

# THE WHITE ENSIGN MAGAZINE

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*INSIDE THIS ISSUE*



The Womens  
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To ensure articles can be edited and published in future editions please check the submission dates (above). All submissions are welcome (please supply images at high resolution with names where necessary and text in MS Word format).

\*While every effort is made to publish in a timely fashion, as the WEM is compiled by volunteers, publication may be delayed due to circumstances beyond the WEM's control. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

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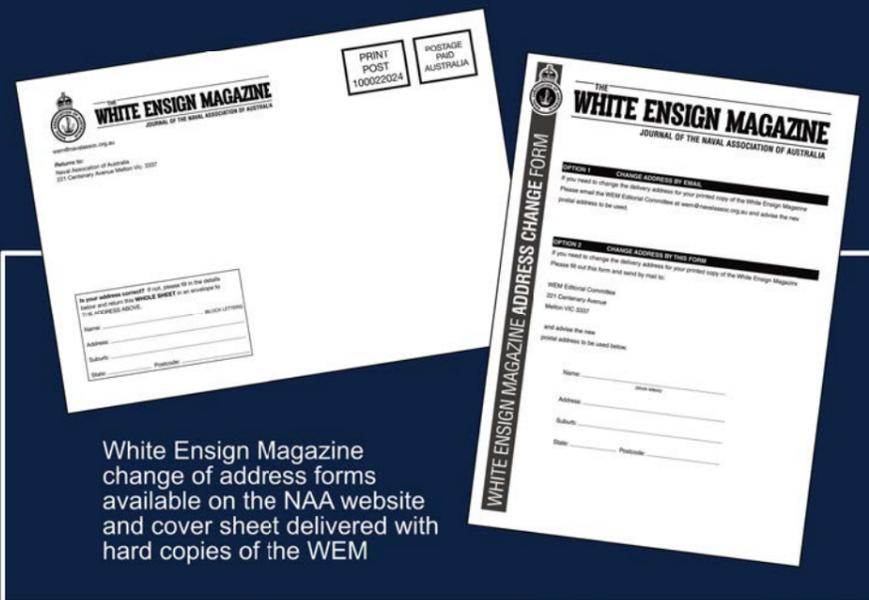
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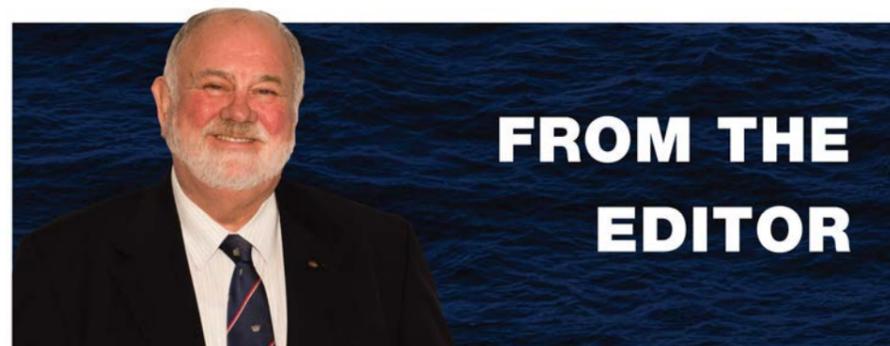


## COVER STORY

First Officer Bowden oversees the cutting of a cake commemorating ten years since the initial establishment of the WRANS during World War II

The Women's Royal Australian Naval Service was formed in April 1941 as a result of a shortage of telegraphists in the RAN. At the end of the Second World War it was disbanded, but manpower shortages in the RAN led to the service being re-constituted in 1951; it was made a permanent part of the RAN in December 1959. WRANS personnel were gradually absorbed into the RAN during the early 1980s and in due course the service was disbanded. Women were not permitted to serve aboard ships until 1983.

Photo Credit: Virtual War Memorial Australia



## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to 2026 and to the Red Watch edition of the White Ensign Magazine. The editorial committee continues to search for stories of interest for our members. This edition focusses on the efforts of the WRANS as a vital part of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), before they became a unified part of the RAN in the late 1980's. Now as Navy officers and sailors they are making a vital contribution to the defence of Australia.

Contributions from Sections and Sub-Sections make the magazine what it truly has become over many years. We are always keen to receive member input and the information and stories we receive and by publishing that information we can keep our members up to date with things happening across our association. Don't forget, if you have a significant event occurring in your Section; let us know so that we can give it some publicity. However please remember the lead time for publication is usually about 3 months, so make certain it is a little way out if you would like a small advertisement in the WEM

The publishing team look forward to 2026 and sharing the latest news and views with all members. Remember there is a constitutional review underway within the NAA and will provide updates periodically. For more up to date news, have a look at the Boatswain's Call on the NAA website – [www.navalassoc.org.au](http://www.navalassoc.org.au).

*Russell Pettis*  
Russell Pettis AM, Editor

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Above: During World War II, Liberty Loan parades in Victoria, were high-profile civic events designed to boost war bond sales through patriotic displays. Featuring marches by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), army personnel, and huge crowds, these parades, such as in 1943-1944, encouraged public investment in the war effort.

Below: WRANS (ACT) veterans march at the AWM on ANZAC Day 2019.

# HISTORY OF THE WRANS



*The Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) During World War II - By Dr John Carroll PhD*

## Introduction

The Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) emerged as a transformative institution during World War 2, profoundly altering the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Australian society's perceptions of women's roles in national defence. Born out of necessity in a time of exhaustive manpower demands, WRANS began as a small, specialized corps of telegraphists and evolved into a robust, multifaceted service encompassing thousands of women in vital shore-based roles. This article presents an in-depth historical analysis of WRANS, covering its origins, recruitment and training, evolution of duties, critical contributions to the war effort, notable members, the shifting of gender norms, and the enduring legacy it bequeathed to the Australian Defence Force and the nation at large.

## Origins and Formation

*The Precursors: Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC)*



*Emblem of the original W.E.S.C*

The WRANS traces its direct lineage to the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC), founded in Sydney in March 1939 by Florence Violet McKenzie, popularly known as 'Mrs Mac'. McKenzie was a singular figure in Australian history; the country's first female electrical engineer and a

passionate advocate for women's technical education and participation in national service. Drawing upon her deep technical expertise, community organizing skills, and relentless advocacy, McKenzie established WESC to train women in wireless telegraphy, Morse code, and visual signalling, foreseeing that these skills would be essential in the event of war and would allow men to be freed for frontline service.



*Florence Violet McKenzie*

WESC was revolutionary not only in its mission but also in practice and pedagogy. Initially operating from cramped rooms in Clarence Street, Sydney, and later moving to a larger site at 10 Clarence Street, the organization abstained from charging formal tuition fees. Instead, female trainees contributed a shilling per week to maintain operational costs. This grassroots model fostered a strong, self-supporting esprit de corps among participants, who wore distinctive forest green uniforms designed by Mrs Mac herself.

Within a year of its establishment, WESC had trained hundreds of women, some to instructional standard. By the onset of hostilities, the demand for signals training was so great that WESC began teaching significant numbers of men, including servicemen from the Australian Army, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), RAN, Royal Indian Navy, and even American military and civilian organizations. The school's reputation was such that, by August 1940, there was a waiting list of 600 women seeking the rare opportunity to be trained in telegraphy and signalling.

## Advocacy and Navy Recruitment

Despite strong evidence of WESC's efficacy, integration into Australian military structures was slow and met with considerable resistance. Mrs Mac, undeterred, lobbied persistently for her female telegraphists to be accepted into the armed services. In early 1941, after extensive demonstrations of competence - and threats by McKenzie to offer her recruits to the Army or Air Force - naval authorities relented. On April 18, 1941, approval was given for the employment of the first group of women as civilian telegraphists and attendants at HMAS Harman near Canberra.

With the arrival of 14 pioneering women at HMAS Harman on April 28, 1941, the foundation for the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service was set - though, notably, these women were not officially enlisted but employed as civilians due to RAN enlistment policies of the time. It was not until October 1, 1942, that the initial female staff and subsequent recruits were formally inducted as naval personnel, a watershed moment which marked the official formation of the WRANS.

## Recruitment Processes and Criteria

### Early Selection and Expansion

The earliest WRANS recruits were drawn directly from WESC, with Mrs Mac accompanying the first intake to Canberra. These women had undergone rigorous preparation, encompassing signals proficiency, Morse code, and radio operation, reflecting the high standards set by WESC's founder and instructors. Prospective recruits were subject to medical testing, and - due to prevailing social norms - were initially selected on the basis of being single and physically fit. The initial intake required 12 telegraphists, with two others volunteering for general service roles such as cooking and domestic support.



*Initial badge of the W.R.A.N.S.*

The national manpower situation and increasing demands of the Pacific War soon led to rapid expansion. The official authorization in July 1942 anticipated 580 roles for WRANS - 280 as telegraphists and 300 in various shore-based duties. By late 1942, recruitment campaigns generated an overwhelming response, swiftly exceeding estimates and swelling the ranks to over 1,000 by year's end. At the war's peak, WRANS constituted approximately 10% of the entire naval complement, with a total wartime enlistment of over 3,000 women.



*The first eight Wran Telephonists arriving at HMAS Harman - February 1942*

### Recruitment Advertising and Criteria

Recruitment approaches evolved as the WRANS became more public. Early campaigns targeted skilled telegraphists and clerks - in line with operational needs - and subsequently expanded to encompass drivers, storekeepers, office orderlies, and other categories. Advertisement and word-of-mouth played major roles; the high profile of WESC-trained women, many of whom had developed an admired reputation for excellence, encouraged others to apply.

