

**WWDHS
NEWSLETTER
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Committee and General Meetings will be held on 17 October 2022 at the Wagga Wagga City Library Community Learning Space (at the back of the first floor). Committee Meeting will begin at 1.30 p.m. and the General meeting will begin at 2.30 p.m.

COMMITTEE

President: Geoff Burch
Vice President: Geoff Haddon
Secretary: Margaret Hill
Treasurer: Geoff Burch
Committee: Brian Andrews, Judy Buik, Mark Christison, Leanne Diessel, Craig Dixon, Di Lovett, Peter Morris, Sherry Morris, Margaret Nowlan-Jones Rhonda Reedy.

NSW FAIR TRADING

NSW Fair Trading have issued a new Model Constitution effective on 1st September 2022. Geoff has prepared a proposed adaption for our society while trying to stick with the Model version as much as possible. The committee will review the new Model and schedule a special meeting to approve the revised Constitution. Members will be notified in advance of the special meeting.

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

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

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Committee meetings: 3rd Monday of the month
General meetings: 3rd Monday of the month
Annual Subscriptions: Single: \$20, Couple: \$30.
Due 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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WAGGA WAGGA AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY, AGM, 20 September 2022

At the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Annual General Meeting on 20 September 2022 the new officers and committee members remained almost the same as for the previous year. The newly elected officers and committee members are as follows:

President – Geoff Burch

Vice-president – Geoff Haddon

Secretary – Margaret Hill

Treasurer – Geoff Burch

Committee members:

Brian Andrews

Judy Buik

Mark Christison

Leanne Diessel

Craig Dixon

Diana Lovett

Peter Morris

Sherry Morris

Margaret Nowlan-Jones

Rhonda Ready

Other positions

Public Officer: Peter Morris

Bank signatories: Geoff Burch, Geoff Haddon and Peter Morris.

Key holders: Museum BGS Site: Geoff Burch;

Post Office Box: Geoff Burch, Margaret Hill

COMMITTEES and DELEGATES

Museum Advisory Committee: Geoff Burch, Geoff Haddon, Peter Gissing and Mark Christison.

Newsletter Editor: Sherry Morris

Research and Enquiries: Leanne Diessel

Web Administrators: Geoff Burch, Peter Gissing

WWDHS Archives: Judy Buik.

The RAHS will be holding an Online seminar on the 22nd October. It costs \$15 for either the morning or afternoon session, or \$25 for both sessions.

The new museum building will probably be completed by February 2023. We are hoping that the society will have access to our room within the complex before Xmas, so that we can set up ready for the opening.

WOMEN'S ROYAL AUSTRALIAN CORPS and ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARMY NURSING CORPS

By Sherry Morris

During the 1950s Australians were concerned about the spread of communism. The outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, the Malayan Emergency and the Viet Ming uprising against the French in Vietnam were all seen as a direct threat to Australia. As the new Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had promised during his election campaign in 1949, compulsory peacetime military training was introduced under the National Service Act of 1951. All young men had to register at the age of 18 and, if fit, were required to undertake 176 days' standard recruit training and then spend five years in the reserves. By 1952 the strength of the forces had been increased from 22,000 to 28,000 and two battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment were serving in the first Commonwealth Division in Korea.

Although Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) had been disbanded, a new organisation known as Women's Australian Army Corps (later Women's Royal Australian Army Corps or WRAAC) was established in April 1951 to overcome manpower shortages in the army during the Korean War and National Service.



By June 1952 there were 600 members of WRAAC who were then allotted to units, including Kapooka, to fill vacancies and to replace men. They were employed as cooks, drivers, stewardesses, clerks, librarians, stenographers, switchboard operators and typists. By April 1953, members of the WRACC were stationed at Kapooka. In that month they were inspected by Major Lucy Crane, Assistant Director of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps in Eastern Command who was examining the possibilities of further employment of members of the Corps in the area. When the Queen visited 1RTB in 1954, WRAAC ladies were on parade.ⁱ

Major Lucy Crane, Assistant Director of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps in Eastern Command

