

## More than pin-up girls: a history of the WAAAF

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“There was no distinction of sex – the little blonde girl had a job to do”, wrote Patricia Massey-Higgins, a journalist visiting a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) station in 1944.<sup>1</sup> This little blonde girl was the only female aircraft armourer in this particular hangar, and a member of the Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF). The WAAAF navigated an uncharted domain, balancing societal expectations of womanhood while daring to contribute to the war effort within a male-dominated society. Their story is one of determination and success in the face of prejudice. This paper will delve into the establishment of the WAAAF, the diverse roles and contributions of the WAAAF to the war effort, societal responses to the WAAAF, and the post-war legacy of the WAAAF.

WAAAF stories have remained absent from many histories of the Second World War, contributing to a lack of understanding about their wartime experiences and contributions. In most cases, publications concerning the WAAAF have been written by former WAAAF members, including Joyce Thomson’s seminal *The WAAAF in Wartime Australia* and other personally published WAAAF memoirs. In the post-war period, the RAAF invested in publishing short compilations of WAAAF stories, such as *They Wrote it Themselves: a Book of the WAAAF* and *The WAAAF Book*. As Director of the WAAAF, Clare Stevenson, wrote in her forward to *They Wrote it Themselves*, ex-WAAAFs had to write their history themselves because “no great craftsmen has so far seen a story in the life of the WAAAF”.<sup>2</sup> However histories of the WAAAF have often focused on a patriotic narrative of service and success which has neglected to uncover the range and diversity of the WAAAF experience. Contemporarily, it is essential to interrogate claims that the WAAAF was an “Australian wartime success story” as lauded by the Department of Defence in 2021.<sup>3</sup> To better comprehend their experiences, we must appreciate the intrinsic complexities of service in the WAAAF.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles: the Story of the W.A.A.A.F.* (Sydney: F.H. Johnston, 1943), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Australian Air Force and Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force, *They wrote it themselves: a book of the W.A.A.A.F.* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1946), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Peta Magorian, “Role of women in Air Force celebrated,” Australian Government Defence, published November 1, 2021, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2021-11-01/role-women-air-force-celebrated>.

Between 1941 and 1947, almost 27,000 servicewomen joined the ranks of the WAAAF, including 28 known Indigenous women. Across 106 locations, mainly in New South Wales and Queensland, these servicewomen worked tirelessly to contribute to the Australian war effort.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the WAAAF's disbandment in 1947, the service encompassed 73 musterings ranging from telegraphist services to drill instructing and flight rigging.<sup>5</sup> Joyce Thomson found that by mid-1944 WAAAFs represented 31.5 per cent of RAAF ground staff, cementing their place in Australian Air Force history.<sup>6</sup> Although they were never deployed to active war zones outside of Australia, their work was not without its risks. Over the course of the war, 57 WAAAFs lost their lives in the service of their country, primarily to instances of illness and accident.

### **The making of the WAAAF**

As the first women's auxiliary service, the status and future of the WAAAF was often uncertain during its formative years. WAAAFs challenged feminine stereotypes by performing roles, namely mechanical and technical jobs, outside the typical domain of women at the time. Women entered the workforce at greater pace with the outbreak of the Second World War. Many found employment in factories, farms, and administrations offices where women often worked as typists and clerks. However, a few other critical developments in the post-First World War climate enabled the eventual establishment of the WAAAF. Technological advancements in the aviation field in conjunction with Australia's geographical position saw an increased romanticism for aviation in Australia.<sup>7</sup> When writing *They Speed the Eagles*, Massey-Higgins went so far to claim that there seemed to be a certain Australian quality that was naturally adept to flying.<sup>8</sup> She wrote that it was perhaps the "freedom of expression" encouraged in the Australian lifestyle that made young Australians daring and independent.<sup>9</sup> To Massey-Higgins, it was these values that accounted for the success of the RAAF.<sup>10</sup> Aside from the heroism associated with aviation often emphasised in nationalist narratives like that of Massey-Higgins, tangible changes in the practicalities of women's lives were occurring.

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<sup>4</sup> Joyce A. Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1991), 314-315.

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 342.

<sup>6</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 262.

<sup>7</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 62.

These included greater access to education, household improvements such as the expansion of gas and electricity, and limited but increasing access to birth control.<sup>11</sup> These factors alleviated, to an extent, the traditional duties and expectations upon women and mothers of the nuclear family, making the prospect of serving in the RAAF more conceivable than not.

Integral to the foundation of the WAAAF were the flying organisations that predated its establishment, notably the Australian Women's Flying Club (AWFC) and the Women's Air Training Corps (WATC). The NSW-based AWFC, led by women such as Gwendoline Stark, aimed to make flying more accessible to young women who could not pursue their aviation ambitions due to financial restraints.<sup>12</sup> As the threat of war intensified in 1939, AWFC membership expanded with many women seeking to train as wireless operators in aircraft workshops. Gwendoline Stark conducted weekend camps with "semi-military discipline" with the aim of gaining recognition as a potential auxiliary arm of the RAAF if circumstances necessitated it.<sup>13</sup> The WATC was another voluntary para-military organisation in the pre-war years that primed Australian women to take seriously their desires to work in aviation and possibly contribute to the impending war effort. Organised by Mary Bell, a ground engineer and pilot licence holder who became a key figure in the establishment of the WAAF, the WATC gave women the opportunity to train for work in hangars and aircraft factories.<sup>14</sup> The female pilots that administered the AWFC and WATC played a significant role in crafting and developing a large pool of women with some para-military experience from which the WAAAF could retain its first enrolments.