Officially, all WRANS recruits were required to undertake two-week induction courses to imbue naval discipline and ethos before moving to specialized category training. Distinctions persisted between officer and rating recruits, with officer training introduced by 1943 to accommodate the expanding internal hierarchy and growing administrative complexity.

### Restrictions and Discriminatory Policies

Despite breaking significant new ground, WRANS was shaped by the gendered conventions of its era. Women were not permitted to serve at sea, nor were they allowed overseas postings. Additionally, WRANS members were often paid

considerably less than their male counterparts - typically two-thirds of the equivalent RAN wage. Policies regarding marriage and pregnancy were restrictive; from 1951, married women were barred from service, and pregnancy was automatic grounds for discharge. These policies began to be dismantled only after persistent lobbying and societal shifts in the postwar era.

## Training Programs and Curriculum

### Initial Training: Building On WESC Foundations

The thoroughly practical orientation of the WESC provided a solid foundation for the WRANS initial training regime. Inductees received intensive instruction in key naval skills - naval regulations, Morse code, visual signalling, discipline, and procedures relating to secure communications. The methodological approach was hands-on, with actual operational equipment and simulations employed to ensure readiness for live naval duties.

For WRANS assigned to specialist technical categories such as wireless telegraphy, signals intelligence, and cryptanalysis, further advanced instruction was required. For example, the training of telegraphists at HMAS Harman involved shift work under

conditions mirroring operational demands: trainees maintained and operated sophisticated wireless systems, working round-the-clock to cover all time zones.

### Specialization and Officer Training

By 1943, as the number of roles expanded and the organizational structure matured, the RAN established formal WRANS officer training at Flinders Naval Depot. The officer training course lasted six weeks and covered a suite of advanced topics, including leadership, administration, naval law, and personnel management. Officer candidates also received tailored training based on anticipated postings, such as intelligence, censorship, or codebreaking, reflecting the diversity of the emerging WRANS roles.

### Ongoing Development and Adaptation

The curriculum continued to evolve in response to shifting operational requirements. For novel roles (e.g., radar plotting, sick-berth attendants, education officers, and dental mechanics), the length and content of training varied from five to twelve weeks and often included instruction from serving naval officers as well as civilian experts. Regular assessment, practical drills, and compliance with the "King's Regulations" ensured a consistently high standard across all cohorts.

### Roles and Duties Performed

#### Initial Roles: Signalling and Wireless Telegraphy

Wireless telegraphy and communications formed the original and most critical focus of the WRANS's

contribution. The first group of 14 at HMAS Harman entered as telegraphists, conducting round-the-clock monitoring and transmission of naval messages. This function was vital for maintaining secure lines between Australia, Allied vessels, and overseas theatres. Many WRANS were attached to high-security operations, including signals intelligence and cipher clerical work, where they were often sworn to secrecy due to the sensitive nature of intercepted messages, especially concerning the Imperial Japanese Navy.

### Expansion to Broader Roles

As the war intensified, WRANS personnel were required to take on an expanding array of support roles. These included but were not limited to:

- Administrative and clerical duties, such as payroll, personnel management, and medical records
- Recruitment, training, and public relations assignments
- Mechanical and technical roles, such as maintaining degaussing ranges, equipment repair, and stewarding.
- Education roles, including teaching, vocational guidance, and dome operators for instructional simulations.
- Harbor messengers, drivers, and transportation coordinators
- Intelligence and translation, including work in Allied intelligence and censorship offices.
- Cooks, stewards, and sick-berth attendants in naval establishments

WRANS were present at virtually every major naval shore establishment across Australia and became essential to the smooth functioning of the RAN's administrative and operational infrastructure.

### Specialized and Secret Work

A smaller but critically important proportion of WRANS served in highly secretive roles attached to intelligence and codebreaking operations, including the world-renowned Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne (FRUMEL) and a section connected to Britain's Bletchley Park. Some, like Pamela Corben (later Nicholls), engaged in intercepting and analysing Japanese navy radio traffic and coordinating top-secret cypher communications. Their work would not be declassified or publicly recognized until decades later.

The table below summarizes the progression and diversification of WRANS roles as the war developed. This expansion was both a response to evolving operational demands and a reflection of growing trust in women's capabilities within the rigid structures of the RAN.

### Operational Bases and Deployments

#### HMAS Harman: The Cradle of WRANS

HMAS Harman, just outside Canberra, played a central role in WRANS history. Originally the RAN Wireless/Transmitting Station Canberra, it functioned as the principal communications hub for the RAN and Allied navies in the Pacific theatre. The base's activities included both overt communications (messages to and from Allied vessels and headquarters) and covert intelligence operations (FRUMEL) that relied heavily on WRANS personnel.

WRANS were also posted to other strategic shore establishments including:

- HMAS Rushcutter (Sydney): Technical and intelligence work, small-craft training



The First 14 - Drill instruction at HMAS Harman

- HMAS Cerberus (Victoria): Officer and specialist training depot
- HMAS Lonsdale (Melbourne): Entry courses and signals training
- HMAS Magnetic (Townsville): Communications for General MacArthur's operations
- Government House, Yarralumla (Canberra): Domestic and ceremonial duties

By the end of the conflict, WRANS personnel were deployed at virtually every major Australian naval base, ensuring the continuity of wartime operations and freeing male sailors for sea service.

### Contributions to the War Effort and Impact on the RAN

#### Strategic Importance

The WRANS played an indispensable role in sustaining RAN operational effectiveness during WW2. By manning critical shore-based positions, WRANS enabled thousands of male naval personnel to be transferred to ship-based and front-line roles, directly enlarging Australia's fighting capacity. This policy - colloquially dubbed A Wran In, A Man Out - was central to Australia's ability

to adapt to the rapidly changing dynamics of the Pacific War.

#### Communication and Intelligence

WRANS telegraphists and signallers maintained unbroken contact with Allied forces, relaying encrypted and plain-text messages across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Their shift-based monitoring was crucial for the direction of convoy movements, detection of enemy operations, and support of both the Australian and Allied navies.

In intelligence, WRANS contributed to critical codebreaking and deciphering activities, relaying information that often-informed major operational decisions - including fleet movements and anti-submarine warfare. While the clandestine nature of this work restricted contemporaneous recognition, its military significance has since been widely acknowledged.

#### Administrative Backbone

The WRANS' integration into a wide range of administrative, technical, and support roles enabled the RAN to expand and maintain its wartime activities. From payroll offices to medical records and stores

management, WRANS ensured that shore installations operated efficiently and that the Navy's substantial logistical requirements were met during the prolonged conflict.

### Societal Impact and Gender Norms

The visibility of WRANS in skilled, uniformed service roles served to disrupt entrenched social attitudes about women's work and capability. While employment restrictions and wage disparities persisted, the demonstrated proficiency and reliability of WRANS personnel challenged perceptions of women as ill-suited to technical or military occupations. The result was a recalibration of post-war gender expectations and a slow, incremental opening of career opportunities for Australian women.



W.R.A.N.S. Uniform

Year	Roles	Context
1941-1942	Wireless telegraphists, visual signallers	Shore-based, initiated at HMAS Harman
1942-1943	Coders, clerks, drivers, cooks, messengers	Expansion due to manpower shortages
1943-1945	Mechanics, educators, intelligence, degaussing	Specialized/reactive to operational requirements
1945	Harbor messengers, translation/interpreters	Roles linked to reconciliation and post-hostility

## Notable Members and Biographies

### Florence Violet McKenzie (Mrs Mac)

Florence Violet McKenzie (1890–1982) is remembered as the founder of the WESC, and by extension, the WRANS. Australia's first female electrical engineer and amateur radio licensee, McKenzie led pioneering education efforts, trained thousands of women, and men in communications, and persistently lobbied for the official recruitment of women by the armed services. Her legacy is preserved not only in the expanded postwar roles of women in the Navy but also in institutions commemorating her contributions, such as a Canberra park named in her honour.

### WRANS Pioneers

Among the first 14 WESC graduates to join the RAN at HMAS Harman, prominent members included Frances Betty Provan, Joan Furley, Pat Ross, Denise Owen, Marion Stevens, June McLeod, and others. Many went on to become instructors, officers, or significant contributors to the broader war effort.

## Intelligence and Codebreakers

Third Officer Pamela Nicholls (née Corben), who began as a wireless operator and was later promoted after officer training, engaged in secret Y section radio intercept operations supporting Allied codebreaking. Her unit worked directly with British Bletchley Park efforts, a connection only fully recognized decades after the war.

Signaller Automatic Morse (Sig-AM) Margaret Hattersley was another significant WRANS figure. Despite coming from modest educational background, she achieved distinction in advanced Morse code listening, coding, and direction-finding operations, reflecting the ability of WRANS training to foster tangible expertise in its recruits.

### Other Noteworthy WRANS

Officers such as Chief Officer Sheila McClemons, Captain Joan Streeter ('Ma'am WRANS' - responsible for major reforms postwar), Captain Barbara MacLeod, and others, who played crucial roles in advancing the acceptance and equal treatment of women in the ADF, also left indelible marks on the service's history.

## Evolution and Policy Changes during WWII

### From Experiment to Essential Service

Though their initial entry was cautiously experimental and kept deliberately low-profile, events quickly confirmed the efficacy and reliability of WRANS personnel. High levels of commitment, proficiency, and esprit de corps not only validated the original vision of WESC but also enabled the rapid scaling of WRANS to match the RAN's operational needs.

