



**WWDHS  
NEWSLETTER  
No. 451  
April - June 2022  
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### Meetings

**Committee Meetings** will be Zoom sessions on 11 April at 1.30 p.m. and 9 May at 1.30 p.m.

**General Meetings:** There will be no meeting in April as it falls on Easter Monday.

On 16 May a meeting will be held. The venue will be advertised as soon as it is confirmed.

### COMMITTEE

**President:** Geoff Burch  
**Vice President:** Geoff Haddon  
**Secretary:** Margaret Hill  
**Treasurer:** Geoff Burch

**Committee:** Tony Dunn, Margaret Nowlan-Jones, Peter Morris, Di Lovett, Rhonda Reedy, Brian Andrews, Craig Dixon, Leanne Diessel, Judy Buik

**Robert Haywood** will be our guest speaker at the General Meeting on 16 May. He will give a presentation of photographs covering historic places in Europe and the United Kingdom.

**North Wagga Village Heritage Track** was officially opened by Dr Joe McGirr MP on 17 March 2022. The heritage track was completed by the North Wagga Wagga Residents Association and assisted by a \$22,000 grant from Wagga Wagga City Council. It consists of 26 signs on a track around North Wagga. A free audio tour will soon be available as well.

**WWDHS Patron:** Michael McCormack, Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Member for Riverina

**WAGGA WAGGA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.  
PO BOX 90, WAGGA WAGGA. 2650.**

**President:** Geoff Burch Ph 0417277592  
**Vice-President:** Geoff Haddon Ph 0269224403  
**Secretary:** Margaret Hill Ph 0269334556  
**Newsletter Editor:** Sherry Morris Ph 0269229337  
**Email:** [info@wwdhs.org.au](mailto:info@wwdhs.org.au)  
**Web site:** [www.wwdhs.org.au](http://www.wwdhs.org.au)

**Committee meetings:** 3rd Monday of the month  
**General meetings:** 3rd Monday of the month 7:30  
**Annual Subscriptions:** Single: \$20, Couple: \$30.  
Corporate: \$50. Due by 1 July each year. Payment by cash, cheque or direct deposit to WWDHS. BSB: 062 600. A/c No.: 0080 0270

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## VALE NADINE GRACE CARLIN



Nadine and Colin Carlin joined the Wagga Historical Society about 1976 and within two years were both elected to the Board of Management. From 1979 they were both recording officers, cataloguing the Society's collection. Col was appointed Museum Curator in 1984 while Nadine, a former teacher-librarian, helped with accessioning the large collection. She also reported the Museum's activities in the newspaper and the Museum's newsletter. She and a small group of other enthusiastic ladies attended working bees each Wednesday; they were on a roster for welcoming visitors to the Museum and the children who attended on school visits; and organised the annual fetes.

In recent years she was living at The Haven. She died on 4 March at the age of 95.

## Margaret Walsh

A big thank you to a new member, Margaret Walsh, who treated a group (which included several of our members) to afternoon tea and a tour of her wonderful historic house.



## Trish Davies



Trish Davies, a former primary school teacher, who has a passion for Palaeontology and is an Honorary Technician at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Laboratory in Winton, Queensland, was the guest speaker for our March meeting at the Wagga City Library. She gave a fascinating talk on locating and unearthing huge bones, stripping the unearthed bones back to their mineralised surfaces and cleaning up a dinosaur fossil.

## 200th SHOW IN SYDNEY

By Geoff Haddon

It is interesting to note that Her Royal Highness Princess Anne opened the Royal Easter Show in Sydney on Saturday 9 April this year to celebrate 200 years of Royal Agricultural Shows. The Sydney Show was the highlight of all shows within the state of New South Wales in that “ribboned livestock” from country New South Wales Shows, at times, were presented.



Up until the Royal Easter Show moved from Moore Park to its present site at Homebush, livestock trains conveyed this livestock from country areas to Darling Harbour. Upwards of three train loads of livestock from Victoria and southern New South Wales passed through Wagga Wagga and up until 1961 at least one full train load of livestock would have had to be transhipped at Wodonga due to change of gauge.

These trains were time-tabled to arrive at Darling Harbour after the departure of the last goods train from that point as all country freight started at Darling Harbour. Darling Harbour was closed around the 1980s because of road and rail congestion in Sydney and the rail livestock interchange moved out to Chullora.

