with the school children up front, a cultural presentation by the local tribe, and so on. Then the poor woman was taken off to start her visit to all the local sights while the crowd followed her around. The next day was a public holiday. However, the kids preferred to do their own thing rather than chasing round the town after her. We had a copy of her itinerary, so five minutes before the party was due to leave The Residency we would ring the dinner bell and all those interested would line up in front of the hostel from where we could see them come out the door, get into the car and drive off. It happened so often that I wonder if, in the end, when they heard the bell ring, they didn't say, "There's the bell, it must be time to leave." One of the places the Queen and Prince Philip visited was a gem shop owned by one of the town's characters, a very down-to-earth old lady who could be quite abrupt at times. She asked the Queen to sign her visitor's book and opened it at the current page. The Queen turned to the front of the book and said, "I always sign on the first page." The woman firmly turned back to the current page and said, "Not in my book you don't." So the Queen dutifully signed it in the next available space.

That night Gwen and I went down the street for a cold drink. As we passed The Residency on the way back, we had a discussion about its security as the fence was low enough for us to climb over and there was no evidence of anybody protecting the place. I posed the question, "I wonder what would happen if we climbed over?" And out of the shadows of the garden, a voice said, "Don't you dare!" It was one of the young policemen whom we knew quite well, and he was able to see us quite clearly in the street light as we laughingly said good-night and went on home.

Our final sight of the royal pair was the next night after they had spent all day out at one of the cattle stations, actually quite a long drive for them. It had been a hot day and Gwen and I wandered outside in the cooler air, and sat on the edge of the street with our feet in the deep gutter.

When they finally pulled into the drive, the driver of the car got out to open the door for Prince Philip who immediately engaged him in conversation. On the other side of the car, the door opened, the Queen climbed out unaided and tottered up the path in stockinged feet, her white handbag dangling from one hand and her white sandals dangling from the other. I think that has been the best of all my memories of her visit.

One of the most interesting excursions for me was a day's flight with the mail plane round all the stations. I could only go if the seat wasn't required by any of the station people. I turned up at the office in the town with my packed lunch and was driven with the cargo out to Connellan's airport and away we went. The plane was a tiny four-seater and had very few instruments apart from a compass. It was fascinating seeing the countryside from only a few hundred feet up in the air. A line of trees in the distance would indicate a river, then we would see it and its tributaries laid out beneath us like a map and every now and then would be the beauty of a mostly dry salt lake. The young pilot found the way by landmarks on the ground. For example, we took off from one place and went north, flying high enough to see Mt. Wedge in the distance. It looked just like its name, too. We kept it on the right and passed it, peering down until we could see the gravel road below, and then turned left to follow it into the next station. If it got stormy or too dark, the pilot put down and stayed there until conditions improved. When in the air he did have radio contact with Alice and let them know where we were every time we became airborne. The airstrips were too far from the homesteads to see them close-up, but I did see them from the air. I was impressed with the aboriginal stockmen, beautifully dressed with the correct riding boots and outback hats.

One of the stations we visited was that owned by Elizabeth's family, and they always had morning tea for the pilot. They were just as excited about seeing me as I was to be there, as the arrival of the mail plane was always a major event for the more remote people.

I can remember being amazed when we discovered just how important to everyone the Melbourne Cup was. The kids organised their own sweeps and there were celebrations in the town. It was then that I realised that if anyone wanted to take over Australia the time to do it would be that time, on the first Tuesday in November because everybody would be so busy listening to a horse race they wouldn't even notice. Life there wasn't always easy. I remember being fascinated by the approach of my first dust-storm until I found out how unpleasant it was to be in it and how hard it was to clean up the mess it left behind.

When we first arrived the artesian water which supplied the town made us sick until we got used to it and began to like its taste of minerals; since then all other water has seemed insipid.

There were the expected tensions as well that result from such a large group of people living in such close proximity. I wasn't perfect in the work area, being human enough to make mistakes; and, unfortunately, the manager and his wife didn't really approve of me and I seemed to get into trouble more often than any other staff. To two such morally upright people it was hard to accept a young woman who had a mind of her own and was willing to express it. I don't think they approved, either, of all the young men with whom I was friendly and did things, but it was all totally innocent. I can't even remember holding hands with any of them as they weren't those types of relationships, just good friends.