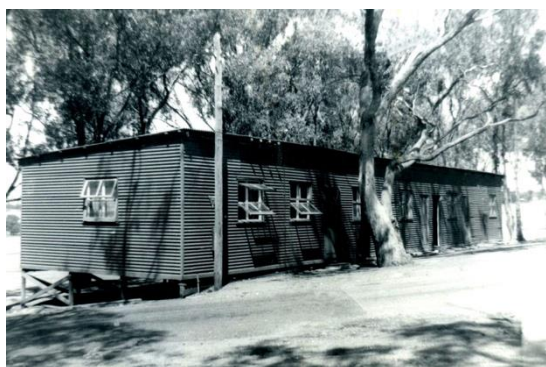
In the early 1960s, there were thirty-three women at Kapooka (including twenty-one members of WRAAC).ⁱⁱ Most of the WRAAC were clerical workers. There were several drivers, one for the Commanding Officer (CO) and a general driver who collected the stores in town, some signal staff, teleprinter and switchboard operators and typists. Jenny McLay (later Robertson) was the Movements Clerk who was responsible for the bookings and all the paperwork involved in sending regular army personnel and recruits to their next unit. She wrote:

I was responsible for train and plane bookings mainly for the recruits leaving Kapooka after their basic training. Duties included typing up Mob 3's (army travel documents) with heaps of copies, (six I think) with carbon paper on a manual typewriter. In our open plan office (old munitions hut) known as BHQ (Battalion Headquarters) there were about eight people each

responsible for some aspect of running the battalion. There were about 50% men and women, although the men were usually of higher rank than the women.

In one corner of the hut, closed off was the Pay Office where three (two male and one female) people manually calculated the pays for all the soldiers and recruits serving at Kapooka. In the opposite corner also closed off was the newly-installed teleprinter that chugged out messages from all over the country. It was noisy, and we had to log on and off at stipulated times each day. It was manned only by those cleared to Top Secret status. No one person was responsible for the teleprinter.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cherryl McNamara (later Mossman) worked in the Pay Office with Sergeant Ernie Palmer (a Korean War veteran). Cherryl had arrived at Kapooka on 29 September 1962 and was promoted to Corporal on 2 September 1963. She recalled that her first duty in the Pay Office each day was to light the pot belly stove and put the kettle on. She really enjoyed her work, calculating the pays for Kapooka personnel.



Above left: The Orderly Room and Pay Office where WRAAC personnel, Cherryl McNamara and Jenny McLay, worked in the 1960s. Above right: Battalion Headquarters where the CO, Assistant Adjutant, RSM and CSM were based. There was also a switchboard room and a flagpole out the front. Source: Cherryl McNamara Mossman.

Lyn Kane Dale (later the author of the book, *Lady Soldiers*) was assigned to General Duties at Kapooka for eleven months while waiting to attend a Clerk Ordnance Course. She worked at the hospital, sweeping, washing and polishing the floors. She made sure the officers were supplied with fresh milk and clean fireplaces and, as a mess stewardess, served food in the Officers Mess. On special occasions she helped prepare for their dining-in nights, spending all day polishing the floors and tables and the silver candelabra. These were always grand occasions with fabulous foods (including suckling pig with an apple in its mouth on one occasion) and expensive wines. Her worst experience was when the hospital was short staffed and she had to hold the leg of a young lad who had been in an accident while the doctor set his leg.^{iv}

There were about twelve nurses at 7 Camp Hospital, members of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC), formed from the Royal Australian Nursing Service and Australian Army Medical Women's Service in 1951. There was then one large main ward at the hospital as well as smaller two-bed rooms, a dressing and treatment room and a steriliser room. In addition, there was an administrative office with ten cubicles, a kitchen and mess room, a medical store, an outpatients' area, an x-ray building, a doctor's residence, an ablution block and a laundry.

Chris Cain (pictured right) had already had two years' experience, working at the progressive Class 'C' hospital, Lucknow, Claremont, in Perth, Western Australia. She found the equipment and technology at Kapooka was outdated. For example, the sterilisers were very old and whereas she was used to giving injections directly from a glass vial, at Kapooka, she had to pre-mix the penicillin before she could inject. She wrote:



As this was the Recruit Training Battalion there were always a variety of ailments, including upper respiratory tract infection (URTI), so penicillin jabs and inhalations were the usual treatments. I think the penicillin must have been left over from World War II as we had to mix it with sterile water to use it. One occasion that sticks in my memory was when a non-commissioned officer (NCO) came in for treatment with a rather nasty infection after he had undergone a circumcision. Being a rather naïve 18-year-old and having never done anything like this before I didn't know where to look and just wished the floor would swallow me. Naturally I wanted to look as if I knew what I was doing as I prepared the sterile dressing and I managed to apply it with some professional diplomacy and hope that I wouldn't be on duty for his next treatment.^v

Chris discovered that there were also many minor and some more serious injuries, with recruits fainting on the parade ground or suffering exhaustion from route marches. The more serious injuries and complaints were forwarded to the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Chris enjoyed her work. She thought that Matron Mills, although very short and 'very sweet', managed to keep control of the nurses and that Sister Lightbody was good to talk to during night duty. Because of her experience, Chris was sent to an Orderlies Course at Healesville School of Army Health in Victoria on 4 August-11 September 1964.