The Show Livestock Trains arrived at Darling Harbour and the livestock was moved out to Moore Park by road and the cover of night. Any livestock not sold after the show was returned to their owners the same way. These Livestock Trains would start at Albury and pick up along the way. The Lord Brothers at Junee entered the Sydney Show every year and utilised the trucking yards, tucked up underneath the northwest corner of the overhead bridge, to load a number of head. Sometimes Arthur Lord or Thomas Lord accompanied the livestock train the brake van. A passenger carriage was marshalled next to the brake van for the conveyance of an owner or carer of the expensive livestock. One train did not do all the pickups. One train would pick up Albury – Junee (including all branch lines), another Junee – Goulburn, so the livestock would not be spending too much time on the train.

One year a Show Train picked up livestock from the Bombala Line at Goulburn and the railway guard had to “retake his train”. He had to rewrite his trainload, which consisted of where the rail truck came from, consignor and position on the train. He had just passed a rail truck when he heard a “large bang”. On turning around he noticed the cattle truck door had come open, a very large bull, turning like a ballerina in mid-air, landing on the ground and chasing the guard down towards the train engine. There is never enough room between trains in a marshalling yard. The Goulburn railway employees had a bull on the loose. The train was secured and despatched to Darling Harbour. The bull was rounded up, placed in another cattle wagon and forwarded by another train.

## **FIVE YEARS WITH THE WAAAF**

**By Alice Clarke**

***Longreach Leader, 11 December 1946***

To the women of Australia, who left their homes and jobs to join with the Women's Auxiliary Services it is in no small measure due that we are able to celebrate Victory. Miss Clarke left her position as clerk at the Graziers' Association office at Longreach, and for five years led the life of a WAAAF in various parts of Australia (including Uranquinty and Wagga Wagga). In this story she gives a vivid description of her experiences.

The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) was the Pioneer Auxiliary Service in Australia. The object in forming the Auxiliary was to release men for active service. It was formed in March 1941 with 320 women whose musterings were: Wireless Telegraphists, Teleprinters, Cypher Assistants and Messing Staff. In July of that year, the musterings increased to consist of Transport Drivers, Medical and Dental Orderlies, Clerical Assistants, Storekeepers (who later became equipment assistants) and Drill Instructresses. In 1943 the musterings were further increased and included Flight Riggers, Flight Mechanics, Electricians and Instrument Makers.

I had the good fortune to be included in the first group from Queensland which left Brisbane on 11 October 1941. There were 49 girls in this group coming from all parts of the State. Upon our arrival in Sydney we were taken to Bankstown to commence our 'Rookies'. On arrival we had to collect our bedding equipment and take it to the hut allotted to us. We discovered to our horror that we had to 'Panik' (i.e., to scrub and clean) the hut before we were able to settle in.

Two courses were ahead of us and on taking up our position in the meal line were greeted with 'you'll be sorry'. I can honestly say that by the end of the first week we were really feeling very sorry for ourselves. Bankstown RAAF Station covers a large area and by the time we had walked from our hut to the mess and then to orderly room and down to the medical section and then back to the hut we were just about 'done in', especially as most of us were wearing high heels. A trip to the clothing store to receive our 'kit' claimed about two hours of the afternoon and then we were marched down to the medical section to receive the first of many needles, after which we were marched on to the parade ground for drill. Many of the girls could not stand up to the drill after having received the needle and later an order was issued by the medical officer forbidding drill until 24 hours after receiving a needle. You can imagine how raw we must have looked being put into a squad, nobody in step and most of us in high heels. We were very pleased to fall into bed that first night as the needle was beginning to take effect and we were feeling the strain of having to sit up the previous night when travelling from Brisbane to Sydney. I do not think that one girl heard the 'Lights Out' whistle that first night.

Next morning, we were all lined up and various cleaning duties allotted to us which had to be completed in a certain time. We were then taken on to the parade ground and introduced to our drill instructor. He was a Scotsman who said that he had spent many years in Queensland and knew just how much Queenslanders could take. One of his frequent remarks to us whilst on parade was 'Can't you keep still. You're like a lot of cornstalks waving in the wind'. After four weeks of drill, physical training and lectures we had our examination and then came the pass out parade. On that morning we were all up bright and early as most of us were not used to adjusting studs and ties. Group Officer, Clare Stevenson, Director of WAAAF, came up from Melbourne for the occasion and it was a very proud day for us when we donned our uniform.