The hours we worked were long and exhausting, even more so in summer when it was so hot. Much of it was hard work physically and we were on duty during the night if any of the children needed us. We were closely associated with the John Flynn Memorial Church, and often looked after the four year old son of one of the ministers when they were involved in activities which made it difficult for them to keep an eye on him. Our girls enjoyed having him with us. In return, the minister's wife would sometimes invite us to stay on our nights off, so that we had a chance to sleep in.

Life was often tough for the children in our care, too. First and foremost of course was the separation from their families which became especially hard when they were sick or stressed. They were sometimes homesick, and we young women were no substitute for Mum and Dad, even though we did our best. And, remember the two little sisters whose home was far west of Alice Springs? They came back from the Christmas holidays full of excitement because they had a baby brother. Then we were the ones who had to tell them that their baby had died. They badly needed their parents then, but they couldn't come. However, every child there knew what it was like to be cut off from home at times like that, and they were wonderful, with even the boys who really weren't interested in little girls, rallying around to take extra special care of them.

I loved living in the Centre - the feeling of limitless space and distance, the brilliance of the colours, the varied scenery, the huge variety of activities in which I was involved and the freedom from the restrictions imposed by family members. However, I've never been back there. The Alice I knew has gone completely; they tell me there's now a supermarket where the hostel was. Bitumen roads make it easier for the tourists, but have lost for me the adventure of difficult travelling to reach the places we wanted to see. I do regain that wonderful feeling of space and distance, though, whenever we drive across the Nullarbor or in the remoter areas of Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

June now lives in Swan Hill and we try to see her once a year. Merrill is in Western Australia and we stay with her and her husband whenever we go west and Lorraine is in Perth. Elizabeth is still living in a remote area but much further north of Alice and she and her husband are highly respected breeders of tropical cattle. June keeps in touch with her. We have lost touch with the others. It was a wonderful experience and I am so glad I went. Looking back now I realise just how much those two years have shaped the way I think about many things that are happening today.

Monthly Meeting Report – 13th November 2007

Mr. Frank Beer – “Women at War”

In the Western world, with just a few exceptions, it was not until the 19th Century, that women got directly involved in war activities, with the fighting of war considered the prerogative of men, women only getting involved if the fighting unfortunately swept through their area.. There were only a few exceptions amongst Western countries that I have been able to find, and apart from such notable women as Boadicea who fought the Roman Army occupying the British Isles in the first century AD, and Joan of Arc, the French patriot who fought against the English in the 15th century, the only other incidents I have been able to discover concerning women at war were the following:-

In the 17th and 18th centuries, pirate activities - although not actually war, they are considered a warlike occupation - became something of a problem around the world, and especially in the West Indies, and two of the most famous pirate Captains were women, Anny Bonney and Mary Reade. In 1761, a woman named Hannah Snell disguised herself as a man and joined the Royal Marines and served for a number of years, including the siege of Pondicherry in India, and although wounded 12 times; once removing a ball from her wounded leg herself, it was never discovered that she was a woman. She was discharged and only then told her secret, and was awarded a pension of 30 pounds a year. She bought an Inn in Wapping, London, and did her serving in her old uniform.

At the Battle of Trafalgar on 21st October 1805, there was at least one woman disguised as a man and officially a member of the crew of Victory, and a number of others, possibly over 30 on Victory alone who had sailed with the ship to stay with their men, and during the battle acted as powder monkeys and assisted the surgeon with the wounded.

However, it was the Crimean War with Florence Nightingale and her nurses that first had women take an official active part in a war, and I assume a similar situation took place in the United States during the American Civil War. Similarly, a group of women that originally started as camp followers with the French Army in the early 1800's, and who looked after the men and wore discarded soldier's uniforms, finally got recognition in 1858, when the Franco - Austrian war took place. The French Authorities regulated them, gave them proper uniforms and called them " CANTINTIERES " . Their function was to supply things like water and nursing to the troops. Incidentally it was during this war that the battle of Solferino took place on 24th June 1859. The Austrian Army suffered 22,000 casualties, and the combined French-Sardinian Army 17,000 casualties. The battle was witnessed by a citizen of Geneva called Henri Dunant, who was so appalled by the suffering of the wounded that on his return to Switzerland, he got a few friends together and formed the institution now known as the International Red Cross, the Red Cross flag being the Swiss flag with colours reversed.