With Menzies' announcement that Australia was at war on 3 September 1939, the AWFC and WATC saw the opportunity to offer their services. The Prime Minister's Cabinet received an onslaught of letters from female pilots who emphasised the need for female mobilisation in the RAAF and their readiness to take up such responsibility.<sup>15</sup> Yet there was little enthusiasm on behalf of Australia's politicians and bureaucrats. A women's auxiliary air force was rejected on the grounds that it would remove women from their "natural environment", the home, wherein they were primarily tasked with the "training of the family".<sup>16</sup> The maintenance of the nuclear

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<sup>11</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 17.

family was central to conceptions of womanhood given that in 1933 women's participation in the labour force had only reached 25.1 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Their slow integration into the general workforce, which was dictated by patriarchal structures, further frustrated women's desires to contribute to the war effort beyond traditional nursing roles.

The concerted effort led by Mary Bell, through her correspondence to Air Marshal Williams, saw the Air Board first consider the use of womanpower in November 1939.<sup>18</sup> It was determined however that the mobilisation of womanpower was premature and unnecessary despite the rapid expansion of the RAAF underway. Arguments that a women's auxiliary service would jump the gun and create unforeseen implications on the Australian armed services, workforce and gender-based norms were tested with Australia's commitment to the Commonwealth Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). This saw Australia commit to providing 26,000 aircrew for service in the RAAF, significantly exhausting the already insufficient reserve of RAAF ground staff.<sup>19</sup>

Australia's commitment to EATS resulted in a forecasted deficiency of over 350 wireless telegraphists by December 1940, even when new male enlistments were considered.<sup>20</sup> Given such an impending crisis, Bell was instructed to draw up an organisational draft, answerable to Air Marshall Williams, of what a women's auxiliary arm might look like. Foremost, Bell recommended that a WAAAF be instituted in accordance with the *Air Force Act*, meaning that women would be enlisted rather than enrolled. Being enlisted in the auxiliary would have meant that WAAAFs were entitled to the same entitlements as RAAF airmen, including deferred pay. This suggestion animated debate well into 1943, two years after the WAAAF's establishment, which will be discussed later. No other government worldwide had legislated women's auxiliary enlistment in this way at this time.<sup>21</sup> While this would be a significant development for women, some feared the legal equal grounding of men and women in the RAAF would have irredeemable repercussions on the structure of the service. The potential enlistment of women in the WAAAF alarmed unions which were concerned that the employment in men's

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Power, "Women and Economic Crises: The 1930's Depression and the Present Crisis (Revised version of paper delivered at Women and Labour Conference, Macquarie University, May 1978)," *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, no. 4 (1979): 3.

<sup>18</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 53.

trades would reduce the availability of post-war work for returning men.<sup>22</sup> The War Cabinet's resistance had the effect of disheartening potential WAAAF enrolments. The *Sydney Morning Herald* insisted in 1941 that a "definite policy" was needed since "Australian women are anxious and willing to make a unified war effort" and were being dismissed by the government's indecision.<sup>23</sup> The delay in establishing the WAAAF saw the loss of several capable wireless telegraphists who were taken up by the Navy instead.<sup>24</sup> Continued indecision surrounding the use of women in the RAAF thus jeopardised the efficacy of mobilising women into the RAAF.

Women's enthusiasm to join an auxiliary service and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett's determination to utilise manpower finally led the War Cabinet to approve the enrolment of women in the RAAF. In February 1941, it was announced that 320 women would be enrolled as wireless and teleprinter operators, among other administrative duties.<sup>25</sup> It was made explicit that such a temporary measure would be overseen with the "strictest exercise of control".<sup>26</sup> The War Cabinet's imperative was to monitor, target and suppress any instances of disorderliness that may arise. Here, stories of alleged indecency and immoral behaviour within the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) loomed heavily upon the Australian War Cabinet.

In opposition to this development, Labor Minister Norman Makin warned that using women to replace airmen going to the front would mean approving a system that was not yet fully understood. He maintained that the country should seek out and exhaust entirely available manpower before women be called upon for their "cheap labour".<sup>27</sup> Labor's posturing of equal pay discrimination became problematic in later debates over WAAAF entitlements to deferred pay, an issue the Curtin government was unenthusiastic to act upon. Thomson argued that the Labor Party's disenchantment with women's inclusion in the RAAF had more to do with their reluctance to accept such a rupture to conventional gender relations than concerns about employment exploitation. The temporary nature of this small inclusion of women was stressed by the provision that it would be reviewed in ten months. However, this review never

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<sup>22</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> "Women's War Service: A Definite Policy Needed, Discouragement to Training," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 12, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article17773576>.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 67.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Napier Gillison, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series 3 – Air. Volume I – Royal Australian Air Force, 1939-1942* 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1962), 100.

<sup>26</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 25 March 1941, [http://historichansard.net/hofreps/1941/19410325\\_reps\\_16\\_166](http://historichansard.net/hofreps/1941/19410325_reps_16_166).

eventuated since it quickly became evident that the issue of diminishing manpower could not be resolved without the expanded use of women. Upon this recognition, Minister for Air John McEwen announced the official formation of the WAAAF on 25 March 1941. Despite this expansion, resulting in the recruitment of 200 WAAAFs in the first month, the auxiliary remained a temporary measure. WAAAFs could only enrol for renewable 12-month periods, a tenet of the service that was not changed until 1943.