The female quarters for WRAAC and RAANC were located near the camp hospital. There were two quarters for the ORs, one for the Non-Commissioned Officers and one for the Officers. In the ORs' quarters there were three or four to a room. However, within the NCO block (across the road near the officers' quarters), Sergeants had their own room and two corporals would share a room. Each person had a bed (with metal bed ends, springs on the base and probably a sponge rubber mattress), a metal wardrobe and a small locker and perhaps a desk and a 'tasteful brown lino floor'.^{vi} Each room had a fan and a two-bar radiator. The rooms opened out onto a verandah. In the officers' quarters, across the road from the main barracks, each officer (one WRAAC Lieutenant and five to six nursing sisters) had her own (more comfortable) room. They had a bathroom and an ante room.

Jenny Robertson found living at Kapooka 'very different to being at home, but mostly it was fun':

In our room we had a record player which we played often, particularly whilst we polished our shoes or attended to our uniforms or just chatting and laughing. I had an alarm clock radio that woke everyone else each morning but not me. In those days I slept like the dead. I also had an old coffee percolator that we filled with water to heat tinned spaghetti which we had on toast, cooked on the radiator, for our supper. Not exactly kosher behaviour. Included in the female barrack area was our Recreation Room where we gathered for socialising, both amongst ourselves or with the male soldiers. We had dances and/or parties for special occasions such as celebrating our WRAAC or RAANC Corp day. On Monday nights we had Closed Camp (no leave allowed) and this room was used to gather all off-duty female personal together for lectures etc. from our female officer and/or sergeant. Usual a serious night, no fun at all.



*Above left: Female Other Ranks Quarters at Kapooka, near the Hospital. Source: Lyn Kane Dale.
Above right: Jenny McLay (later Robertson). Source: Jenny Robertson.*

Many of the women found Kapooka extremely cold in winter. Chris Cain wore thick woolen socks and wrapped herself in a blanket and then put another two blankets on top of her each night. It was really cold when she had to get up early in the morning. She wore her cardigan on her way to work but was not allowed to wear it at work. She worked and moved very fast to keep herself warm and was often scolded by Matron for running.

On average the WRAAC had to parade about once a week – at ‘Closed Camp’. Although their rooms were not inspected every day they were expected to be always ready for inspection. Official inspections of the rooms, wardrobes and lockers (and the kit held within) were held ‘as part of the Closed Camp saga’. Their uniforms had to be impeccable. In winter the WRAAC wore a highland green suit comprising a skirt, jacket, shirt, tie, stockings, shoes and a beret. The summer dress was described as a ‘parchment, creaseless linen’ worn with a felt hat and a green tie or open neck.^{vii} The nurses’ ward uniform was grey with a white collar and had buttons up the front and a box pleat at the back. In winter the uniform was buttoned at the neck and had a white detachable collar (similar to a peter pan type) and fastened at the front with a pin. The head wear was a lightly starched white triangular shape which was tied at the back in a particular knot (this was changed to a cap mid 1965).^{viii}

There was a laundry at their quarters with a washing machine and tubs as well as a drying room with lines and racks. However, the old Whirlpool washing machine which the ladies referred to as a ‘cement mixer’ and a ‘monster speed spin dryer’ were very rough on their clothes. The WRAAC washed and starched their own uniforms in the laundry and hung them on the line where they usually stuck together. The nurses had a similar problem. Their uniforms (each with the owner’s name inside the collar) were sent away to be washed and starched. They were returned on a rail which had to be wheeled in. The uniforms were flat and still starched and sticking together. The women (WRAAC and RAANC) had to literally pull their uniforms apart and for a while they crackled as they walked. Ironing the linen uniform was quite onerous. It had to be damped down and every inch wet and ironed inside and out so that all the seams were the right side up.