### Policy Developments

During the war, the WRANS faced - and gradually overcame - restrictive policies on uniform, pay, and employment conditions. The introduction of specific uniforms (modelled on the Royal Navy's WRNS attire), officer training, incremental wage increases, and greater role diversity marked major steps toward parity. Nonetheless, continued exclusion from sea service and the enforcement of discharge on marriage and pregnancy underscored the persistent gender barriers of the era.

### End of the War and Demobilization

With the conclusion of hostilities, the perceived need for a female naval

auxiliary diminished. The WRANS began a process of demobilization, culminating in the discharge of the last active members by July 1948. The transition was bittersweet; many former members recalled the sense of achievement and camaraderie, even as civilian society often struggled to integrate women's wartime service into postwar norms.

## Societal Impact and Gender Norms

### Challenging Prejudices

Prior to and during WWII, women in Australia were generally expected to perform domestic or 'feminine' roles, with technical, military, and leadership positions considered unsuitable. The existence and visible success of WRANS signalled a profound shift in public attitudes, demonstrating unequivocally that women could perform skilled communications, logistics, intelligence, and mechanical duties under stressful, high-stakes conditions.

### Public Perception and Media

Media coverage of WRANS, though sometimes patronizing by today's standards, contributed to the normalization of uniformed women in public life. Documented wartime photographs, recruitment posters, and stories about individual 'WRANS' entered the Australian cultural consciousness, further blurring gendered occupational boundaries.

### Post-War Reintegration and Recognition

Despite their achievements, many former WRANS members experienced difficulties transitioning to civilian life, often encountering resistance or indifference from peacetime employers and the community. Nonetheless, the exposure and precedent set by WRANS paved the way for broader professional participation by women in Australian society, as well as for subsequent moves toward workplace equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

## Disbandment and Post-War Legacy

### Immediate Post-War Demobilization

Following the cessation of hostilities, the WRANS was viewed by military authorities as surplus to peacetime requirements, and disbandment commenced promptly. By July 1948, the service was officially wound down, with all remaining members demobilized and returning to civilian life. Many WRANS alumni remained active in veterans' associations, memorializing their service, sharing recollections, and advocating for the recognition of women's military contributions.

### Re-establishment and Integration

Growing tensions during the early Cold War - particularly surrounding Australia's regional commitments - prompted the re-establishment of WRANS in 1951 to meet renewed manpower needs. Although initially constrained by even tighter policies (married women excluded, discharge on pregnancy, no sea duty), the service persisted, gradually expanding in membership and responsibilities through the 1960s and 1970s.

Over subsequent decades, sustained lobbying, evolving cultural expectations, and broader equality movements saw the incremental dismantling of discriminatory provisions: restrictions on marital status lifted (1969), discharge on pregnancy ended (1974), equal pay achieved (1978), and, finally, permission for women to serve at sea (1983).

### Final Integration

The passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1984, coupled with organizational reforms within the ADF, rendered separate women's services incompatible with national policy directions. In 1985, the WRANS was fully dissolved as a distinct entity, with its personnel absorbed into the general RAN, now officially open to women in virtually all roles alongside their male peers.

## Enduring Influence

The impact of WRANS on the Navy and Australian society has been profound. It catalysed the broader transformation of military service to embrace diversity and equal opportunity, and its alumni went on to hold key leadership positions both within and outside the defence establishment. Former WRANS continue to participate in commemorative activities, mentor new generations of servicewomen, and advocate for women's rights. In popular culture, history, and naval tradition, the legacy of the WRANS endures as a symbol of progress, resilience, and patriotism.

## Conclusion

The story of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service during World War II is one of vision, struggle, extraordinary achievement, and enduring legacy. From humble beginnings as an experiment in female technical training, WRANS evolved into a linchpin of the RAN's home-front strength, fundamentally changing both military practice and societal perceptions of gender capability. Its members' technical excellence, professional discipline, and unwavering commitment not only allowed the RAN to meet the manifold challenges of a global war but also established a foundation for the postwar pursuit of equity and inclusion across Australian society. The example set by the WRANS - "as good or better than men," in the words of its founder, Florence McKenzie - continues to inspire and inform efforts toward full and fair participation for women in Australia's defence and all levels of society.

\*

*Dedicated to the memory of*

*Pauline Margaret Ryan (Maloney)  
(1941-2019),*

*WRAN RO(T) R85203, 1960-62,*

*WRAN 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer O2070, 1962-68.*

*Sister-in-Law of the author.*

## Appendix: Timeline of Key WRANS Events

DATE	EVENT / MILESTONE	DETAILS
March 1939	WESC founded by Florence McKenzie	Training women in signals, Morse, visual communication
April 1941	First WESC women recruited by RAN, arrive at HMAS Harman	12 telegraphists, 2 general service roles
July 1942	Approval for WRANS; 580 positions (280 telegraphists, 300 other duties)	Expansion beyond telegraphy
October 1942	First group sworn into Navy as official WRANS personnel	Transition from civilian to uniformed service
January 1943	First WRANS officer training at Flinders Naval Depot	Leadership structure established
July 1943	HMAS Harman commissioned as formal naval establishment	Main WRANS operational hub
1943-45	WRANS peak strength: roles expand to include administration, logistics, intelligence	Over 3,000 serve; c.10% of naval strength
July 1948	Last WRANS discharged postwar, service disbanded	Transition to peacetime, many join ex-service groups
1951	WRANS re-formed in response to Cold War manpower needs	New recruitment, more restrictions initially
1959	WRANS made a permanent part of the RAN	Start of integration into mainstream service
1969	Ban on married women lifted	Social and legal changes underway
1974	Discharge on pregnancy ended	Step towards gender equity
1978	Equal pay for WRANS and RAN counterparts	Milestone in workplace equality
1983	Women permitted to serve at sea	Full operational integration begins
1984-85	WRANS disbanded, full integration into RAN	End of separate women's branch

# WRANS - THE FIRST 14



WR/1 Francis Betty Provan



WR/2 Joan Louise Furley



WR/3 Patricia Ross



WR/4 Denise Owen



WR/5 Marion Stevens



WR/6 June McLeod



WR/7 Daphne Wright



WR/8 Jess Scott Prain

Enlisting as a telegraphist on 28 April 1941, Provan was given the official number WR/1 and posted to HMAS Harman, the communications station in Canberra. She and her colleagues relayed messages to the fleet and maintained contact with many wireless-stations around the world.

Studio portrait of Joan Furley wearing the uniform of the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC). WR/2 Joan Louise Paget Furley from Sydney served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 3 December 1945 when she finished her service as a Second Officer (Lieutenant equivalent).

Born in Sydney on 29 August 1916, WR/3 Patricia Ross from Sydney served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 15 March 1946 when she finished her service as a Second Officer (Lieutenant equivalent).

Born in the USA to Australian parents, WR/4 Denise Culver Owen from Wallace, USA served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 31 January 1946 when she finished her service as a Third Officer (Sub Lieutenant equivalent).

WR/5 Marian Stevens from Sydney, NSW, served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 30 September 1955 when she finished her service as a Second Officer (Lieutenant equivalent).

WR/6 Telegraphist June Margaret MacLeod, from Vaucluse. One in a series of portraits of early members of Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC), many of whom became WRANS. The album of portraits was compiled by Mrs Florence Violet McKenzie OBE, founder of WESC, which trained signallers and telegraphists.

WR/7 Daphne Mary Wright from Sydney, NSW served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 17 October 1945 when she finished her service as a Petty Officer Wran Telegraphist

One of the original fourteen females to join the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Jess Scott Doyle (née Prain) was the inspiration for the creation of a lasting memorial to all those in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) during the war and later in peacetime.



WR/9 Ethel Joan Cade



WR/10 Joan Muriel Hodges



WR/11 Sylvia 'Billie' Thompson



WR/12 Judith Alley



WR/13 Shirley Isobel Drew



WR/14 Elsie Lillian Colless

Joan Cade of Sydney, NSW, joined up as a 21 year old with the original fourteen WRANS and served from 28 April 1941 until 14 January 1946.

WR/10 Joan Muriel Hodges from Melbourne, Victoria served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 8 March 1946 when she finished her service as a Third Officer (Sub Lieutenant equivalent).

Leading Wran Telegraphist WR11 Sylvia Violette 'Billie' Thompson. Served at the Naval Wireless/Transmitting Station, Canberra (to be later commissioned on 1 July 1943 as HMAS Harman). Transferred in late 1942 to the nearby Molonglo Receiving Station opened to carry traffic from Whitehall, Halifax and Bombay Fort.

WR/12 Judith Purchase Alley from Sydney, NSW served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 8 January 1946 when she finished her service as a Chief Petty Officer Wran Telegraphist.

WR/13 Petty Officer Wran Signaller Shirley Isobel Drew was part of the first fourteen women to join the WRANS and started work on 21 April 1941 at the Naval Wireless Station in Canberra that was later commissioned as HMAS Harman.

WR/14 Elsie Lillian Colless from Sydney, NSW served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) from 28 April 1941 until 5 October 1942 when she finished her service as a Leading Wran Attendant (Cook).