At the helm of Australia's first auxiliary service was Clare Stevenson. Stevenson joined the WAAAF as its director in June 1941 upon selection by Air Marshal Sir Charles Burnett and McEwen.<sup>28</sup> Stevenson held professional experience at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Berlei Limited, the women's lingerie company. Stevenson was interested in team-leading and building confidence within others to ensure they fulfil their capabilities.<sup>29</sup> Stevenson's external hiring discouraged some of the earlier women involved in the WAAAF who felt themselves better placed to lead the auxiliary given their aviation experience.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the ranks of the WAAAF, however, Stevenson was regarded highly with Flight Officer Pamela Penglase declaring her a "real feminist".<sup>31</sup> Thomson similarly described Stevenson to be deeply committed to equal opportunity between different sexes and classes.<sup>32</sup> At the time of Stevenson's admission as Director of the WAAAF, the War Cabinet was undertaking investigations into the feasibility and effectiveness of a further expansion of women in the services.<sup>33</sup>

Stevenson's ability to build a solid auxiliary service was cut short in October 1941 when the new Curtin government halted WAAAF recruitment. The Curtin government directed that no more recruits were to be considered until the budgetary commitments made by the previous government were reviewed. At this critical juncture, the government neglected how capable the WAAAFs were and instead preferred to consider the WAAAF as a mere transitory measure until more men offered themselves up. However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 forced Curtin's War Cabinet to not only resume the women's auxiliary but to expand it.

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<sup>28</sup> Clare Grant Stevenson, Private Records, AWM PR89/123.

<sup>29</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 93.

<sup>31</sup> Pamela Penglase, Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Kathy Sport and Louise Pasgale (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 2 April 2004, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1737>.

<sup>32</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 96.

Now faced with the possibility of attacks upon mainland Australia, women's mobilisation was accepted as necessary despite the doubts that swirled among government, military and public domains.

### **The WAAAF in action**

Reasons for enlistment in the WAAAF were diverse, and new recruits did not always have experience in the required roles. In many cases, WAAAFs were motivated by familial ties to the defence forces. Fathers, brothers or cousins often served as inspirational figures to WAAAFs to aspire to and support through their service in the auxiliary. For others, the WAAAF was an exciting opportunity that gave them a way out of the hardships of ordinary life. Jessie Agnes Cameron Bull enlisted when she was 18 years old. She recalled that directly after completing her secondary education, the WAAAF represented a "release from an unhappy homelife", which alongside the "glamour" of service life, was an unmissable opportunity.<sup>34</sup> Director Stevenson recognised the varied emotions which drove each girl to the recruiting centre, including "patriotism", "fear of invasion" and "backing up one's boyfriend".<sup>35</sup> However, according to Stevenson, these motivations were not the centre of their conversations.<sup>36</sup> Rather once they entered the service, they were foremost committed to the task at hand. Fittingly, throughout many WAAAFs correspondence during the war and later recollections is the collective sense of duty – the desire to actively contribute something in the face of war.

Despite the overwhelming nature of service in the RAAF, especially as the first women to enter the service, the WAAAFs remained resolute. Upon her reporting for training in January 1942, Aldyth McCready wrote in her diary that even though she felt uneasy leaving her loved ones behind, she remained excited at having a "shot at anything".<sup>37</sup> She insisted that that was how she felt above all else. Similarly, Doris Ellen Plummer, in writing to her husband in December 1942, stated that although she was at first "sick with confusion and loneliness", her motto

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<sup>34</sup> Jessie Agnes Cameron Bull, Private Records, AWM PR03152.

<sup>35</sup> Royal Australian Air Force and Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, *They wrote it themselves: a book of the W.A.A.A.F.*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Aldyth McCready, Personal Diary, AWM PR00623.

remained “never say die”.<sup>38</sup> In appreciating their unique position and the responsibility attached to their inclusion in the Air Force, WAAAFs approached their work with resilience and rigour.

So much so, that by March 1942, the WAAAF encompassed 19 musterings, an impressive feat considering the delays and complications the service endured in the first year of its existence. The expansion of WAAAF trades was only set to continue with WAAAFs re-training to more mechanical roles as the war raged on. The breadth of their work was such that by mid-1944 WAAAFs were almost evenly distributed between then-perceived feminine and masculine trades. 46.5 per cent of WAAAF personnel served in technical musterings, including radar and signals and stores and aircraft maintenance.<sup>39</sup> By 1945, WAAAFs were performing their duties in 73 musterings (trades) which ranged from anti-gas instructing, laboratory technician, cipher assistance and meteorological charters. The WAAAFs became immersed in work that was formerly performed exclusively by men and were able to demonstrate that they were able to complete such work equal to men and, in some cases, even outperformed their male counterparts.

To envision the work done by WAAAFs, *The Argus* reported on women conducting routine inspections of aircraft that had completed 40 hours of service.<sup>40</sup> Flight mechanics were responsible for checking the aircraft’s oil reserves and ignition and cylinder pipes. In contrast, riggers were tasked with ensuring the safety of the aircraft’s tyres, undercarriage, cockpit, cabin and main planes. Finally, armourers were responsible for inspecting bomb racks, firing switches and bomb sight. By 1943, WAAAF armourers had been trained to service and inspect guns mounted on fighter and bomber aircraft and load their bomb racks. WAAAFs were thus performing technical and mechanical work that was essential to the safe operation of aircraft by RAAF crews. Any discrepancies in their work could have proven fatal for the men in charge of the operation of such machinery. In a message to mothers of WAAAFs, Stevenson asked if readers really understood that “without [their] daughters the RAAF could not function properly”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Doris Ellen Plummer, Letter 09/12/1942, AWM PR01902.