During the Boer War in South Africa, many women took part on both sides, but again normally as Nurses. The first Australian Nurses to go to South Africa accompanied the 2nd contingent of the NSW Medical Corps in January 1900. It was claimed that had an adequate nursing staff and medical facilities been provided from the beginning of the war, many lives would have been saved, as more soldiers died of disease than were killed or died of wounds in battle. (*See photo of nurses, page 30*)

In 1907, an organization called the "First Aid Nursing Yeomanry" and known as the FANY, was formed as a corps of horsewomen trained in first aid for mobile service.

By 1914 it had become mechanized, and during WW1 served in France and Flanders with the British, French and Belgian Armies. It was the first women's service to be mechanized and staffed, and ran self-contained motor ambulance units. If you watch the TV series on ABC called " Foyle's War ", the female driver is a member of the FANY. The organization still exists, after having served in both world wars.

When one looks back at the time in Europe before WWI, one gets the impression that everything was prosperous, and people lived a life free from strife and problems, but it was at this time that women were starting to question their position in society, and in Great Britain the suffragette movement was agitating for the vote and more freedom, and as the Government refused to listen, the suffragettes resorted to such means as breaking windows, setting fire to letterboxes and buildings, cutting telephone wires and vandalizing male dominated things such as golf courses by digging up the greens. By the way, the name golf came about when the sport was invented many centuries before in Scotland, and the meaning was Gentlemen Only, Ladies Forbidden.

In 1913 a woman called Emily Davidson threw herself to her death under the hooves of the King's horse during the Derby at Epsom trying to make a point. Finally it was World War 1- 1914 to 1918 - that gave women the first chance to show what they could do for their country. The manpower shortage had become acute by 1916 with the terrible casualties suffered by the British Empire's Armies, mainly on the Western Front. For instance, on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1st July 1916, the British Empire's Armies suffered 57,470 casualties including 20,000 dead, and by the end of the battle in November over 1,000,000 men on both sides were either killed or wounded. The battle of Passchendaele fought in 1917, caused a total of 245,000 Empire and 8,500 French casualties, and although women had slowly been taking over from men in such jobs such as shop assistants and bus and tram drivers, the process became a social revolution as women took over more and more jobs traditionally reserved for men.

Women became porters and guards on the railways, middle class women got jobs in government offices, and as women made the most of their :new found and well paid freedom, the stiff decorum of pre war life vanished, together with the corset and the pavement length skirt. Love affairs with men who were about to go to the front and be killed and never seen again made the Victorian ideas of chastity a nonsense. Total war did more to liberated women than all the efforts of the pre war efforts of the suffragettes. And still the Army needed more men. The Army and Navy themselves had started to recruit women in 1917, forming the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Royal Naval Service respectively to replace men in such jobs as Domestic and clerical duties, but soon found that they were capable of performing more and in the Navy's case took over Cipher, anti-submarine and telegraphy duties. In both Services they became cooks, drivers and mechanics and by the end of the war, the WRNS - the Women's Royal Naval Service as it had become known, were also cleaning ship's boilers, were sailmakers, performed work on depth charges and torpedoes, adjusted gyroscopes, and worked on mine nets and gas masks among other jobs.

Despite their remarkable achievements during the war, the services disbanded the women's arms in 1921, as it was felt that women did not have a part to play in the regular Army, Navy and Air force. Owing to the shortage of cooks in the new British Armies which were forming in 1914 - 15, and incidentally known as Kitchener's Army after the famous General Lord Kitchener, who, as Secretary of State for War, found it his job to form these Armies.

You have all seen the famous poster with Lord Kitchener saying " Britons Kitchener wants you, join your country's Army", the Women's Legion was formed by Lady Londonderry, and took over duties as cooks on 3rd. August 1915, and later was employed in other capacities such as general duties, clerical and Motor Transport.

The Motor Transport Section was officially employed by the Army in February 1917, and when the WAAC's were formed in 1917, the cooking and General Service Sections numbering over 7,000 women, enrolled in it, and were soon on active service in France. The Motor Transport Section however, remained as the Women's Legion and served overseas until 1919.