A metal plaque attached on the Boer War Gates, Toowoomba QLD. Dedicated to members of the Womens Royal Australian Naval Service



# MERLE HARE

## 106 AND STILL GOING STRONG



WR/90 Leading Wran Supply Assistant  
Merle Kelway Storrie

On 17 June 1944 Merle married Robert Hare. Robert was an AIF soldier and served on active service in the Middle East and Papua New Guinea. Merle remained in the WRANS while married.

When Merle was asked how she remained as a married WRANS, her answer was that "it was wartime dear" and her husband Robert was in the 9th Division and went to New Guinea so there was no chance for children until after the war." Merle also said she was able to remain in the Navy after marriage because they were given the option to remain, which was the policy for the Royal Navy for the WRENS. However, after disbanding the WRANS in 1946 and re-establishing the WRANS in 1950 the marriage veto remained until 1968.

On 7 March 1945, Sergeant Donald Kelway Storrie was a crewmember in a Catalina flying boat engaged in minelaying in waters up to Japan. The aircraft failed to return to base and has never been located. Sergeant Storrie was 25 years of age when he and his fellow crewmembers were declared lost.

Merle discharged from the WRANS on 9 January 1946 and remained in

Victoria to raise her family. Merle had a talent with numbers and would do the account books for friends.

Upon the death of her husband Robert, in 1997, Merle at the age of 77 packed her car and moved to Canberra to be near her two children and their families. Her family played soccer and Merle took over running the Canberra City soccer club canteen. Merle regularly enjoys listening to her local radio station - 2CC - and contributes to discussions, educating the listeners with her opinions.

In 2003, at the age of 83 Merle participated in the steering committee to form the WRANS Association ACT and remains a member of the association.

On 20 January 2020, the Last Post Ceremony held daily at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, honoured Sergeant Donald Kelway Storrie, who was the twin brother of Merle Hare, on their joint 100th birthday.

Merle is the only surviving sibling. Merle continues to live independently and is treasured by navy veterans, serving members and Legacy.



Merle Hare (nee Storrie)



20 January DCN Matt Buckley presenting Merle with a letter

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A6770, STORRIE M K

Above & Below: Merle's Service Records (National Archives of Australia)

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A6770, STORRIE M K

Merle Kelway Storrie grew up in Sassafras, Victoria. She had a twin brother Donald Kelway Storrie and an older sister Alva Kelway Storrie. With the outbreak of World War Two all three siblings joined various arms of the military.

On 29 March 1943 WR/940 Merle Kelway Storrie enlisted and served at HMAS Lonsdale and HMAS Cerberus.



January WRANS, WRENS and current serving Naval personnel at Merle's lunch

## Merle turns 106

Thank you all for coming today to celebrate Merle's 106th birthday. She has lived 38690 days. To me, there is something special about a person reaching this milestone. They are truly incredible in more ways than I could ever say in a birthday greeting.

Some people grow more stubborn and become grumpier with age, Merle just gets wiser and more optimistic. Many complain about aging, but the wisdom we gain from living for many years has its advantages. Merle embodies that wisdom.

Merle raised her family in Victoria but after the passing of Robert, her husband, in typical Merle fashion she moved to Canberra to be with family and ended up joining the ACT WRANS associations. Merle joined the WRANS in 1943.

Merle has influenced many WRANS lives by, listening to their problems, providing advice or giving a hug when required.

We look at Merle and realize aging is a gift. We truly celebrate with her as she turns 106 years old this Tuesday the 20th of January.

Please join me in raising your glasses to wish Merle a happy birthday.

Speech given by Pauline Gribbe at Merle's 106<sup>th</sup> Birthday



# THE EX-WRANS ASSOCIATION (QLD)

By Peg Thorne (1993)

Extract taken from "From Then, Until Now - The Diamond Jubilee of the WRANS Sub-Section of the NAA"

On the 16 July 1962, The ex-WRANS Association was formed and the meeting held in the YMCA Building, Edmond Street, Brisbane. At the commencement of the meeting, Mrs Muriel Bath took the Chair and explained that it was the desire of several ex-WRANS to form a committee for the purpose of arranging reunions and other functions. The first term of office was decided to be from 1 August 1962 to 31 July 1963.

The first Office Bearers were:

- President Mrs Muriel Bath
- Vice Presidents Mrs Edna Ismay  
Mrs Irene Keeshan
- Secretary Mrs H Milliner
- Treasurer Miss Edna Park
- Committee Miss Jess Maxwell  
Mrs J Johannes  
Mrs M Giles  
Mrs T Stewart  
Mrs M Phillips  
Mrs J Young  
Mrs M Gorey  
Mrs D Bourne

The first reunion they arranged was held at the Wardroom, HMAS Moreton. It was a success with Mrs Castle doing the catering at 6/6 a head (in today's currency 65c). It was an afternoon tea to celebrate our 21st Birthday. 82 ex-WRANS attended. As there was not enough seating, some of us sat on the floor and others preferred to stand.

A special meeting was called 6 July 1963 for the Naval Association to speak to us about becoming a Sub-Section of the NAA.

The first meeting was held August 1963, and the former idea was brought up but it didn't bear fruit till later on.

The Officers decided for the coming year were:

- President Mrs Muriel Bath
- Vice Presidents Mrs Irene Keeshan  
Mrs J Griffen
- Secretary Miss Jess Maxwell
- Treasurer Mrs M Thorne
- Committee Miss Edna Park  
Mrs M Forbes  
Mrs T Stewart  
Mrs J Johannes  
Mrs M Phillips  
Mrs J Smith  
Mrs D Bourne  
Mrs J Hazell  
Mrs V Leverington  
Mrs M Gorey

The ex-WRANS Association disbanded on 10 February 1964 and it became the WRANS Sub-Section of the Naval Association of Australia. It was the night of the horrific HMAS *Voyager* disaster and also the night we received our Charter. That is the reason why, at all our meetings, when we say the Ode - we pay tribute to the men who went down on the *Voyager*.

Our first (NAA) Committee comprised:

- President Mrs Muriel Bath
- Vice President Mrs Irene Keeshan
- Secretary Miss Jess Maxwell
- Treasurer Mrs M Thorne

In 1963, 14 WRANS led the Navy in the ANZAC Day March. It was their first, as before that, they felt rather shy to march and always regarded ANZAC Day as a Men's Day.

The next year, we marched as part of the Naval Association and also it was the year our banner was paraded for the first time.

The Banner was presented to us by the NAAval Association. It has the Naval Association Badge with WRANS underneath it embroidered in gold. It was presented to us at HMAS Moreton by Captain Thomas before the main March in the city. That year, we had a serving WRAN march with us, Barbara Lyon. She is now our hard-working President, also doing a couple of years as our Secretary (now Barbara Snowdon).

We had our first Aboriginal WRAN join from Queensland. She was sworn in at Brisbane and left for Melbourne to train as a Stewardess.

The Chermside Sea Scouts land ship was called The *Voyager*, so the WRANS Sub-Section through Mrs Bath, presented the unit with a framed photo of the ship on 20 June 1964.

HRH Princess Marina (of Greece & Denmark) paid a visit to HMAS *Harman* (in Canberra) on 29 September 1964 and was presented with Catholic

Naval Association of Australia

Orchids, flown down from the QLD WRANS Sub-Section.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of the WRANS was held at the YMCA with films of Navy Recruiting. The Sub-Section attended a Service at St Mary's Anglican Church, Kangaroo Point for the unveiling of a plaque in Memory of those who went down with the *Voyager* in its collision with HMAS *Melbourne*.

Each year, a Reunion Dinner or Lunch has been held on the Saturday as near as possible to 10 November. That is the date when the first girls enlisted in Queensland. It is organised by the Sub-Section but all girls who have served the Navy are welcome. We held special Reunions for the 21<sup>st</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> year.

On 10 June 1978, the WRANS Sub-Section co-hosted the State Council Conference with the John Oxley Sub-Section. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> State Council Conference.

Some of our members went to Sydney for the unveiling of our stained glass window at Garden Island in 1986.

In 1987, we had girls go to Townsville to revive memories of the Wrannery on the Strand. They went with the ex Service Women's Reunion.

We have had National Reunions in all capital cities except Darwin:

- 1971 Canberra
- 1976 Hobart
- 1979 Melbourne
- 1981 Brisbane
- 1984 Hobart
- 1986 Adelaide
- 1988 Sydney
- 1991 Perth
- 1993 Brisbane

All being held during ANZAC week.

White Ensign Magazine

Each year, when Navy Week occurs, we have members attending all functions. We are very fortunate as the War-Time and Post-War girls work very well together, having fun and raising money.

When the "W" was taken out of the WRANS and the girls became Seamen, a few of the Sub-Section held a "Wake" at the Botanical Gardens Cafe, which was the War-Time Wardroom of HMAS Moreton.

State Council used to give a bursary. In 1967, it was won by Ellen Bassani, daughter of Beryl (nee Haig). A more than meritorious effort considering Ellen is unusually handicapped. In 1993, she was named Blind Person of the Year in Great Britain.

The Bursary was won by Margaret Norman (daughter of Grace Robinson) in 1968. In 1970, the Bursary went to Marilyn Leverington (daughter of Val Keith) and that year, Marilyn earned her Queens Guide Badge.

In 1967, one of our members, Moya Evans (Horwitz) gave us a talk on the Robin Hood Committee which fosters Mental Health through the medium of Art and Music.

Capt Thomas presented us with a gavel and stand in memory of his wife Valerie. He also had holes put in our Banner which made it easier to carry.