<sup>39</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 262.

<sup>40</sup> “Technical Jobs Done by WAAAF,” *The Argus*, October 5, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article11797306>.

<sup>41</sup> “Message to mothers of WAAAFs,” *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, March 13, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article51192388>.

With the importance of work performed by the WAAAFs came the associated stress and risk of completing high-stake roles in the Australian war effort. The experiences of Joy Linnane and Moira Shelton offer insight into the diverse but equally vital contributions made by WAAAF officers. Joy Linnane was one of only 13 WAAAFs trained in kana code, a particular type of Japanese phonetic Morse code which involved symbols and transpositions.<sup>42</sup> The speed of kana code was much faster than that of the international code the operators had previously learnt.<sup>43</sup> Kana operators oversaw the interception of all enemy signals, including air/ground and air-to-air messages sent by Japanese aircraft. These intercepted signals would then be passed onto the intelligence room within the “hush hush hut”, the colloquial term for the isolated building in which intelligence officers operated with the utmost secrecy.<sup>44</sup> These signals would then be used to plot enemy aircraft positions and warn the targeted areas. “All activity emanated from the kana intercept operator and we fully felt our responsibility”, wrote Linnane to Joyce Thomson.<sup>45</sup> The work was arduous as operators would work around the clock and rarely get more than two hours of sleep at a time. The physical proximity, demanding hours and sheer importance of their work meant the kana WAAAFs formed a “tremendous bond” that kept them in touch long after the war.<sup>46</sup>

While the kana operators carried out unusual and difficult work, roles in the WAAAF were more varied still. Flight Officer Moira Shelton, a biochemistry graduate, joined the WAAAF in 1942 to perform food analysis. She left her posting in 1943 to become a technical adviser within the RAAF Chemical Warfare Section.<sup>47</sup> Shelton was the only woman employed on armament and chemical warfare duties in the service and had an exceptional grasp on all phases of chemical warfare<sup>48</sup>. During her service in Queensland, Shelton analysed the effects of chemical bombs dropped in jungles and tropic islands off the north coast. Shelton also headed the training of 800 WAAAFs in gas defence and organised decontamination and gas cleaning centres across

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<sup>42</sup> Joyce Enid Linnane, Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force 1942-1945, interviewed by Joyce Aubrey Thomson, 17 August 1984, 13, AWM S00226.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Joyce Enid Linnane to Joyce Aubrey Thomson dated 1987 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>44</sup> Joyce Enid Linnane, Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force 1942-1945, interviewed by Joyce Aubrey Thomson, 17 August 1984, 11, AWM S00226.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Joyce Enid Linnane to Joyce Aubrey Thomson dated 1987 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>46</sup> Joyce Enid Linnane, Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force 1942-1945, interviewed by Joyce Aubrey Thomson, 17 August 1984, 4, AWM S00226.

<sup>47</sup> Moira Shelton, WAAAF Officer and Chemical Warfare Scientist 1942-1946 undated typescript paper in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Australia.<sup>49</sup> She recalled the difficulty of her role, particularly the “unpleasant and painful” mustard gas burns she sustained during her work.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Shelton was described by her superiors as “most enthusiastic and keen on her work”.<sup>51</sup>

Despite its existence as an auxiliary service wherein women were only enrolled for 12-month renewable periods, the WAAAF was heavily integrated within the structure of the RAAF. WAAAFs worked alongside RAAF servicemen, often undertaking the same work as the men they had relieved. The *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* states that 77 per cent of RAAF musterings were available to women.<sup>52</sup> However, such notions of equal footing must be tempered by the restrictions that continued to be imposed upon WAAAFs until the service’s disbandment. There were many caveats to the WAAAF, including the inability to post WAAAFs overseas. The kana operators displayed such a meticulous work ethic that US General MacArthur requested their service in the US invasion of the Philippines. The Australian War Cabinet refused, maintaining that no WAAAF personnel were to be stationed outside of Australia under any circumstances.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the overseas clause, the WAAAFs were as the women who did do everything but fly, despite many of them, especially those first WAAAF enrolments, holding their pilot licences. Similarly, historian and author Eleanor Hancock has noted the importance of recognising the fact that in comparison to women’s services in Britain and Germany, Australian servicewomen were given “narrow” opportunities.<sup>54</sup> Unlike Australia, Britain had allowed the establishment of women’s auxiliaries before the outbreak of war and thus were not occupied by debates over women’s inclusion in the war effort. While there was a shift toward liberation, with Massey-Higgins even proclaiming it was an “era of complete emancipation”, women’s contributions were still strained by the Australian War Cabinet’s initial indecisiveness.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> P. Dennis et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (South Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press, 2009), 677.

<sup>53</sup> P. Dennis et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* 677.

<sup>54</sup> Eleanor Hancock, “‘They Also Served’: Exaggerating women’s roles in Australia’s wars,” in *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, ed. Craig Stockings (Kensington, NSW: New South Publishing, 2012), 108.

<sup>55</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 64; Hancock, “‘They Also Served’: Exaggerating women’s roles in Australia’s wars,” 110.