The Australian Army Nursing Service - the AANS - was formed from a group of trained civilian Nurses who enlisted for the duration. The first 25, closely followed by another 161 accompanied the 1st AIF to Egypt in late 1914, and tended the wounded and sick soldiers on their evacuation from Gallipoli. Some were based on the two hospital ships that plied between Gallipoli, Lemnos and Alexandria with the wounded, whilst others manned the two base hospitals set up in Cairo, the 1st and 2nd Australian General Hospitals. The numbers were given to the units not the buildings they occupied. Most of the original soldiers and nurses knew each other, both as they had grown up together, joined up together and met each other on the ships going over to Egypt, so it was very distressing for the Nurses to see familiar faces amongst the sick and wounded. Nurse Campbell from NSW was relieved not to see her brother come in amongst the wounded, only to be told by a wounded soldier that he had seen him killed at Anzac Cove, but she carried on and finished her shift.

One nurse related that things were very primitive in the hospital, and the only way they could get sterile water for bathing wounds, was to have it boiled in large jugs on the hospital kitchen stoves, with an Egyptian orderly carrying the jugs from the kitchen to the operating theatre, only to find on one occasion, an onion at the bottom of one of the jugs after doing a series of operations.

In the European theatre, one nurse became very well known at this time. Edith Cavell, an English born nurse, who ended up behind the German lines after their invasion of Belgium. She assisted in getting over 300 allied servicemen back to their own lines, but was arrested by the Germans and put on trial for espionage, and in 1915 was shot as a spy by a firing squad.

In civilian work, women took over factory jobs making weapons, aircraft, and munitions. They drove transport vehicles of the Red Cross behind the front line, and as already said, were bus and tram drivers. As the battlefields swallowed up the men, the women had to take on more and more of the jobs at home. The number of women working in public transport increased by 14 times between 1914 and 1918; their numbers doubled in commerce, rose by a third in industry, and for the first time women donned police uniforms. When the Royal Air Force was formed on 1st April 1918 by amalgamating the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps, the Women's Royal Air Force was set up to act as drivers and fitters. Women farm workers also put on uniform and became the Women's Land Army, to be re established later in WW2. War service won for the Women of Britain the prize that had eluded the pre war suffragettes when the Representation of the People's Act of 1918 gave the vote to women over the age of 30, together with the right to stand for parliament. In the 1930's when it was becoming apparent that another war was a possibility, defense measures started to be put in place.

The ATS was set up in 1935 as the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service and was part of the Army reserve. They undertook general duties, clerical and motor transport including maintenance, and in November 1939 there were 24,000 on duty. They were taken into the regular Army as the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. By this time their duties also included wireless operators, Anti Aircraft gun spotters and crew - although they were not allowed to fire the guns, as it was not expected that women would actually kill anyone, so there had to be a man to actually pull the lanyard - medical orderly, stores, testing new ammunition - which required a science degree to be able to do the job, and many other jobs that enabled men to be used in the front line.

In 1945 there were 190,000 women in the ATS. Despite their work, they were only paid 2/3 of a man's wage for the same job. They finally became part of the Regular British Army Regiments in the 1990's, and nowadays can be found in most Regiments of the British Army.

The WRNS was re-formed in 1939 and by 1941 could muster 25,000, and by the end of the war numbered 74,635 employed in over 90 categories and 50 branches of the Navy. They were called up as jobs became vacant, and besides the jobs they performed in WWI, they became boats crews, ship and air mechanics, torpedo and radio repairwomen, one woman actually became a blacksmith - the only one at that time and photographers. They became part of the Naval Control Service that planned the convoy routes, some of their duties involved boarding Merchant ships in harbour to deliver sailing orders, explain routes, mustering confidential books etc, and were also DEMS boarding Officers responsible for checking the guns, ammunition and armament stores on Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships.

They operated the radar and communications networks, were air traffic controllers and meteorologists at naval airfields, looked after supply and secretariat, were dental nurses and offered general support to the naval hospitals, and became regulators - the Navy's Police. The first casualties suffered by the WRNS were 22 killed when the Merchant ship S. S. Aquila was sunk early in the war by a German U -boat. The first overseas deployment was to Singapore in 1941, and of course they suffered many casualties there. Miss Maria Elizabeth Ferguson was on her way from Argentina to the UK to join the WRNS hoping to be accepted for boat crew training, when the ship she was traveling on - the Blue Star Liner Avila Star - was sunk by a U-boat on the 5th July 1942 in the Atlantic. After spending 3 weeks in an open life boat, helping tend the other passengers, for which she received the BEM and the Lloyd's medal, the first ever woman passenger ever to receive the award, she finally arrived in the UK and reported for her interview. When asked if she had had any previous boating experience, she simply answered yes.