Capt Cook Bi Centenary Celebrations - Our First 200 years (1770-1971) Qld Women's committee. Margaret Thorne was our representative on the committee. Dorothy Davidson, who was with the VAD, was the convenor: Women in Wartime. We had section 11 in the City Hall and were part of a pageant in which we were dressed in our respective uniforms. Gaye Tart and Martharet Thorne representing the WRANS. Queen Elizabeth II was there

and mingled with all the girls. What a thrill to meet Her Majesty.

Brenda Williams (nee Kaalund) has held office at State level of both President and Secretary.

Gayle Brady, one of our past Presidents planted a tree at Atkinson Dam at the Forest of Fame.

Every year the Qld Sub-Sections have held the Golden Rivet (or John Oxley Trophy) for indoor bowls and darts. We have had teams completing and have won in the Golden Rivet in 1982 and 1992.

The Alex Nichols Memorial Shield is presented each year for the highest percentage of new members was won by us in 1972 and 1992 and was tied with Ipswich in 1980.



The WRANS' window in the Chapel at Garden Island



# WRANS (SA)

Extract taken from "Something of Ourselves"

The stories behind the members of the NAA (SA) WRANS Sub-Section

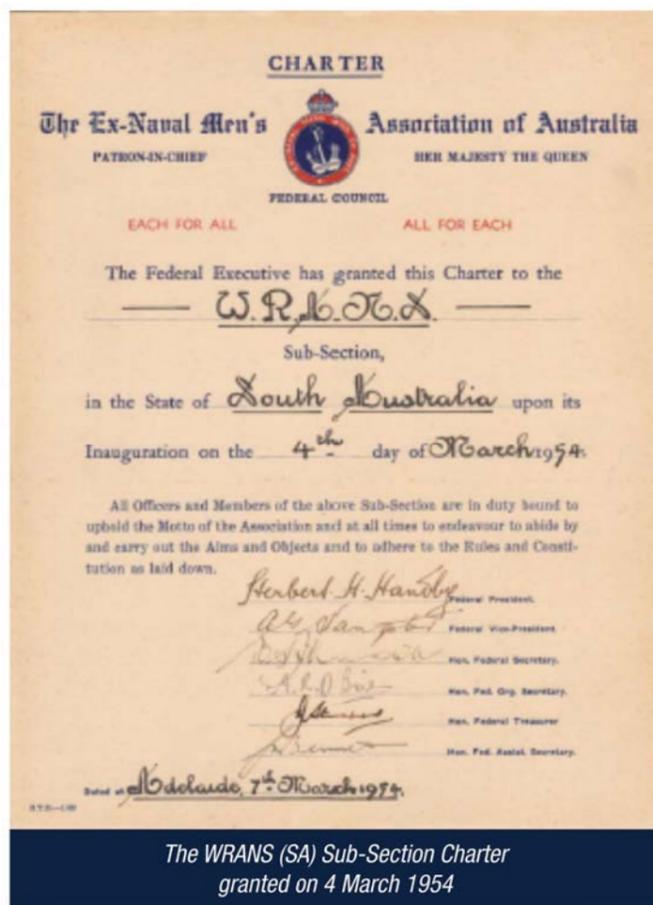
Australian service women share a very proud military history. Our Naval women have certainly enjoyed a significant, yet sometimes turbulent journey, from the establishment of the WRANS in 1941 to the women who now form such a valuable part of the 21st century RAN. Our original trailblazers joined to help their country through a period of global turmoil. Whilst some may have welcomed a career, the opportunities simply were not available at that time in our history. Today, it is a different story, with so many avenues open to our women.

would have no roots or firm foundation on which to build their careers. History is always a great teacher, and as the following stories unfold, I hope that we can all learn something and appreciate our heritage. We look back with gratitude and we certainly look forward with optimism.

Thank you to all who have shared their stories so that they may live on.

Liz Scarce (nee Taylor)  
Government House - Adelaide  
Patron, WRANS Sub-Section  
Naval Association of Australia - SA

When I joined in 1973 as a Recruit WRAN Officer Cadet, no provision was in place for entrants holding university degrees, unless in the teaching / medical areas. ADFA did not exist. There was little, if any, discussions of women serving at sea. The thought of a female attaining flag Rank was simply a pipe dream. How things have changed! Our women serve on land, at sea, under the sea, in the air and in the loft corridors of power in Canberra. All these women deserve our thanks, admiration and respect. However, they owe so much to those who have gone before. If it were not for the women whose stories are highlighted in this book, they



The WRANS (SA) Sub-Section Charter granted on 4 March 1954

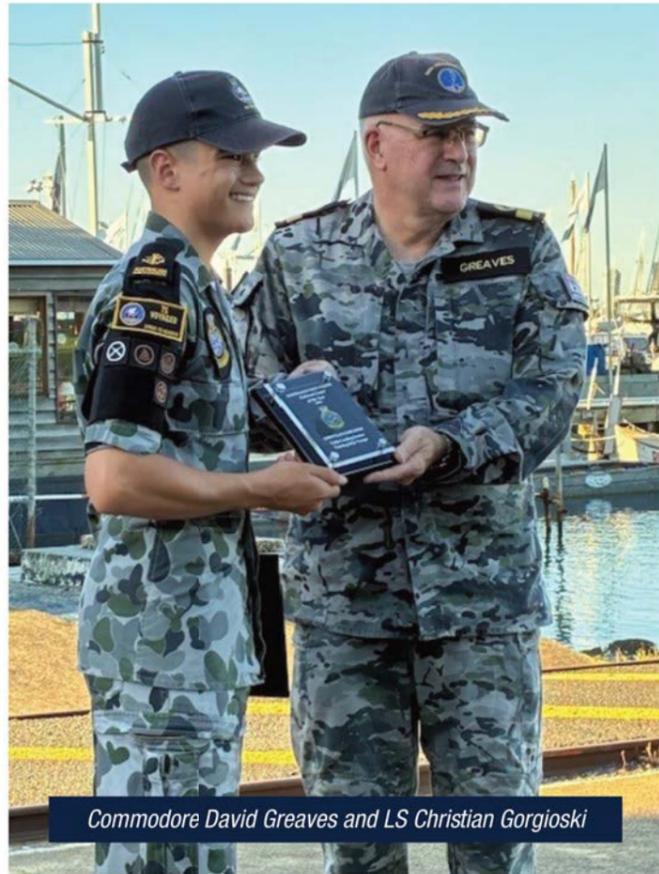


Above: WRANS WRANS telegraphists at work on Morse code comms equipment at HMAS Harman in CBR 1955

Bottom Left: 1952 advertisement for WRANS, WRAAC, WRAAF

Bottom Right: WRANS Members of WRANS tapping out messages on WT keys - State Library of Victoria





Commodore David Greaves and LS Cristian Gorgioski



Commodore David Greaves and LS Cristian Gorgioski



VIC Section Pres Ron Evans and LS Cristian Gorgioski

Presenting the award to Cadet LS Cristian Gorgioski was Commodore David Greaves Director General of Navy Cadets.

Victoria Section President Ron Evans also presented a mounted NAA Challenge Coin.



Commodore David Greaves with LS Cristian Gorgioski and his family

On Friday 20 February a ceremony was conducted at TS Voyager (Williamstown Victoria) to National Cadet of the Year 2025 to Cadet Leading Seaman Christian Gorgioski.



### LIFE MEMBERSHIP

At the December 2025 meeting of the ACT Section, Alan Masters was presented with Life Membership of the NAA.

Alan joined the RAN as a Schooly on 24 Jan 1966. He served in *Leeuwin*, *Duchess*, *Encounter*, Harman Navy Office, *Kuttabul* and did two years exchange with the Royal Navy teaching Greenies at HMS Collingwood. He retired from the RAN on 23 May 1988, the day before his 48th birthday.

Alan joined the ACT Section of the Naval Association of Australia on 1 May 1996 and has been a financial member ever since, and one of the mainstays of the Section.

With the 'Old Guard' slowly falling out, he was elected as the Section's Secretary in 2012 - a task which he has performed to the Section's entire satisfaction until stepping down from that role in 2025.