Throughout their service, WAAAFs were also deprived of equal pay, receiving only two-thirds of the wages allotted to their RAAF counterparts, an endemic issue that was present across all the auxiliaries. Low pay was rationalised by RAAF officials and politicians on account of its rough equivalence to award rates that civilian women received at the time.<sup>56</sup> When asked about the disparate pay, ex-WAAAF Pamela Penglase stated that it “wasn’t fair” to have a female and male rigger who were “doing the same job” be paid disproportionately in favour of the male.<sup>57</sup> However, Penglase maintained that while it was not ideal, it “didn’t worry [her]” and that she “was there doing what [she] wanted to do irrespective of pay”.<sup>58</sup> A similar sentiment was shared by former WAAAF Beryl Martin who insisted that WAAAFs were “not there for the money” but were always “broke and usually hungry”.<sup>59</sup> Despite some WAAAFs acknowledging the more unfair aspects of their situation, it was not material gain that drove them to serve in the auxiliary, rather a desire to assist the Australian war effort through whatever means possible.

Similarly, since WAAAFs were enrolled into the auxiliary service, they were not entitled to deferred pay like RAAF officers. Reports in 1942 bemoaned the Curtin government’s inaction on the issue stating that even withstanding with the government’s praise of the WAAAF it “refuses” to consider the service as anything but a “substitute force”.<sup>60</sup> *Truth* asserted that it was “grossly unfair” for servicewomen to be subjected to such a “short-sighted” policy that was likely to cause dissatisfaction within the ranks and demotivate future enrolment.<sup>61</sup> A 1942 report into WAAAF enrolment by Adolphus Peter Elkin, a NSW-based professor of anthropology, identified the tangible impact lower rates of pay and the lack of entitlement such as deferred pay and pension rights has on possible recruits.<sup>62</sup> These factors it was found were particularly discouraging for those young women who had to contribute to the “upkeep” of their parents’ homes.<sup>63</sup> It was this “ludicrous state of indecision” that Stevenson sought to

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<sup>56</sup> Thomson, *The WAAAF in wartime Australia*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Pamela Penglase, Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Kathy Sport and Louise Pasgale (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 2 April 2004, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1737>.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Beryl Martin (nee Thomas), “Fifty Years Ago – Recollections of a WAAAF” in Private Records, AWM MSS1513.

<sup>60</sup> “WAAAFs Want (But Don’t Get) Deferred Pay”, Melbourne *Truth* article dated August 1942 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Adolphus Peter Elkin, “Enrolment in the WAAAF, Objectives and Difficulties” 1942 Report, AWM PR84/291.

<sup>63</sup> Adolphus Peter Elkin, “Enrolment in the WAAAF, Objectives and Difficulties” 1942 Report, AWM PR84/291.

rectify.<sup>64</sup> In their oral testimonies, many WAAAFs spoke staunchly of Stevenson's advocacy for her WAAAFs.<sup>65</sup> Alongside the Council for Women in War Work and the National Council of Women, Stevenson secured deferred pay for WAAAFs in March 1943. WAAAFs were entitled to their deferred pay from the day following their six-month period. Deferred pay was also to be credited from 7 December 1941. This was made possible by including the WAAAF in the legal structures of the *Air Force Act*. Thus, 1943 was a year of consolidation. WAAAFs became official members of the RAAF rather than uniformed citizens and were entitled to demobilisation benefits.

### **Scandal in the WAAAF**

Up until the final years of the Second World War, a certain negativity existed towards the WAAAF from some sectors of Australian society. Women's enlistment in the auxiliary service stoked anxieties regarding the survival of femininity and the nuclear family in Australia, issues that delayed but unsuccessfully sought to stop the establishment of the WAAAF from 1939 to 1941. A September 1943 report, "Reasons Underlying Women's Failures to Volunteer for Service", surveyed almost 200 WAAAFs based in Sydney to ascertain the factors contributing to declining enrolment. Over half of the surveyed WAAAFs admitted their concern about the fact that the "average civilian" thought negatively of the service, signalling the extensive discrimination they were subjected to.<sup>66</sup>

Such negativity was not imagined, and the WAAAF uniform attracted significant critique throughout the broader Australian press. To some, the WAAAF uniform became a physical manifestation of the erosion of traditional womanhood. Air Force blue on a woman's body gestured to some the degradation of their characters. It was popular among some sections of the Australian public to believe that uniformed WAAAFs sought to draw unnecessary attention to themselves in an unattractive and unpalatable way. When civilians were asked why they felt negatively about the WAAAF some insisted that the WAAAF were self-opinionated, unlike the

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<sup>64</sup> "Govt. Still Baulking on WAAAF Rights", *The Herald* article dated September 1942 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>65</sup> Martin (nee Thomas), "Fifty Years Ago – Recollections of a WAAAF", AWM MSS1513; Pamela Penglase, Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Kathy Sport and Louise Pasgale (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 2 April 2004, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1737>.

<sup>66</sup> "WAAAF Recruiting: Reasons Underlying Women's Failure to Volunteer for Service. Report to the Director-General of Manpower by J. Walter Thompson," September 1943 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, 27, AWM PR00246.