The WRNS came under the Naval Discipline Act in 1977 and now go to sea. They do all jobs on a ship now. The aim of the Authorities was that no man should do a job that could be done just as well by a woman. So the third service - the Royal Air Force - set up the WAAF. They were originally employed in administration, and code and Cipher work. This was later increased to include over 60 trades including radar and radio operators, accounts, equipment and stores, intelligence, catering, photography, radar and radio mechanics, Motor Transport mechanic, cook, steward, fabric worker (it should be noted that a number of different types of planes at the beginning of the war had fabric fuselages and sometimes wings, including the Wellington bomber), rigger, tailor and shoe repairer, hairdresser, welder, armourer, balloon operator, electronic and aircraft mechanic,

meteorologist, parachute packer and repairer, bomb plotter, police, medical section, including orderly, optician, dental, lab. assistant, operating room assistant and radiographer. They numbered over 8,800 by November 1939.

A woman Officer in any of the services received less compensation than a male private for total disability, and wounds. Nurses in the three services numbered over 8,000 at the beginning of the war. The Transport Service was manned by both men and women qualified pilots, whose job was to ferry planes from factory to front line squadrons at their airfields so that younger men could fly them in combat. The men were all retired or elderly pilots and the women included such famous names as Amy Johnson. Amy Johnson had made her name by flying solo from the UK to Australia in 1931. Both she and her husband Jim Mollison worked for the ATA. She was 38 years old when the plane she was flying, ran out of fuel over the Thames Estuary. She crashed near the Royal Navy Trawler HMS Haslemere. The Skipper, Captain Fletcher dived in to try and rescue her, but failed and he himself died in hospital later.

Other women volunteered for the Women's Volunteer Service for Civil Defense known as the WVS and in the first six weeks of the war had 1,060,000 join up. One job they did was to make meals for evacuees. The knitting for Victory campaign set up in October 1939 mass produced such items as sea boot stockings and balaclavas for ships' and boats' crews to Admiralty specifications. The Women's Land Army took in women between the ages of 17 and 40 and numbered 35,000 by the end of 1939, and by 1943 had over 80,000 employed on farms throughout Britain. Women were employed in Civil Defense as fire watchers, and 60,000 joined the Auxiliary Fire Service which became the National Fire Service, which already had 180,000 men.

The aircraft factories employed over 800,000 women, and 1 in 3 factory workers were women. 57% of workers in Royal Ordnance Factories were women. 40% of all workers in the Engineering Industry were women. Women worked a minimum 50 hr week - men worked, 55 hrs, and all had 1 week annual leave. In December- 1941, women between the ages of 20 - 30 were called up for National Service, and were placed in the Police, Fire Service and Armed Forces as required. Women conscientious objectors were sent to prison, as were the men. In May 1943, a new law was passed that had all women from 18 - 45 years of age do compulsory part time work, although those with children under 14 years of age were exempt. In July 1943, recruitment to the armed services and the Land Army was stopped, and most women age up to 50 went to work in the aircraft factories, with 100,000 to the railways.

Because of their normal wartime employment women were not normally put into the position of winning many medals, but some did. An ATS telegraphist - I haven't been able to find out her name - was awarded the MBE for work with the British expeditionary Force in France in 1940.

The Australian Nancy Wake, who was married to a Frenchman, was living in France when the war started and immediately joined the Resistance in the Marseille area. She helped create an escape route to Spain, and after being pursued by the Gestapo had to use it herself in 1943, to escape to England. She joined the FANY and was trained as a saboteur with Violet Szabo and parachuted back into France in February 1944, in the Auvergne area. The marquis under her leadership became the most active and troublesome in France for the Germans.

She was eventually to lead over 7,000 marquis, and was never caught. She received from the British the George Medal. From the French she received three Croix de Guerre, two with Palm and one with Star, and the Resistance Medal, an honour granted to very few Frenchmen and hardly ever to a foreigner. From the Americans she received the Medal of Freedom with a Bronze Palm, which again is very rarely given to foreigners. She received the award for assisting the US Government in the prosecution of the war, and saving the lives of two American Officers under her command. She has never been given an award by the Australian Government.