*Clare Stevenson, director of WAAAF  
from May 1941 to March 1946*

As our postings had not come through on our pass-out day we were granted three days leave, which I might add we were very pleased to get. On returning to Bankstown, we were all told of our various postings and as most of us were posted in groups to units we did not feel so lonely going on to a unit. I was posted to a Headquarters Unit in Sydney. At that time there were no WAAAF barracks and we had to find our own accommodation. After living out for four months, an old home in Double Bay was taken over as a barracks. Wing Officer Hawthorne was in charge of WAAAF stationed in Sydney and when this home was taken over six girls went into barracks to get the place in order. I was one of the six and after finishing work at our section we would return to the barracks and then commence to 'panik' the place. I do not know how many nights it took to find the pattern on the linoleum but eventually after using much floor polish we came to it. When everything was in order the rest of the WAAAF stationed at Point Piper were brought into barracks. We were very fortunate living at those barracks as we had 'Redleaf' swimming pool next door and we were given permission to use the pool whenever we liked.

After being in the service two and a half months, I received my first promotion to Acting Corporal. During the first summer we were in the service, we had not been issued with summer uniforms and were wearing 'Blues'. After the entry of Japan into the war, we were all issued with respirators with instructions that they had to be worn at all times. The medical officer issued an order that jackets were to be discarded as the girls were finding it too much having to wear the respirator over 'Blues'. It was a sight for the residents of Wollesley Road to see us having respirator drill each morning for half an hour, especially having to climb a hill.

### **Wagga Wagga**

In May 1942 our unit moved to Wagga Wagga. A special train was engaged and we left Sydney in the early morning. Lunch was served to us at Goulburn which consisted of the usual sausages and potato. Tea was served to us at Cootamundra and not being very keen on sausages we were all hoping for a very nice tea but on sitting down at the table we discovered we were to have saveloys and potato. However, we arrived at Wagga about 10.30 p.m. and as an advance party had gone down a few days previously we were treated to tea and toast. Hotels had been taken over in that town and on rising the next morning we were all told that the hotel had to be 'panicked' from top to bottom. We had only left Sydney a fortnight when the Japanese submarines were captured in Sydney Harbour. However, the submarines were exhibited in country towns in NSW, so we had the opportunity of inspecting them. They were very small and made one wonder how men could possibly fit in them.

The CWA opened up a rest room at Wagga for the WAAAF and later when the AWAS arrived they were given the privilege of using this rest room. All service girls were most appreciative

of this room and owe many thanks to the women who did their utmost to make the girls feel at home. I think this room was most appreciated by girls serving the units adjacent to Wagga as it was always somewhere to go when they came to town on their day off. Another big asset in Wagga was the opening of a Service Women's Hostel and many girls owe much to the kindness of the matron in charge.

When the Service Women's Hostel was opened in Wagga, WAAAF and AWAS marched through the streets of Wagga and Lady Gowrie took the salute. I do not know how we looked marching as our unit had a band in front and another behind both playing different tunes and time together so you can imagine how we skipped down the street changing step the whole time. We were taken to task afterwards by Group Officer Stevenson for our skipping exhibition and all vowed we would never be in another march. After twelve months service I was promoted to the rank of sergeant.



*March of the Women's Services down Baylis and Fitzmaurice streets prior to the opening of the Women's Services Hostel, 3 April 1943*



*Left: Matron Bess Duncanson on the front verandah of the Service Women's Hostel with Dot Stebbing and Michael, the Red Setter, 1943. She was the matron from 2 March 1943 until the hostel was no longer required for the servicewomen, on 27 January 1946. She died on 14 September 1991.*

## Uranquinty

After a stay of seven months in Wagga I was posted to a service flying training school at Uranquinty. This was a school where pilots received their 'wings' on completion of their training and I was privileged to see many 'pass out' parades. It made one feel very proud of Australia's youth to see the lads being presented with their 'wings' and no doubt it was a great day in their lives.

This unit was 14 miles from the nearest town so consequently most of the personnel were only able to leave the unit on their 'stand down' day. However, we had our own picture theatre, pictures being shown four times a week. A dance was held every Monday night on the unit and as we had our own orchestra and band we were well catered for in the way of entertainment. Boxing tournaments were held monthly. An Army camp nearby always sent a team of boxers over. The CO was very keen on having gardens to beautify the place, so everyone was detailed to do gardening so many hours a week. The station was a picture to see and no doubt many ex-service men and women will remember 'Curnow's Country Club' which the unit was familiarly known as.