Australian Women's Army Services (AWAS), and "snooty".<sup>67</sup> WAAAFs supposedly held an air of superiority about them that they were unafraid of making apparent to the average civilian.<sup>68</sup> Such sentiments were explicitly expressed in a letter received by *Air Force News* written by an anonymous, self-proclaimed "Furious Father" in 1941. In describing the effect enlistment in the WAAAF had on his daughter and her friend, the father derisively claimed that "wearing of the uniform has converted both of them into conceited little prigs".<sup>69</sup> When worn by a WAAAF, the military uniform was not perceived as a "powerful encoder" of authority and discipline.<sup>70</sup> Rather, in this example, the WAAAF uniform alienated the women that wore it. For some Australians, the WAAAF uniform presupposed the arrogance and over-confidence of these women – values that ran counter to traditional expectations of womanly behaviour.

The contradictions inherent in such gendered discrimination towards the WAAAF reveal themselves as the letter continued. The male writer went on to call for the elimination of uniformed services for women as they "merely" imposed "futility since if women wanted to contribute to the war effort they should 'emulate the munition workers'".<sup>71</sup> "One such girl in a day will do more to win the war than a whole squadron of uniformed peacocks in a month".<sup>72</sup> The writer preferred the aesthetic qualities of the female munition worker who "[wore] their own clothes".<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, female munitions workers in Australia wore overalls and other protective gear, much like ground staff WAAAF personnel, which can be considered as similarly unfeminine by historical standards. A misunderstanding of the actual work performed by the WAAAFs and a predisposition to launch unfounded attacks upon airwomen was the basis of the father's claims. This is best demonstrated in his uncharitable appraisal of WAAAF duties as not being of 'any apparent consequence' since airwomen did "nothing more than the small routine tasks ...[of] a sub-junior office boy."<sup>74</sup>

A week later a response to the "Furious Father" was published. *Air Force News* condemned what it saw to be the particular Australian character of such discrimination. "It is odd to contrast

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<sup>67</sup> "WAAAF Recruiting: Reasons Underlying Women's Failure to Volunteer for Service," 62, AWM PR00246.

<sup>68</sup> Adolphus Peter Elkin, "Enrolment in the WAAAF, Objectives and Difficulties" 1942 Report, AWM PR84/291.

<sup>69</sup> "Father Has His Say," *Air Force News*, November 15, 1941, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article259479542>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

this spirit,” wrote *Air Force News*, with that of Britain, Canada and New Zealand where airwomen were “accepted without cavil, criticism or complaint.”<sup>75</sup> Perhaps it was that the Air Force blue grew “green as sour grapes” out of jealousy for those who could not don the uniform. The double standard applied to airwomen and airmen was stressed by *Air Force News*, reminding readers like that of the “Furious Father” that these women were releasing men for active service who also wore this uniform and were not criticised for it.<sup>76</sup>

Distaste for airwomen also attacked the virtue of their behaviour which was presumed to be provocative, loose and irresponsible. The moral aspersions cast upon the WAAAF were found by Elkin’s report to be one of the leading factors behind a lag in enrolment in 1942.<sup>77</sup> Perceptions of immoral behaviour revealed themselves in respondents’ claims that WAAAFs had “the best time” with both RAAF officers and American airmen.<sup>78</sup> Many ordinary Australians harboured quite shocking opinions that they had no qualms in sharing anonymously. A middle-class mother said, “No respectable family would allow their daughter to join. You know what W.A.A.A.F’s are: ‘Ground sheets for the Air Force’”. A country policeman even entertained the idea that he would “sooner see [his] daughter dead than in the W.A.A.A.F”. Beryl Martin recalled an encounter on a train into Melbourne with a civilian woman. After having completed a 14-hour night shift, Martin was on her way to a Melbourne library to complete her university course by correspondence when a woman commented that Martin had obviously fallen asleep on the train since she had “been up all night entertaining the troops”.<sup>79</sup> Such jarring interactions with civilians who held unfounded but nevertheless incredibly demeaning ideas about servicewomen were common among WAAAFs.

As rumours of WAAAF indecency ran rampant well into 1942 and 1943, debasing attitudes towards airwomen were no longer isolated to words. Corporal Margaret Hutchison recalled to a newspaper in the 1990s that she had experienced “some pretty nasty encounters”, including being “spat on by young boys who ought to have been in service themselves.”<sup>80</sup> Aldyth McCready was similarly subjected to such disrespect when two old men outside of the Young

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<sup>75</sup> “Where There’s a WAAAF There’s a Will”, *Air Force News* article dated November 2, 1941 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Adolphus Peter Elkin, “Enrolment in the WAAAF, Objectives and Difficulties” 1942 Report, AWM PR84/291.

<sup>78</sup> “WAAAF Recruiting: Reasons Underlying Women’s Failure to Volunteer for Service,” 62, AWM PR00246.

<sup>79</sup> Beryl Martin (nee Thomas), “Fifty Years Ago – Recollections of a WAAAF”, AWM MSS1513.

<sup>80</sup> Margaret Hutchison, Private Records, AWM PR01795.

and Jackson hotel in Melbourne's CBD spat at her and another officer.<sup>81</sup> McCready, a self-proclaimed "shy" woman, remembered being "shocked" at such treatment.<sup>82</sup> In acknowledging the possibility for such behaviour, some WAAAFs took the precaution to travel in groups especially when in Melbourne. In an oral history given in 2003, Elizabeth Cameron recalled that even a tram driver dared to spit on the group of officers, declaring that they would soon be out of the services.<sup>83</sup> In facing such hostility, many WAAAFs began to "expect insulting opinions" from the public and focused on rising above them through their work.<sup>84</sup>

While WAAAFs were often criticised by those with little understanding of their work, this did not preclude them from criticism from their RAAF comrades. Some reflections made by WAAAFs identified how airmen were reluctant to allow women within their "sacred sites" and looked for the slightest transgression to critique.<sup>85</sup> When performing drills "no allowances [were] made for women in any way," and many male instructors resented the fact that they had to accept women into their domain.<sup>86</sup> Inappropriate interactions with RAAF officers made Beryl Martin realise how service in the WAAAF was not simply about "defending our country" but also about "defending our honour".<sup>87</sup> Martin also wrote that there existed a "good deal of sexual harassment" that WAAAFs had to defend themselves against, without drawing excessive attention to it out of concern of being reprimanded.<sup>88</sup> Gendered discrimination permeated the WAAAF experience in ways that challenge narratives of equality and emancipation like that put forth by Massey-Higgins.