Odette Hollows, nee Sansom, and Churchill, born in 1912, was parachuted into France in 1942 as an agent. She was captured by the Gestapo in 1943 and ended up in Ravensbruck concentration camp, and as her boss Peter Churchill, who was captured with her, pretended to be her husband, and they were mistaken by the Gestapo as relations of the Prime Minister Winston Churchill, were kept alive as hostages. After the war she was awarded the George Cross and the MBE.

WAAF Corporal Joan Pearson was awarded the Empire Gallantry Medal - which later became the George Cross - for rescuing a bomber pilot from a bomber which had crash landed at Detling Airfield in Kent in May 1940. After pulling him clear from the burning plane, she shielded him from exploding bombs, then went back to rescue the wireless operator, who was unfortunately already dead.

Noor Inayat Khan, an Assistant Section Officer in the WAAF was shot by the Gestapo in September 1944 in Dachau after being captured whilst working for the French Resistance. Violet Szabo of the Women's Transport Service, after working for the French Resistance, was captured by the Gestapo and interned in Ravensbruck where she was murdered in early 1945. You may have seen the movie of her story called "Carve her name with Pride". Both women were awarded the George Cross posthumously.

In 1940, Stewardess Amy Goodrich was on the Hospital Ship Dinard when the ship was detailed to sail over to Dunkirk to help rescue the soldiers off the beaches. The authorities took off the women, but she refused to get off and said that as the nurses were going, she was going too, and became the only woman to receive a Dunkirk decoration. Also in September 1940, the Liner City of Benares loaded with refugees from England to Canada, including over 90 children, was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic - only 13 children survived - A 41 year old music teacher Miss Mary Cornish was in a life boat with 46 people including 6 small boys, the 4th Mate Mr. Cooper, in charge of the life boat, Mr. Purvis, a Ship's Steward and 32 Lascars. She cared for the children for 8 days until rescued by a British Destroyer HMS Anthony. She, together with Cooper and Purvis were awarded the BEM.

In February 1942, when the Japanese were capturing Singapore, many allied personnel tried to escape, both to the south, and eventually to Australia, or west to India. Sixty four Australian Nurses were evacuated on a merchant ship, the Vyner Brooke. On the 14th February 1942, when the ship was in Dutch East Indies waters - now Indonesia - it was sunk by air attack. The survivors drifted ashore on Banka Island, only to be shot at by Japanese soldiers, who killed 21 of the nurses. The Japanese then herded the survivors into the surf and machine gunned them, and killed all but one, who although seriously wounded, hid from the Japanese, and although later captured and spending the rest of the war in a Japanese prison camp, lived to tell the tale. Her name was Vivian Bullwinkle.



**Nancy Wake -
Now in her nineties.**



Victoria Drummond

Victoria Drummond, born 1894 of a very well to do family and a god daughter of Queen Victoria, decided to do what most women of her day would never have contemplated. She decided to become a Marine Engineer. She was the only woman ever to become an Engineer in the British Merchant Navy until the 1980's at least, and was never fully accepted by some. She began her career as an apprentice in the Caledon Shipyard Dundee Scotland, only being able to obtain such an apprenticeship because her father was a great friend of the shipyard owners, and went to sea as a Junior Engineer on a passenger ship in 1922. The sight of a woman in an engine room caused great consternation at first, but her Chief Engineer in his fitness report of her, stated that she soon had everyone eating out of her hand. She also had a way with engines. One colleague noted that she could always get more speed out of an engine than anyone else. When asked how she said " Oh I just talk nicely to them. You can coax or lead engines to do what you want; you must never drive them" In 1941, her ship was attacked by German bombers in the Atlantic. She remained at her engine room post, sending the rest of the black gang up top. Unaided she helped save the ship by getting the ship to increase its maximum speed from 9 knots to over 12 1/2 knots. Her MBE citation called her "an inspiration to the ship's company". She remained at sea for 40 years and retired in 1962, sailing as Chief Engineer on Foreign flag vessels as no British shipping Company would employ her as Chief Engineer.

During both the first and second world wars, women continued to serve at sea in the Merchant Navy normally as stewardesses and nurses, and in WW2 some were doctors, but it wasn't until the 1970's that women went to sea in the British Merchant Navy as deck and engineer officers.