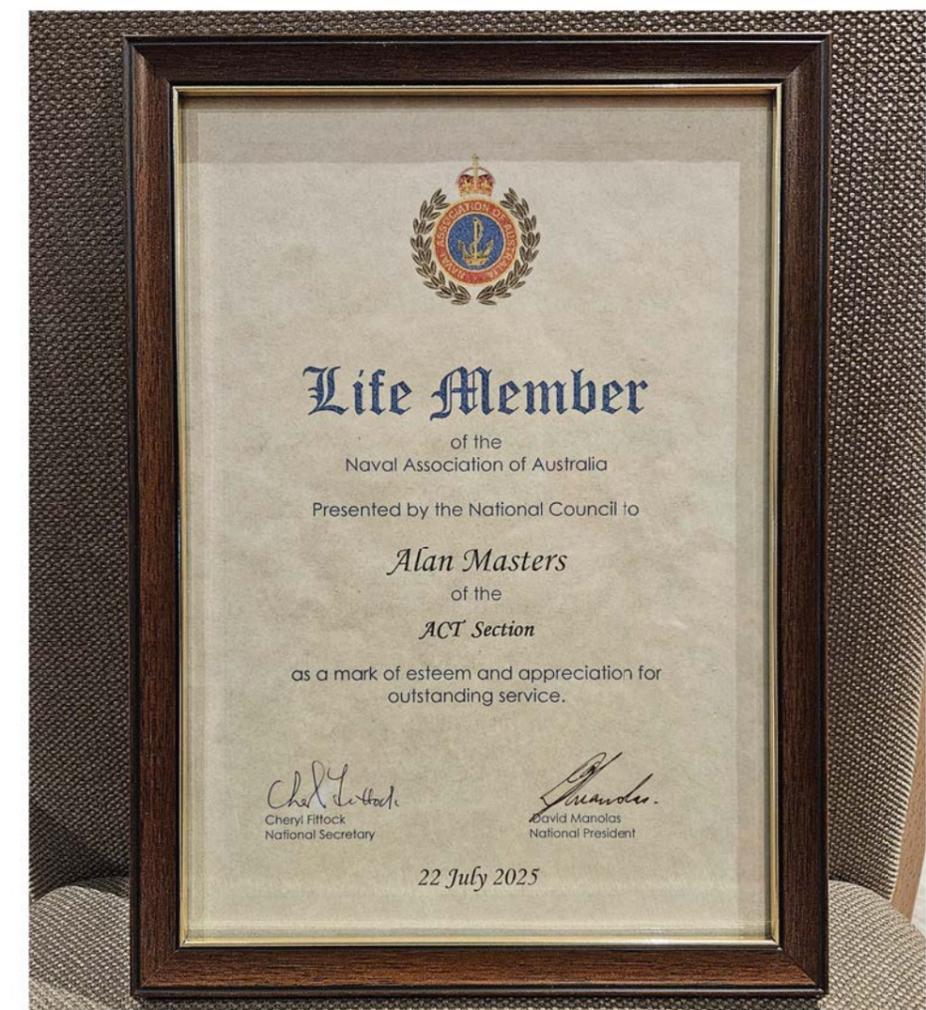
He was elected the Section's Treasurer in 2014, which he combined with the duties of Secretary until the end of 2024 -and again, provided outstanding service.

In 2016 he assumed the role of implementing and coordinating the tasks involved with conducting and managing the annual public remembrance ceremony marking the loss of HMAS *Canberra (I)*. He relinquished that role in 2022, but resumed it through 2023 and 2024.

Throughout his outstanding membership of the ACT Section Committee he has performed all his tasks with an extremely high level of mateship and exceptional performance since he joined the section almost 30 years ago.



Life Membership awarded to Alan Masters by Section President David Manolas





Members of the Naval Health Services Sub-Section at the Afternoon Tea hosted by the Governor of NSW to celebrate the centenary of the Naval Association's NSW Section.



Guests enjoying hospitality at the Afternoon Tea hosted by the Governor of NSW to celebrate the Centenary of the Naval Association's NSW Section.

On 23 February 2026 Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, Patron of the Naval Association's NSW Section, hosted an afternoon tea at Government House to celebrate the centenary of the Section's formation. More than 70 Naval Association members and guests attended this event, where the Governor spoke of the important service that the Naval Association has provided to veterans and the community for more than 100 years.

The afternoon reception was the culmination of a year of celebratory events and activities enjoyed by members of the NSW Section. These included a Centenary Luncheon, Service of Thanksgiving, a Centenary Naval Historical 'voyage' on Sydney Harbour, plus the production of commemorative medallions and a Centenary cap.

During the reception the Governor presented a Naval Association Life Member certificate and lapel badge to NSW Section President Keith Grimley, following his award of this honour in November 2025. This award acknowledges Keith's outstanding and sustained efforts as an Executive member of his Sub-Section and the NSW Section, and as a delegate to the Naval Association's National Council. *BZ Keith!*



The Governor of NSW, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, presenting the Naval Association Life Member certificate and lapel badge to Keith Grimley, President NSW Section – during the Afternoon Tea hosted by the Governor to celebrate the centenary of the Naval Association's NSW Section.

# The Navy's Place in the ANZAC Tradition

By AT Kenos (originally published in *The Rattlesnake*, HMAS Lonsdale, Aug 1983)

Every Australian has in his blood some sound of the sea. After all, we are an island continent – a child of the sea whose development was in many ways nourished by the sea. However, most people tend to forget the deep importance of the Navy in the founding and development of our great nation, just as they forget the fact that – even today – most of our trade with other nations depends upon the sea.

Similarly, in almost any consideration of Australia's involvement in the Great War, people tend to speak far more about the part played by the amazing ANZAC soldiers. This is understandable in view of the fact that there were some 400,000 soldiers compared to around 5000 naval personnel in Australia's forces; however, historical texts have gone so far as to imply that the only the soldier of that ANZAC tradition typified the image of the Australian people.

Of course, these many texts do make some fleeting references to the valour of our first naval personnel. After all, "many thousands of our gallant young men sailed away from Australia to fight, not so much as a duty, but as a proud privilege to uphold the honour and glory of the British Empire and by their valorous deeds on Gallipoli and the fields of France, inscribed in letters of blood. (Frank Forde MP, 28 January 1943, House of Representatives).

From the very beginning of our Navy, all political parties in Australia and indeed the Australian people, were keen to support its development. To them, the Navy was "an effect of growing nationalism... and marked a passage in Australia's progress to adulthood".

Indeed, whereas the Royal Navy RN experienced some difficulties in recruiting suitable men in the years leading to and during the Great War, the Royal Australian Navy had to turn away a great many eligible men.

The classic view of the early Australian male is that image created by the historian, Russell Ward. This view, often taken to fit the typical ANZAC also bears striking similarities with the typical seaman of the same era. As with Ward's typical Australian male, mateship and egalitarianism were very strong amongst the men of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). CVlass structures were meaningless. Their major pass times tended to be gambling and drinking. A few were also family men.

But they were ever resourceful, and adapted to their conditions far better than did their Royal Navy counterparts. Moreover, unlike the R N, the ranks of the RAN were filled with men of every class without distinction.

That stated, unlike the RN, women had no place in the RAN. While the RN had established a Women's Branch in the First World War, the RAN did not do so until the Second World War. However, this absence of women from naval service reflected social attitudes to women more than any perceived contempt for them.

The character of the men of the RAN was best summed up in an address to the Commonwealth Parliament by sometime Prime Minister Alfred Deakin when he stated...

*'naval discipline and training differ in character very largely from military training and discipline. The former is much more specialised on shipboard... and demand far more training to reach a modern standard of efficiency... In the examinations and tests with men of the Royal Navy... they are standing well above the average standard achieved'*.

Australians are proud of their Navy's role in the Great War, and during those horrid war years they felt safe within the protection of the White Ensign (the flag of the RAN). As Mr Deakin – an ardent proponent of an Australian Navy along with Mr Andrew Fischer - said on one occasion, "withdraw (the White Ensign) and our peril would be instant. "After all",



he went on to add, "Australians do not want and never wanted charity".

When the war came, the RAN was the one branch of the service best prepared for war, and yet – ironically – engaged in the least action.

The RAN's war service to Australia was guarded by a policy that demanded it be assigned patrol duties for three main reasons. Firstly, Australia's fears of a 'strong German fleet on the sea' necessitated regular patrols of the Pacific Ocean and Australia's coastal waters. Secondly, the fame of the RAN arising from the sinking of the HIGMS Emden by HMAS Sydney led to RAN vessels joining Royal Navy patrols and surveillance throughout the British Commonwealth but most notably around Great Britain. Finally, 'an enemy strategy that remained largely negative throughout the war' caused further concern.

Sblt Stan Veale began the war when he hoisted a signal in the Naval Examination Service vessel 'Alvina' at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, resulting in the firing of a shot across the bows of the German motor vessel "Hobart", which was attempting to put to sea. When that ship returned to port a search found a copy of the German mercantile code book, which the Royal Navy would use to decode German naval signals throughout the war.

Within hours of war the declaration of war in 1914, the RAN was ordered to go to sea to secure a number of strategic bases in the Pacific theatre of war, then held by the Germans. Veale was immediately ordered to join the naval assault on a German radio communications base in New Guinea. The RAN was ultimately victorious and it led to the surrender of all of German's territories in the South West Pacific Ocean; but in such action the loss of life is inevitable, and the very first member of the Australian Defence Force to die under the Australian flag was a member of the RAN.

Gallipoli would follow (note – the place was called Kallipoli by its Hellenic/ Greek inhabitants, before the 1913 Genocide by Turkey began, a genocide that would continue for ten years). Gallipoli, as it was now called, is honourably remembered as the place where Australians first showed their mettle as fighting men, and that cannot be reduced or down played in any sense. However, the actions of the fledgling RAN in attacking the German radio base could well

be regarded as setting a standard for other Australian Defence Force personnel to follow.

The most famous action involving Australia's young Navy was that between HMAS Sydney and HIGMS Emden. The Emden was probably the most notorious ship of that entire war, with twenty three vessels captured or sunk to her credit. On the ninth of November 1914, the Sydney's patrol and surveillance duties caused her to become engaged in combat with that light German Cruiser off the Cocos Island. The battle was fierce but the heavy cruiser Sydney was ultimately victorious.

As news of the victory spread, praise for the Sydney and her crew, the RAN and for Australia came from far and wide. The world noticed, and tributes poured in from afar. Australia had earned the respect of one and all.

The RAN's official war historian Mr A W Jose, recorded that

*"admitted as equals into the greatest service the seas have known, their keenest effort has been to prove that honour fully deserved"*

Although they saw little action in the war after wards, the RAN was determined to show its mettle at every opportunity, and the flag staff were keen to prove Australia as a nation through the RAN. Thus, for example., the RAN set its own examinations and fitness tests for personnel at levels much higher than those required of Royal navy personnel, and they applied to all men without distinction.