When in uniform, the WRAAC ladies had to march. The nurses were not required to drill or march but they had room inspections and their equipment and shoes had to be spit polished. There was a bed check most nights at 2230 (the Recreation Room closed at 2200) although, with approval, they could stay out until midnight on Friday night and on Saturday nights to 0100 Sunday mornings. Both WRAAC and RAANC ate at the mess near the hospital which catered for hospital staff as well as WRAAC, regardless of where they worked (at the hospital

or within the battalion area). The WRACC had to walk to the mess in all kinds of weather – hot in summer and cold in winter. In winter they could feel the ice crunching under their feet. They had to line up for their meals which were served from a bain-marie. Jenny Robertson wrote:

Overall I enjoyed the food as I had been brought up to eat what was put in front of you. The meals were basic. Breakfast was cold cereals, or porridge plus eggs, fried, or scrambled plus bacon. Lunch and Dinner: Meat and a couple vegetables, plus all the old fashioned dishes – lambs fry and bacon, crumbed brains, for example, and of course salads – boring (iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and beetroot slices). The meat was usually corned beef and topped with old fashioned mayo. Dessert was also available and again the old fashioned types like apple pie and custard, jam roly pollies, junket and jellies.

On Christmas Day, they were served a ‘beautiful and very abundant Christmas lunch’ by the officers, a very old tradition within the services. Lyn Kane Dale remembers that for her first Christmas Dinner at Kapooka, Matron Mills made an effort to make it an enjoyable day for the women. Jenny McLay (Robertson) recalled that she was served by the Battalion CO and ‘it was lots of fun’.



Above: Some of the WRAAC and one of RAANC ladies assembling in the grounds of 7 Camp Hospital prior to boarding the bus for the Freedom of the City Parade and Ceremony. From left to right: Judith (Judy) Hancock (later Stone), Sergeant Elizabeth Trainor, Vera Alexander, Sergeant Beryl McIntosh (RAANC), Valma Gainsford, unknown, Carol Parkinson. The ladies stood up in the bus all the way from Kapooka to Wagga Wagga so that their starched uniforms would not crease. Some of them took their best pair of spit-polished shoes and wore their second best and changed on arrival. Source: Cherryl McNamara Mossman.



Above: The WRAAC and RAANC ladies performing a Right Dress (forming straight lines) prior to marching. Front rank, left to right: Judy Hancock (later Stone), Cherryl McNamara (Mossman), Joy Ahearn ('Beep Beep'), unknown, Pauline Howard ('Shortie'), Hazel Buckley, Daphne Morgan ('Tiny'), Dot Innes, Beryl McIntosh. Centre rank, left to right: Jenny McLay (Robertson), Anne ('Annie') McKees also known as McKenzie, Pat Sanders, Bulcock (obscured), Betty Robertson, Carol Parkinson, Vera Alexander, Valma Gainsford, Christine Spurr. Rear rank, left to right: Ann Gilfoyle, Margaret Randall, Shirley Elwell, Jan Culyer (Hislop), Pat Green or Greene (Arnold). The Platoon Commander Lieutenant (later Captain) Marie Cook and Platoon Sergeant Elizabeth Trainor are not in the photograph. Source: Cherryl McNamara Mossman.



*Above: The WRAAC and RAANC rehearsing in the hospital grounds at Kapooka for their march in the Freedom of the City Parade and Ceremony in Wagga Wagga.
Source: Cherryl McNamara Mossman*



The WRAAC and RAANC marching

In the late 1960s seven young women, members of the WRAAC volunteered to form a Drums Corps and were added to the Engineers Band at Kapooka. They were possibly the only female drummers in a military band in Australia at the time. They supplemented the band at Parades but did not perform at other functions and recitals with the Kapooka Band until 1961. (They were never full-time musicians).^{ix}



The WRAAC Drum Corps

The ladies also played sport against Wagga Wagga teams and against the RAAF women. International basketball was played one night a week. According to Jenny McLay:

The competition was very keen and we enjoyed pitting ourselves against the opposition. There were more than a few bruises at times but no real nastiness.

Jenny remembers a hockey match between 'a rag bag group of hockey players', some of whom had never played hockey before (and probably never since) who participated in a match against the Air Force girls in September 1963. She can't remember who won but does remember: 'We had a ball, lots of giggles etc, and the Air Force girls were great sports and hosts.'



Above: Kapooka's 'rag bag team of hockey players' who played a team from the RAAF, September 1963. All were WRAAC ladies except where stated. Back row: Jenny McLay, not known, Judy Hancock, Laurie Newton, Dot Innis (nurse), Pat Green. Front row: Stephanie Slinger (nurse), Lieutenant Barbara Weeks, Kay Freeman, Sergeant Elizabeth Trainor, Beth Pasfield, Carol Parkinson, Cathy (surname unknown). Source: Jenny Robertson.