Uranquinty is a cold spot. We were living in unlined huts and in the morning it was a common sight to see icicles hanging from the rafters. It was so cold there during the winter that the ground would be covered with frost. It was a common occurrence to see girls fainting on the parade ground. When investigated, it was discovered those girls preferred to stay in bed a few extra minutes and miss breakfast. An order was issued that all personnel must have breakfast before going on parade. One of my most pleasant memories of that unit was the CO's parade which was held every Sunday morning. To see the whole of the personnel of the unit on the parade ground and then the march past, the CO taking the salute. Church parades were held every Sunday morning following the CO's parade and it was really surprising to see the few who dropped out when the order, 'fall out those who do not want to attend church'.

As I stated previously, this unit was 14 miles from the nearest town. A unit train went into town on Saturday mornings and returned at midnight. We did not have a siding but just had to jump down from the steps of the carriage and then make a rush for the tenders which would be waiting to take us back to the unit. I am sorry to say there was no 'ladies first' there.

This particular unit would have a general 'stand down, every three months and trains engaged to take all personnel to Sydney or Melbourne. There was always the joy of re-union on the return journey and everyone looked forward to meeting one another again and discussing their leave with them. There is no doubt there is something in community life which binds us together. I think it must have been the fact that we were cut off from civilian life and when coming in contact with it again we felt somewhat lost.

NCO schools were started in 1942 and the school that I attended was held at the experimental farm just outside Wagga. Each school lasted for one week. The course consisted of lectures, drill, physical training, informal discussions at night, and terminated with a hike. During the course, each NCO was given a subject on which they had to deliver a five-minute lecturette. There are a few very trying moments when you first stand on the stage and look down on your audience. I remember one poor girl standing up there and not being able to get even a sound from her mouth. She was absolutely stage frightened. Another burst into tears and was unable to continue. I was fortunate enough to be able to cope with my subject which was 'South Africa's War Effort'. The idea of the course is to train NCOs in dealing with airwomen as on quite a few units no WAAAF officer was there and the NCO was responsible for the welfare of the airwomen.

I was the first WAAAF sergeant to be posted to Uranquinty and was told by the WAAAF officer that I had to eat in the sergeant's mess. There were approximately 200 men in the sergeants' mess and they were not very pleased at the prospect of women in their mess, so you can imagine the reception I got on my arrival. I was taken down to the mess prior to the first meal I had there and met the stewardesses who promised they would look after me as they were very pleased to see a female coming into the mess. The first night I went in to tea, I sat at a table where there were four males, as all tables had to be filled before another one started. Nobody spoke to me and I received the curtest replies to anything I ventured. I heard afterwards that the idea was to try and 'freeze' me out. The same thing happened the next morning at breakfast and when lunch time came the Warrant Officer of the section I was working in apologised for the men's behaviours and kindly offered to escort me to meals until the men got used to my presence in the mess. After a few days the men began to thaw and then a month later another WAAAF sergeant was posted to the unit which made things much happier for me. Within six months we had about half a dozen WAAAF sergeants in the mess. After a few weeks we were invited into the room for a drink. I believe the other WAAAF officers had the same experience when first entering the officers' mess. This treatment was such a contrast as when another girl and I got our third stripe in Wagga the president of the mess invited us over to meet all the other sergeants and saw that we were properly received.

Life on a flying unit is very interesting and we were treated to some marvellous displays of aerobatics on various occasions. I remember Group Captain 'Killer' Caldwell coming over bringing three Spitfires and three Kittyhawks and did they turn it on before coming in to land. It was a fine sight to see them 'shooting up' the place. Another day three Venturi's had a dog fight in the air.

In November 1943 I was posted down to Air Board in Melbourne on special duty. In December 1943 I was promoted to the rank of flight sergeant. In March 1944 I was posted back to Uranquinty and arrived there on the WAAAF birthday. A special parade was held that morning with the WAAAF taking the leading parts. The girls all looked spic and span in their summer uniform and later when a competition for marching was held between the RAAF and WAAAF, everyone agreed that the WAAAF marched much better than the RAAF. The airwomen were given a dinner at night, being waited on by the RAAF.