**Members of the Australian Women's Land Army become pig farmers.
Established in July 1942, the W.L.A. employed at its peak 2,500 auxiliary
workers in most areas of agricultural labour.**



Mrs Ruby Boye-Jones

Mrs. Ruby Boye-Jones was the only female member of the Australian Coast Watchers operating in the battle area during the war. When the Japanese entered the war, she was a 50 year old mother living with her husband, the manager of a timber Company and two school-boy sons on Vanikoro Island, which is about 300 miles from Malaita in the Santa Cruz group of Islands. She was the only trained tele-radio operator available in the area, so she stayed back with her husband after the island was evacuated.

Throughout the long drawn out Solomon Islands campaign, she relayed messages from other coast watchers to the Allied bases and ships, including the information about the Japanese beginning the construction of the airfield in Guadalcanal, which made the Americans send in the Marines to try and capture the place. The Japanese became aware of her presence and landed troops to find her, attacked the island with planes and ships, and threatened to execute her as a spy if they caught her, but she remained at her post.

When the Japanese destroyed the suspension bridge leading to her radio station, she swam a crocodile infested river at night, to make her radio schedule on time. In 1943, when things were getting very serious for her safety, she was made an honorary 3rd Officer of the WRANS and a uniform was airdropped to her, in the hope that if she had been captured the Japanese would not have killed her, which knowing the Japanese, would have been a forlorn hope.

She stayed at her post for 3 years, and the information she sent helped contribute to the final defeat of the Japanese in that area. At the end of the campaign, she was honoured by a personal visit from the USN Commander in Chief, who, on landing, said "I would like to meet the wonderful Lady who operates the radio here". Mrs. Boye-Jones was awarded the BEM at the end of the war but was never given any pay for her years of services during the war.



Nurses E.J. Gould, P. Frater, and J. Blyth Johnston - three of the nurses who accompanied the second contingent to the Boer War, January 1900. (Australian War Memorial)



Vera Lynn

Vera Lynn, who was born in 1917 who is still going strong, was known as the Forces Sweetheart. Vera travelled the world as part of " ENSA" with other well known British entertainers such as Gracie Fields, to entertain the troops on all war fronts, including Burma.

She still entertains the Burma veterans each year at their reunions in London. She was made a Dame of the British Empire as a reward for her services.

Australian women shared similar experiences as their British counterparts. There were similar women's Army Navy and Air force organizations set up, for example the Australian Women's Army Service was set up in August 1941, and disbanded in June 1947. Later women were allowed to join the regular services and now form an essential part of the Defence Force.

On America's entry into the war in December 1941, the Government took over the control of the American Merchant Marine and made all women working on ships at that time go ashore. 3 resisted and continued to serve at sea throughout the war, but as far as I know, were the only American women to served at sea during the war.

Some of the most infamous women in WW2 were the female SS camp guards in the concentration camps such as Dachau, Belsen and Treblinka, who were in many ways, more vicious in their behavior, than their male counterparts.

In Russia, Merchant Ships had women crews including Engineer and Deck Officers, including Captains, with some ships entirely manned by women. They were also in the Red Army and Air Force, some becoming Pilots and a few becoming fighter aces. Many partisans, both men and women, fought behind the German lines and an 18 year old girl called Zoya, was captured near Moscow by the Germans, who hanged and mutilated her body as a warning to others. Needless to say, it didn't stop most of them from being in the resistance.

Many of the Yugoslav partisans were women, fighting as their male counterparts did, and were tortured and killed when captured. There was no mercy given by either side in that conflict. Out of a population of 15 million, 1.4 million civilians and over 300,000 soldiers died.

Israel is also one of those countries to integrate women totally into the armed forces, with national service applicable to both men and women, with infantry Battalions completely made up of women who take their place in the front line just as the men do. Although it has taken a long time for women to be recognized for their worth in war, it is only in recent years that in some Western countries, women have been given the opportunity to take part in actual combat, but it is still not considered to be the proper thing in the British or Australian Services to actually pull the trigger, even though they are allowed to give firing orders. Training policy with regard to weapons training changed in 1979 in the British Army when small arms training started to be given to women in certain trades as it was suddenly realized that women Military Police had been involved in active security duties for some years in Northern Ireland, which requires competent weapons skills, and this of course has continued since the invasion, in Iraq.

However, just recently, one of the last bastions of male dominance in Britain has fallen when an ex - regular British Army woman was recruited into the Yeoman of the Guard -known as the Beef eaters - which, since 1485 when they were first formed, had until then been an all male pre-serve.

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