A new and higher standard for naval personnel was thus set.

When the war concluded, it was said that the "service rendered to the Empire by the Australian navy contributes one more item to a long history of glorious achievements".

The Royal Australian Navy and the ANZACs acted nobly and valiantly. The men who composed these services were basically of the same character, and the service paid to Australia was as much a tribute to the RAN as it was to the ANZACs.

[While the term ANZAC technically refers to army personnel only, its meaning and its soul are reflected in others who have served our nation and include the RAAF and individuals such as the "white mouse", Nancy Wake.]



## HMAS Parramatta II Memorial Service



HMAS PARRAMATTA II

Parramatta Sub Section of the NAA arranged and hosted a memorial service to remember and commemorate the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of HMAS Parramatta II. The service was held in the grounds of St Ioannis Greek Orthodox Church in Parramatta on Sunday 23rd November 2025.

The temporary relocation of the service was due to capital works being carried out by the City of Parramatta Council around and near the HMAS Parramatta II memorial in Queens Wharf Reserve – the usual location for this significant event. While this provided an early concerning obstacle, it turned out to be just one of many challenges to be met.

Rain fell through the previous night, so a gloomy and wet early morning greeted the set-up crew who started work in light rain on the former bowling green, by now under some 5mm of rainwater. This was not an auspicious start with four marquees and a temporary 5.2M flag pole to be erected and with the event scheduled to get under way in a little over four hours. Thanks to the magic of

bowling green drainage, the surface water drained away and as the sun came up, the weather changed to warm and humid and then to hot and humid in time for the start of the service.

Deputy Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Charles Chen, opened the service with a formal but warm Welcome Address on behalf of the Lord Mayor and the City of Parramatta.

The Oration, delivered by Commander Adam Stafford, RAN, current CO of HMAS Parramatta IV, was a moving tribute – not only to those who were lost with Parramatta II -but to all sailors who were lost and to the families who waited at home. The ship's Command Warrant Officer and two Principle Warfare Officers also attended.

Several former commanding officers of HMAS Parramatta IV were in attendance, including Commodore Simon Howard CSM, RAN who did triple duty by representing Chief of Navy and Fleet Commander as well as arriving early to review Australian Navy Cadets from TS Australia and TS Nepean.

Navy provided strong ceremonial support: Catafalque party and flag marshal from HMAS Kuttabul Ceremonial Support Group and a brass quintet from the RAN Band Sydney provided appropriate music and accompaniment for hymns. Navy bugler sounded a faultless Last Post & Reveille and we were fortunate enough to have vocalist PO Tracy Kennedy lead the singing. Chaplain Adrian Gomez, RAN led the prayers and blessing.



(L-R) President Bruce Richens, Parramatta IV Command WO Gordon Davis, CAPT Simon Cannell (former CO Parramatta IV), CMDR Adam Stafford (current CO Parramatta IV), CDRE Simon Howard and CDRE Troy vanTienhoven (both former Parramatta IV COs), N19 Secretary Michael Kietly.

Bruce Richens  
President - Parramatta Memorial Sub-Section



Mr Brian Hugo presented the reading suggested by Chaplain Gomez (John XV verses 9-13)

City of Parramatta Councillors, State MP for Parramatta and school captains from Parramatta High School were all in attendance and laid tributes during the service.

VIPs in attendance were families of the crew of HMAS Parramatta II; this group was specifically acknowledged during the Oration and also during the Welcome Address. Local veteran associations and supporting clubs were well represented.

On completion of the service attendees were invited to join us for a light snack and refreshments.

All challenges met.



Temporary Memorial and flagpole



## 75th anniversary of National Service

1951-1972



Representing the Naval Association of Australia at the service were Mr Alaric O'Neill (Pictured) and Ms Veronica Heard

The 75th anniversary of Australian National Service (1951–1972) was commemorated on 14 February 2025, honoring over 280,000 "Nashos" called up for service.

A national service at Parliament House, Canberra remembered those who served, including the 200+ who died in service, with highlights on their lasting commitment and sacrifice.

National service refers to two conscription schemes for the armed forces that operated during the Cold War. Both schemes saw young men conscripted into Australia's armed forces for full-time and part-time service. Those who served in the national service schemes were affectionately known as 'Nashos'.

The National Service Training Scheme (NSTS) ran from 1951 to 1959. It required nearly all 18-year-old males to be registered for national service and undergo between 3 and 6 months of full-time training in one of the armed services followed by a part-time service commitment in either the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, Citizen Military Force, or Citizen Air Force.

The National Service Scheme (NSS) ran from 1965 to 1972. This scheme required males turning 20 and resident in Australia to register for potential national service and then men were selected for national service by a ballot system. Those selected were required to complete 2 years of full-time service with the Australian Regular Army or six years of part-time service in the CMF. Nashos in this scheme could serve in Australia or overseas, including in Vietnam, Malaysia (including in the Indonesian Confrontation), Singapore, and Papua New Guinea.

Over 280,000 young men were called up for national service between 1951 and 1972 with the last Nashos discharged in 1974. More than 200 died on active service overseas and others died while serving in Australia. Although many young men were proud to serve their country in uniform, national service came at a personal cost for all Nashos, irrespective of the nature and location of their service.



### HMAS Sydney II Memorial - Geraldton WA

I visited Geraldton and the memorial site, on Wednesday 19th November 2025, with another Box Hill NAA Sub-Section member, Graham Thomas and his wife Ros, for the 84th memorial service of the sinking of HMAS Sydney II, 120 nautical miles from Dirk Hartog Island, off the coast of WA. It was a service never to be forgotten.

You may have visited the memorial, yourself, as it is a great magnificent and emotional site. I think no person, with a connection to the navy should not visit it. There are greater memorial Museums, such as Canberra and Melbourne; however, they cover all the armed forces and all wars. The memorial at Geraldton, is for the Navy and a Ship, HMAS Sydney, with the loss of 645 lives, Australia's greatest, naval disaster.

As the author Ernest Hemingway once, said, "A man dies twice, when his body is no longer living and when his memory is forgotten." The people of Geraldton, have not forgotten the memory of HMAS Sydney II.

The Battle HMAS Sydney v HSK Komoran.

The Light Cruiser, HMAS Sydney II, at approx, 1830, on 19th of November 1941, in the Indian Ocean, approached a merchant ship, flying a Dutch Flag. When the Sydney came into range the ship struck the Dutch Flag and raised, the German Naal Ensign and fired its hidden guns and torpedoes. 2 torpedoes hit the Sydney, ripping a large hole in the side of the ship, and causing the bow to be damaged. Some of its salvos hit

the Sydney's Bridge, killing all personnel and the Captain Joseph Burnett.

The Sydney did fire back with salvos and torpedoes. Some of Sydney's salvos struck the engine room, causing severe damage and the ship had to come to a stop, both ships were ablaze.

The Komoran's Captain, Theodor Detmers, gave the order to abandon and scuttle the ship and the Kormoran sunk. 83 German sailors lost their lives and 318 survived to become prisoners of War.

The Sydney was last seen crossing the horizon, on fire and there were no survivors, 645 had lost their lives.

Both ships were located in 2008

The Geraldton HMAS Sydney Memorial consists of 5 parts: -

1st: the metal umbrella made of 645 seagulls, one for every person who was killed aboard HMAS Sydney II.

2nd: the large metal structure in the shape of the bow of HMAS Sydney with the Australian National Flag flying a top.

3rd: the woman dressed in black, looking out to sea, waiting for the ship to return and never did, very emotional. She represents, all wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and girlfriends, who had a connection to any one aboard. I observed several women come away with tears in their eyes.

Wayne Bastow  
Treasurer - Box Hill Sub-Section



4th: a large seagull lying in the direction of the last sighting of HMAS Sydney, with the latitude and longitude.

5th: the Memorial Wall with the names of all personnel aboard Sydney killed.



The Memorial Service 19th November, 2025.

At least 300 people attended, the service many Geraldton citizens, dignitaries from Canberra, Senior Naval, Army and Airforce Officers, Senior Police Officers, Politicians,

the Mayor, Councillors, secondary and primary school students, service organisations, WA NAA members, WA Historical Society, Geraldton RSL, and the Geraldton Symphonic Orchestra.

There were speeches, prayers, songs, buglers, and wreath laying. Graham Thomas layed a wreath on behalf of the Victoria Section of the NAA and I laid a wreath on behalf of the Box Hill Sub-Section.

After wreath laying, the Naval Cadets fired a 6-gun 4 volley salute, followed by a loud shot, fired from a large cannon and then flares lit at sea. It was the greatest, naval service I have ever attended.