One funny incident happened at Uranquinty. I was orderly sergeant this particular night when a girl came rushing over to my hut and said that there was a drunken soldier in their hut. When I arrived there was no sign of the man and an enquiring what had happened was told that six of the girls grabbed him and threw him over the fence. He had the misfortune to pick on a hut whose occupants comprised flight riggers and flight mechanics. So much for the weaker sex! In December 1944 I was posted to Townsville. I was in Townsville when the end of the war with Germany came. In July 1945 I was granted my discharge on compassionate ground and had to report to Sandgate for my discharge. It was with mixed feelings that I walked out of Sandgate and service life. I have been out of the service just over 12 months and have settled down to civilian life again but I have very pleasant memories of the days spent in the 'service' and of the fond friendships I made. Wherever I may go I will always find someone whom I knew in the service.

In concluding I must say that the training and discipline in the Service was very strict and it was really amazing to see the way the girls settled down to 'service life', especially the older girls who had been used to leading their own life and doing as they pleased and to see how they knuckled down to discipline. We had girls from all walks of life and it was wonderful how they all worked together.



## AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS 1945-1995

**By Olive Jardine nee McNeil,  
24 February 1995**

In this year which has been designated the time 'Australia Remembers 1945-1995', I would like to tell a little of one of our wartime Women's Services for I feel that a lot of folk, especially the younger generation, know very little of the contribution these people made towards the Peace we now enjoy.

Each Anzac Day as I march behind our WAAAF Banner and hear the applause of the onlookers to the March I wonder what their thoughts really are. Do they appreciate the fact that each one of these 'girls' were volunteers. Do they see them as Veterans? Although we march in the Air Force 'block' are they aware the letters WAAAF stand for Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force which was formed on 15 March 1941 – the first Women's Service in World War II. Sterling work was already being done by the Nursing Service.

Miss Amy Gwendoline Stark, who later became Mrs A. G. Caldwell OBE commenced duty on 10 March 1941 and was the first WAAAF Officer in NSW. Sadly, our beloved 'Starkie', as she was so affectionately known (how we shall miss her cheery few words and kiss bestowed on each and everyone of her 'girls' prior to the March she so ably led – sometimes feeling far from well) departed this life on 28 November last year (1994). Our very well-respected Director (D/WAAAF), Miss Clare Stevenson, died a few years earlier. Miss Stevenson took Office in June 1941. The last member of the wartime Service was demobilised in 1947.



*Left: Olive McNeil on enrolment in WAAAF in 1942.  
Right: Olive McNeil in WAAAF uniform*

Originally one enrolled for twelve months. Later it was decreed that enlistment for the duration was necessary if one wanted to stay in the Service. Being happy in the Service, I enlisted on 15 April 1943, a year to the day of being enrolled. The various musterings for airwomen were paid according to whatever grouping they came under: deferred pay at 1/6 per day commenced six months after joining and was paid on demobilisation together with interest accrued.

Of the 27,874 WAAAFs who served, each girl was able to release a man for 'active' duty. The musterings (trade groupings) for airwomen numbered 73. There were cooks, stewardesses, timekeepers, armourers, radar, electrical and mechanical workers, drill instructors (DIs) and fabric workers. A lass whom I knew at school and who was on our station at Uranquinty once saved an airman's life. He was wearing the parachute folded by Dorothy when he and his plane parted company. They drove transports, issued petrol, hosed down trucks, collected meteorological data, were canteen workers, attended to the sick, signals – on and on the list would go. I was a Clerk Accounts but there were clerks of many descriptions – stores, general, pay, equipment etc.

We were vaccinated, inoculated and X-rayed, there were rules and regulations to be observed and obeyed such as hair had to be worn no longer than one inch above the collar, were issued with leave passes, clothing ration coupons etc. Of course, we were required to wear identification discs around the neck at all times – they were referred to as 'meat tickets' – punched thereon were a number of details, number, name, service (in my case WAAAF) and religion. On the back of the discs was the blood grouping (guess the second disc would have been for the casket should it have been necessary!).

I would like to give you an idea of life on two of many Air Force Stations. However, as everyone sees things from numerous perspectives, so too, varying accounts of a 'like' situation may differ. After my 'rookie' course at Bradfield Park I spent the greater part of my service life down Wagga Wagga way. The warm and sincere hospitality afforded the service people by the residents of Wagga Wagga and surrounding areas will never be forgotten. My first 'posting' was in May 1942 to 5 SFTS, Uranquinty (5 Service Flying Training School, affectionately referred to as 'Quinty or Bar 20) then, after 3 years 1 month 6 days, to 5 AD (5 Aircraft Depot) at Forest Hill, the other side of Wagga. I later spent some time in Melbourne.