While some WAAAFs encountered discrimination, this was not the experience of all WAAAFs, some of whom insisted on the absence of sexual discrimination and harassment. "I don't know anything about women's discrimination because you just took your place alongside men," Amy Gwendoline Caldwell told Joyce Thomson in 1984.<sup>89</sup> In the same vein, Leila Joyce Granger found that RAAF instructors were "very keen" to teach airwomen and that perhaps if you were

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<sup>81</sup> Aldyth McCready, undated manuscript in Private Records, 7, AWM PR00623.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Cameron (Betty), Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Isabel Fox and Chris Houghton (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 20 May 2003, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/167>.

<sup>84</sup> "WAAAF Recruiting: Reasons Underlying Women's Failure to Volunteer for Service," 317, AWM PR00246.

<sup>85</sup> Aldyth McCready, undated manuscript in Private Records, 2, AWM PR00623.

<sup>86</sup> Beryl Martin (nee Thomas), "Fifty Years Ago – Recollections of a WAAAF", AWM MSS1513.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Amy Gwendoline Caldwell (nee Stark), Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force 1941-1945, interviewed by Joyce A Thomson, 9 January 1984, AWM S00185.

looking for male resentment “it would have been there”, telling WAAAF researcher Joyce Thomson that “life’s too short for that nonsense”.<sup>90</sup> It is not entirely indicative of the WAAAF experience to conclude that their service was either largely subjected to discrimination or largely positive and encouraging. Lowe, in her article *Reflections on Gender and Memory*, argued that many WAAAFs, particularly in their older years, preferred to affirm narratives of equality to bolster collective narratives of the WAAAF.<sup>91</sup> In maintaining they did not suffer discrimination, some WAAAFs were able to reminisce positively on their service and protect their nostalgia from being challenged. Such a desire is reflected in many histories of the WAAAF and women’s services in general. Patriotic narratives in which women are uncritically placed alongside men, leaving gendered nuances aside, have dominated these historical accounts. Lowe’s analysis provides worthwhile reflections on the complexities of memory recollection and the construction of WAAAF narratives.

WAAAFs acknowledged the need to rectify the negative public image unfairly inherited by the auxiliary. One WAAAF stated her desire for the service to “try and create a better impression” since “nothing [was] done to contradict bad stories”.<sup>92</sup> Coincidentally, it was in 1943 when WAAAF officials took the reins to reclaim popular narratives about the WAAAF. Clare Stevenson and other high-ranking WAAAF officers led a campaign to turn the tide of anti-WAAAF rumours. Stevenson warned that any Australian “who pass[ed] on a scandalous story about the Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force is doing the work of Hitler and Tojo”.<sup>93</sup> *Wings*, an Air Force publication, joked that “if anyone dares to abuse her chicks his chance of survival is less than nix”.<sup>94</sup>

The WAAAF took two main approaches to address the concerns of Australian society. The first strategy undertaken by the service was to make clear the diverse and often strenuous work completed by the WAAAF. To celebrate two years of the WAAAF, a “working exhibition” was held in the Myer Emporium building in Melbourne between 21 and 26 June 1943.<sup>95</sup> The exhibition included various sections that had been set up to display the work of armourers,

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<sup>90</sup> Leila Joyce Granger, Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Joyce A Thomson, 4 September 1984, AWM S00228.

<sup>91</sup> Lowe, “Reflections on Gender and Memory,” 159.

<sup>92</sup> “WAAAF Recruiting: Reasons Underlying Women’s Failure to Volunteer for Service,” 290, AWM PR00246.

<sup>93</sup> “Scandal Aids Tojo,” *Morning Bulletin*, March 20, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article56142432>.

<sup>94</sup> “Every Airman’s Guide – No. 8 Defines D-WAAAF”, *Wings* article in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>95</sup> “She Knew the Way”, *Argus* article dated 19 June 1943 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246

flight riggers and weather charters. One of the main attractions included the dismantling and reassembly of a Tiger Moth aircraft.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, the public was afforded the opportunity to quiz themselves with Air Force aptitude tests and could ask WAAAFs questions about their roles.<sup>97</sup> The exhibition was directly purposed to “demonstrate to the public much of the actual work carried out by the WAAAF”.<sup>98</sup> The “highly interesting” exhibition which attracted large crowds throughout the week generated positive press for the auxiliary service which may have softened negative attitudes towards the WAAAF.<sup>99</sup>