Chris Cain (RAANC), unable to commit to a competition because of shiftwork, filled in as a goalie in the RAAF Hockey team (if they weren't playing the Army team). Some weekends, the WRAAC ladies went water skiing at the Lake Albert Boat Club.

Kapooka personnel (male and female) travelled to Wagga Wagga either by bus or car to shop, go to the movies at the theatres or the drive-in, or to various other shows or to visit the milk bars which had juke boxes or a hotel. According to Jenny Robertson:

At weekends we went shopping, had haircuts etc. then usually met some of the army guys at one of the hotels for a quick drink before heading back to camp or before heading off to play netball, have a swim or travelling to wherever the army boys were playing rugby union. Saturday nights when off duty, we would once again head to Wagga for socialising (if of course there wasn't anything being held in the camp). Some went dancing, some just met the army guys for a drink. Rarely if ever did any of the girls date the Air Force boys or the locals.

The canteen was popular as it sold magazines, paperback books, cool drinks and milkshakes (which they could take back to the Recreation Room). There were movies every Friday and Saturday night but the theatre was a mile (1.6 kilometres) away and since they were not permitted to walk home on their own they had to ring a duty vehicle to drive them over there and back. On Sundays they attended church at the chapels at Kapooka again travelling by duty vehicle. They were permitted to walk in the daytime. On one occasion, when the ground was wet from the previous night's rain, they were given a lift back to their quarters by the CO Colonel C. T. W. Dixon in his white Jaguar.

1RTB remained the basic recruit-training centre of Australia where all recruits did their initial training. By centralising training in this way, the army achieved a standardisation impossible from previous methods of training in local areas. After this initial training, the recruits were posted to their specialised units, allotted depending on their own preference, their aptitudes revealed in aptitude tests and training, and on the vacancies existing in the Army.



Lieutenant Colonel C. T. W. Dixon at the recreation Room, WRAAC and RAANC Quarters, 7 Camp Hospital c.1963 with Valma Gainsford (left) and Pat Greene (right).

However, Kapooka was a culture shock for many of the WRAAC including Lyn Kane who had grown up in the city and found the isolation of the camp quite confronting. Others, at first had great difficulty walking into the Battalion canteen (ASCO) which was full of young recruits who would either silently peruse them or call out to them. However, after several months, they managed to walk in and ignore them. Most of the women enjoyed the camaraderie of living in barracks, working together and eating at the mess with young women of their own age, many of them never having left home before.

Although the AWAS members during the Second World War were welcomed and their work appreciated by locals, many of the WRAAC felt unwelcomed particularly by the men who were not impressed by women in uniform at that time. At dances, local men rarely, if ever, asked the Army girls to dance with them. Occasionally, the ladies were verbally abused by men in the street.

Forming relationships was difficult as it was forbidden for the women to date recruits or young officers (who were usually single) and senior officers were usually married. For some women, the ambulance (usually unlocked) was a meeting place for 'extra-curricular' activities until, on one occasion, the ambulance drivers received a call-out and on arrival at the scene of the accident discovered a couple in the back of the ambulance. The couple, after getting dressed, had a long walk home. The ambulances were thereafter locked.

Despite the difficulties several of the women, including Jenny McLay and Chris Cain, met their future husbands (both drill instructors) at Kapooka.^x

ⁱ Janette Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen: Women in the Australian Army*, Oxford University Press, 2001; Lyn Kane Dale, *Lady Soldiers*, Erin Productions, 2014; Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (1951-1975), <http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/structure/awas.htm>.

ⁱⁱ Dale, p.53.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jenny Robertson, email, 5 February 2016.

^{iv} Lyn Kane Dale, telephone conversation, January 2016; and Dale, p.60

^v Chris Cain, phone conversation, 24 February 2016; and Dale, pp.62-63.

^{vi} Dale, telephone conversation, January 2016.

^{vii} NAA, B1552, 823, Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) pamphlet, 'Picture yourself in the WRAAC', 1965; Dale, pp.52-54.

^{viii} Chris Cain, email, 28 March 2016.

^{ix} *Daily Advertiser Special Publication*, 26 October 2002.

^x Sherry Morris, *Kapooka: From Engineers Camp to Home of the Soldier 1942-2016*, Chapter 8, pp.108-113; Chapter 9, p.122-124; and Chapter 12, p.151.