Our living conditions at 'Quinty were very far removed from what most people would expect today. As the station was only established in the latter part of 1941 conditions were primitive but as time went on improvements were made. For instance, very early on there were no partitions between the showers, no doors on toilets. Some huts were wooden, some iron, but all unlined. Ice was often on our blankets in the morning. In fact it was so cold we often put extra clothing on to go to bed and have to take it off in the morning! The huts had bare floorboards. We slept on palliases (straw encased in hessian bags) placed on wire stretchers. Sheets were non-existent unless brought from home. At 'Quinty we gathered field mushrooms and cooked them on our small pot-bellied stove which, because of the freezing conditions, had been installed to help heat our unlined, corrugated iron, non-partitioned hut. The living quarters for the WAAAF were much better at 5AD. The huts were divided into rooms with a passage-way down the centre, two girls to a room. It was quite a comfortable style, the ablution section being at the far end. At 'Quinty we had to go out of the hut to a separate ablution section which was terrible in inclement weather. We had 'panic' nights when duties for the cleaning were allocated.

My first winter at 'Quinty we had a lot of rain and mud was everywhere. A rose garden was started in the centre of the compound and when those roses bloomed what a difference it made to the landscape! I have read that June 1944, too, was an incredibly wet month and for five days the temperature was below freezing; we also had fogs. In November 1944 visibility was down to 300 yards when our station suffered a day-long dust storm. I can remember one dreadful dust storm on top of which we had a thunderstorm.

Even though we contended with the heat of summer, the flies, grasshoppers (we were in a wheat-belt area), the dust storms and the bitterly cold winters, a wonderful atmosphere prevailed at good old 'Bar 20' – away from the world but in a world of our own! We had station dances, sports days, concert parties, a Fellowship was formed and Church Services were held, cinema etc but when our swimming pool was opened in 1944 we were overjoyed. It was a real boon! Of course we worked, did all the mundane things of life like washing (coppers, tubs, but no washing machines then), ironing etc to keep our very attractive and serviceable uniform spic and span. We kept the postal authorities busy with our letters to and from home.

At 5 SFTS the Wirraway was the chosen plane used in the training of pilots for single-engine service aircraft. Planes flew both day and night. We had our share of aircraft accidents, unfortunately, some fatal. How clear the sky seemed at night, the twinkling stars bright. The port and starboard lights of red and green shone in the darkness of the night: I understand that by November 1945 'Quinty had almost ceased to be a wartime training school; it was finally closed down in 1958, then used as a migrant camp. I remember seeing rows and rows of Beauforts and Beaufighters being stored at 5AD at the conclusion of the war.



*Olive McNeil and friends at Uranquinty*

It would be very remiss of me not to mention the sterling work performed amongst the Servicewomen by the YWCA and Salvation Army Officers. These people were always so helpful to us. Despite the lack of the many conveniences considered desirable today we were a very happy bunch of girls who enjoyed our service life working as a team. Our standard of living varied from station to station – spartan to very comfortable. Whether we had come from poor, rich or in-between homes was of no consequence, an equality existed, we dressed alike, in winter and summer uniforms. We ate the same food. We went to the many and varied activities on the station. We were and still are, would you believe it – friends!

## **The End of the War**

When the war ended, I was stationed at 5 Aircraft Depot, Forest Hill. This is an account (in part) I sent home to my Mother on Saturday, 11 August 1945:

*Well honey the war is about over at last and excitement is high here I can tell you. Guess I'll start from the beginning. Yesterday afternoon I went into Wagga, did a bit of shopping for the tea club and then went down to Mrs Pollard's place where I had afternoon tea and also tea and stayed for supper. I got the 9.30 p.m. bus.*

*When shopping for our tea club I went into Edmondsons and asked and asked if they had any biscuits. When they said they had, I said I'd have 5/- worth. Well, the girl just looked at me and asked if I meant what I said and when I said yes, she said she was sorry but they only sell half-pound these days!*

*I got home round 10 last night and listened to the news but there was no mention of peace then. I went to bed and later on I heard Lynn and Peg come home from the pictures and go to bed. After a while we heard some kids running through the huts and kicking up an awful din. They came through our hut and I felt like getting up and telling them we wanted to sleep. Apparently as soon as the news came over about 11.15 everyone got excited. The fire alarm made an awful din, chaps came down the road kicking tins. They had a drum and the place was in a uproar. Everyone was out of bed in a shot and just put their jeans over their night attire. I didn't think it was true but in the end had to get up as I had to be in the fun.*