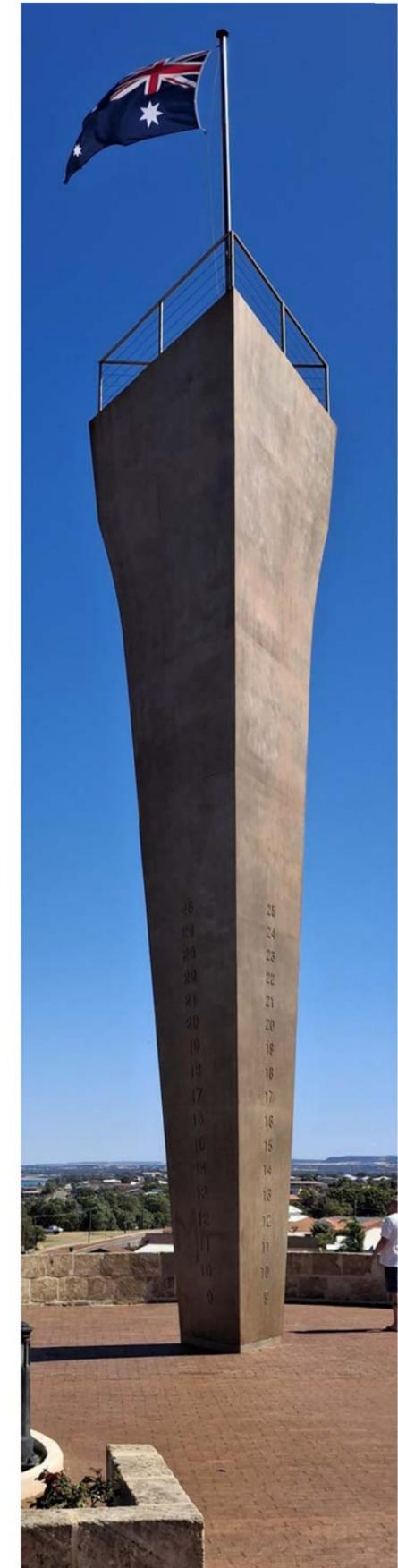
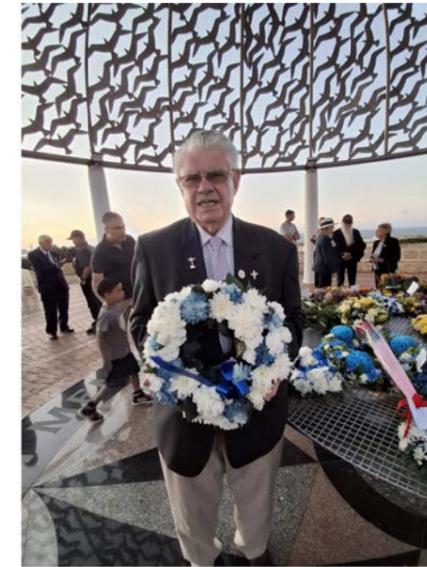
Any naval person who, is interested, in the history of the Royal Australian Navy, should not miss visiting this memorial site or an actual memorial service.

Who am I?

My name is Wayne Bastow, Chief Petty Officer Bosun.

Eleven years, service in the RAN (1962 to 1973), as a Petty Officer Weapons Mechanic and (1980 to 1996), 16 years in the RANR as a Chief Petty Officer QMG and then CPO Bosun.

The 11 years in the RAN, was almost spent doing War time. 3 Wars, Borneo Malaysian confrontation 1963/64, HMAS Supply then 2 trips to Vietnam 1968 HMAS Hobart and 1971 HMAS Brisbane. I spent 10 months at the Great Lakes Naval Gunnery Base, USA doing training for Vietnam. I did do time on the HMAS Sydney III, when it was an aircraft Carrier.





Don Lennard, Kevin Mole, Bernidette Mole, Steve Penman, Ed Husic MP, Bob Cooper & Barry Brooks.

### Gifted a New Trailor

Rooty Hill & District Sub-Section accept a new trailer presented to us from Member of Parliament Ed Husic to help with our volunteer work for our veterans and community.

With this we can carry on our work. We meet at West Tradies - Woodstock Ave Dhurrark on the last Sunday of the month if any serving or ex-naval personnel want to come along to join us.

Thank You Ed Husic member for Chifley for helping us out again.

### Birthday Wishes

In January, Rooty Hill & District Sub-Section member Emanuel Micallef turned 103



Emanuel Micallef

### St Marys Church, Kangaroo Point

Story and pictures by Paul Andrews

On Tuesday 13 Jan 2026, Ms Madeline Blyth and Mr Paul Andrews met with Mr Tony Jones, warden of St Marys Church in Kangaroo Point, QLD.

Madeline visited the church to clear up a small discrepancy in a naval memorial to her brother SBLT EAGAR who was killed in WW2 on board HMAS Sydney sunk in battle 19 Nov 1941.

SBLT EAGAR was spelt incorrectly as EAGER and the church is currently in liaison with HMAS Moreton, the Naval Association and Qld Heritage section to check what can be done to rectify this mistake.

Madeline's mothers ashes (Kathleen Eagar) are interned in the church grounds and Madeline advised she also attended the Sunday school here.

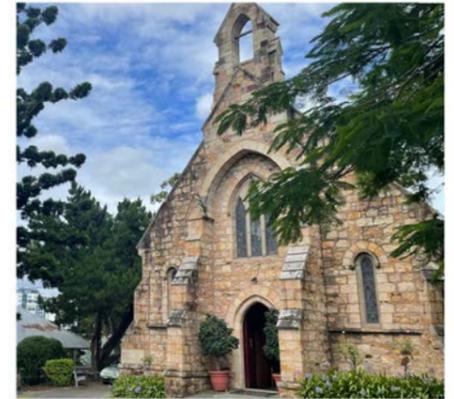
The warden conducted a tour for Madeline (97 years young) who lived in the area before and during WW2 and actually recalled when she watched the story bridge being built when she lived nearby.

Fr Richard James took time out of his busy schedule to also chat to Madeline.

Madeline's father was Capt Kingsley F Eagar who later was a well known sea captain who served on sailing, P&O liners and coal fired cargo ships. Capt Eagar's first ship to start his career was aboard the three masted iron clipper Taranaki. Capt Eagar then worked his way up through the business of seamanship from the ranks of a seaman to Captain.

He later worked as Tug Superintendent from July 1926- Sept 1948. A life story completed by Mr David Jones of the Qld Maritime Museum is truly a wonderful read of a great man of the sea.

St Marys was the Naval Chapel for Queensland; the chapel contains both British and Australian Ensigns and a memorial to those from HMAS Voyager lost in Collison in 1964.





# A CODED TAPESTRY

By Laura Black (2022)

## Decoded: 75 Years of the Australian Signals Directorate

An exhibition about the history of a foreign intelligence organisation inevitably conjures up images of James Bond, Miss Money Penny, and Q (or 'Quartermaster'). Indeed, a real Q features in the history of the Australian Signals Directorate (where 'Q' was short for Q Branch). But, unlike the movies, the new Decoded exhibition also brings together some curious objects and amazing people that never made it to the big screen.

Take for example the woman who created the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) commemorative chair in 2006.

Tapestry is not usually associated with espionage, but Marion Stevens, who worked at HMAS Harman near Canberra during the Second World War, embroidered the upholstery of the chair with information about the way communications were conducted at Harman and its outstations during the war.

Marion embroidered call signs and radio frequencies from memory, as a tribute to the vital work she and many other women performed in secret. The chair also features the HMAS Harman crest.

Marion was the fifth woman to join the WRANS. Her official number was WR5 (WRAN number 5).

The highly-skilled WRANS monitored the airwaves 24 hours a day to provide radio coverage of Pacific Ocean communications and intercepts for Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne.

The tapestry displays this world in codes, including the central Allied communications hub at Whitehall (GYC) in London, Colombo Fort (GZH), Canada Esquimalt (CKL) and Waiouru, New Zealand (ZLO). It features the night and day frequencies used to communicate with Allied ships.

On the chair's arms, Marion embroidered the code for the words 'nothing for you' (used when there were no messages to report) in both the navy telegraphist code X257 and the commercial code QRU.

Marion was put in charge of the Molonglo wireless telegraphy station. After the war she represented the WRANS at the Queen's Coronation and went to visit her signals colleagues at Whitehall.

Marion recalled the scene on meeting a senior British male officer in London in 1953:

'You know, that's the best station we ever worked during the war,' he said. 'It was the only one we were allowed to broadcast to. You know, they never let us down', and he laughed and he said, 'We found out after a while that a woman was running that station. I doubt if we'd been allowed to do it had we known at the time it was run by a woman'.

He said, 'I'd like to shake her by the hand,' and it was with great happiness that I held my hand out and said, 'Well, go right ahead'. But I think that was really about the proudest moment in my entire life.

*Decoded: 75 Years of the Australian Signals Directorate was on show at the National Museum of Australia from 1 April to 24 July 2022.*



WRANS commemorative chair with embroidery by Marion Stevens, 2006



Marion Stevens (third from left), WRANS at HMAS Harman naval wireless station Canberra, ACT, 1944

THEY HAVE NO GRAVE BUT THE CRUEL SEA,  
NO FLOWERS LAY AT THEIR HEAD.  
A RUSTING HULK IS THEIR TOMBSTONE.  
AFAST ON THE OCEAN BED.

## LEST WE FORGET

- |                            |                |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Chris Robinson             | Bayside        |
| Chaplain Col Baxter OAM    | Bribie Island  |
| Geoff McLeod (LIFE MEMBER) | Dandenong      |
| Roy Barwick                | Gerringong     |
| Richard Black              | Gold Coast     |
| Ken Heath                  | Gold Coast     |
| Alroy (Winki) Higgins      | Navy Women QLD |
| Dawn Walsh                 | Navy Women QLD |
| Mick Rudkins (AGED 102)    | Redcliffe      |
| Raymond Matson             | Sydney/Country |
| Robert Osborne             | Sydney/Country |

SHIPMATE, YOUR WATCH IS OVER



1944 - WRANS in the Liberty Load parade

# ONCE NAVY, ALWAYS NAVY



2019 - WRANS veterans marching on ANZAC Day