*The boys and girls marched down to the CO's place and got him and his wife out of bed, cheered him, sang 'He's a Jolly Good Fellow' and he said we could do what we liked until Monday morning.*

*Talk about Speed Good, there were chaps walking off the Station five minutes after with their ports packed and were heading for Sydney and Melbourne. Mum, I can't pen all what happened because it was all so marvellous but will tell you when I see you. They started a dance and everyone was being kissed. The accounting boys and then their friends and their friend's friends mobbed me and I was just about kissed to death. Never before have I been so popular. Little Ken Humphries saw me home.*

*Everyone was still going when I came away and that was 20 to 4 this morning. Never before have I had such a time. The Sergeants' Mess was opened and free bottles of beer were given out. I asked for lemonade and when the boys saw it they pounced on me thinking it was gin. When they found what it was they all sang 'throw her out', all in fun of course. It was a grand night – beg yours, I should say morning. The CO and also Wing Commadore Stiller came up to the dance and addressed everyone. It was good I can tell you.*



*Nearly everyone was up first thing this morning. Lots have gone off the Station. Some kids were up at 6 this morning but I didn't get up till about 8.15 although I was awake earlier. I rang Madge up at Quinty this morning and we're going to meet in Wagga tonight and have tea, then go to a dance and celebrate. Tomorrow night is the Fellowship Tea. It was a lovely day yesterday but today isn't very nice as its showery. Well, Mum this will have to do for now as I'll give you a full account of things when I see you. Lots of love for now.*

*Your loving daughter Olie (Jane) xxxx*

*Believe the dance here ended at half past five this morning.*

Within a few days of writing 'Peace' was officially declared (15 August) and 'special trains' were to take us either to Sydney or Melbourne. On our arrival in Sydney the scene was unbelievable. Strangers were hugging and kissing each other. There was laughter and crying – and yet, in all the joy, one thought of the sadness of those still grieving the loss of loved ones, the wounded, the sick both physically and mentally. What great hope there was for those still listed as 'missing'! After leaving Central Railway Station I found my way to my home at North Ryde. My Mother and I then went into Sydney and met, as previously arranged earlier in the day, my WAAAF friends and others, on the corner of Martin Place and George Street. It must have been by then early evening. The dancing, hugging, singing was still on-going! What an exhilarating day!

The letter to my mother is interesting reading these many years on as Madge, the lass I mention meeting in Wagga to celebrate the impending war's end, I still meet monthly when we go to our WAAAF Branch Meeting.



*WAAAF ladies marching up Fitzmaurice Street, Wagga Wagga, during the End of War Celebrations*

## Elva Elizabeth Collins

Elva Elizabeth (known as Bette) was born in Roseville, Sydney, on 23 February 1923. She was the daughter of Percival George Collins and Penelope Mary Roberts. Percival had served in the Middle East and Gallipoli with the 3rd Battalion, Australian Infantry Forces (AIF), during the First World War. She was the granddaughter of former Mayor of Wagga Wagga, Edward Easter Collins. She had attended primary school and correspondence school. Although she did not have work experience, she had been a governess to the younger members of the family and had supervised their correspondence courses. She had been a Patrol Leader in the Girl Guides and had secured a first aid certificate.

Bette enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) on 2 June 1942 during the Second World War. It was the first and largest of the war's Australian Women's Services. Bette was then aged 19 years, three months. She was 5 feet, 8 inches tall and had fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. After completing her ten-day training course at Bradfield Park, she was posted to No. 2 Aircraft Park at Bankstown where aircraft were fitted out, repaired and refurbished before they went into battle. She was employed as an Office Orderly and later as a clerk, being responsible for checking and bringing up to date the logbooks for each aircraft. She later transferred to Melbourne Headquarters and then to the recruiting centre at Woolloomooloo.

In September 1944, Bett contracted pneumonia and pleurisy (as her father Percival had done during the first World War). She was discharged as medically unfit for further service on 3 April 1945.

Reference: National Archives of Australia (NAA), A9031, 97960.



*Above: Elva Elizabeth Collins at the time of her enlistment (left); in WAAAF Uniform (centre) and a photograph of Bette used in WAAAF recruiting literature when she was working in the recruiting hut in Martin Place, Sydney(right).*