The second tactic to quell societal concerns about the character of the WAAAFs was to enthusiastically assure the public of the femininity of the WAAAFs. Deputy Director of the WAAAF, Audrey Herring, told *Argus* reporters directly that “Australia’s airwomen ... had lost none of their femininity”.<sup>100</sup> The maintenance of the womanly WAAAF was also represented visually. Cinesound produced a recruitment film, *Diary of Diana*. In the five-minute film, viewers were introduced to Diana who joins the WAAAF mainly because her boyfriend Bob serves in the RAAF.<sup>101</sup> She declares that if she is to be Bob’s “comrade for life in peace, [she] began by being his comrade in war”.<sup>102</sup> Bob and Diana’s love reflects the argument put forward by Ruth Ford that “feminine patriotism” centred upon heterosexual romance. *Diary of Diana* represented women’s service as in pursuit of women’s relationships with men, meaning that the discipline of the force would not threaten their femininity.<sup>103</sup> As the civilian woman and airwoman exchange a glance, *Diary of Diana* assured the population that the WAAAFs first and foremost remained women and service in the Air Force did not endanger them becoming unrecognisable to the civilian population. To consolidate this sentiment, several illustrations published in *They Speed the Eagles* in 1943 also sought to demonstrate that the WAAAFs were “pin-up girl[s]” first, then mechanics, and that they still completed traditional household

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<sup>96</sup> “Exhibition by WAAAF”, *The Age* article dated 17 June 1943 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>97</sup> “The World of Women: Work by WAAAF on Exhibition,” *The Argus*, June 16, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article11344028>.

<sup>98</sup> “She Knew the Way”, *The Argus* article dated 19 June 1943 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>99</sup> “WAAAF’s doing great job,” *The Sun*, May 31, 1943, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article231725405>.

<sup>100</sup> “WAAAF Officer Replies to Moderator: Femininity Not Lost, She Declares”, *Argus* article dated 20 January 1944 in Private Records of Joyce A Thomson, AWM PR00246.

<sup>101</sup> *Diary of Diana* c. 1942, Cinesound, AWM F01355.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Ruth Ford, “Lesbians and Loose Women: Female Sexuality and the Women’s Services during World War II,” in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Marilyn Lake and Joy Damousi (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 91.

duties.<sup>104</sup> This was typical of the tactics used to improve opinions of the WAAAF – to remind the public that, despite their work, they would remain womanly at their core.

The extent to which these tactics worked is not known, however many WAAAFs recognised a shift in public opinion towards the end of the war. Some believed that the Australian public required some time to acclimatise to uniformed women.<sup>105</sup> By the end of the war people realised that “women [could] do all these jobs,” and found that “they couldn’t run the services without women.”<sup>106</sup> Over 27,000 women served in the WAAAF during the Second World War, making it the largest women’s auxiliary service in Australia. This contribution alone allowed nearly 28,000 men to be trained via EATS, a figure that may have been significantly less had these women had not offered up their services. Moreover, the WAAAFs set an important precedent for the inclusion of women in the Australian defence force. Lauded by the Department of Defence in 2021 as the first military organisation that “focused on skills other than tending to the sick or injured”, the WAAAF paved the way for the establishment of women’s auxiliary services in the Navy and Army.<sup>107</sup> Post-war reviews by government and military officials regarded the WAAAF as the service with the “highest morale of all”, as WAAAFs did not exhibit a “go slow mentality”.<sup>108</sup> The Air Board determined that women were “unquestionably better than men at certain duties” and that the WAAAF played an integral role in the endurance of the Air Force’s capabilities.<sup>109</sup> In the post-war period, the credibility of the WAAAF inspired the formation of a permanent Women’s Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) in 1950. More than 2,000 women had applied to join the WRAAF by October 1950, a feat that can be attributed to the significant work of the WAAAF.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Massey-Higgins, *They Speed the Eagles*, 11.

<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Cameron (Betty), Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Isabel Fox and Chris Houghton (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 20 May 2003, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/167>.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Magorian, “Role of women in Air Force celebrated,” <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2021-11-01/role-women-air-force-celebrated>.

<sup>108</sup> Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1984), 239.

<sup>109</sup> Alan Stephens, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence Vol. 2, The Royal Australian Air Force* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 203.

<sup>110</sup> Magorian, “Role of women in Air Force celebrated,” <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2021-11-01/role-women-air-force-celebrated>.

## Post-war bonds

Like many auxiliary services, the WAAAF remained a tight-knit group following its disbandment. Bronwyn Lowe found that it was perhaps the “low repute” in which WAAAFs were held that “hardened their sense of collective identity”.<sup>111</sup> While many WAAAFs felt their stories significant enough to be heard and recorded, their testimonies were somewhat “self-deprecating”, indicating their desire not to appear unique or distinct from their peers.<sup>112</sup> Rather, their recollections prioritise the WAAAF as a collective instead of them as individuals, highlighting their sense of camaraderie as a service. This collective identity survived throughout the post-war period. An overwhelming amount of WAAAFs positively recalled their service in the auxiliary during the Second World War. Their collective memory of the WAAAF is characterised by the themes of independence, mateship and improving gender equality. Their time in the WAAAF remained the most fulfilling and daring of their lives despite the adversity they faced. The lessons learnt from discipline to friendship had a “great deal of influence” on the remainder of many WAAAFs’ lives.<sup>113</sup> From the interviews collected by Joyce Thomson to unpublished post-war memoirs, WAAAFs centralised their enjoyment of and gratitude for their opportunity to serve in the Australian war effort. Many often expressed the guilt, disappointment and regret they would have felt if they had not offered their assistance during reunion and anniversary events.<sup>114</sup> Essie Over wrote that “there was a comradeship engendered and nourished unknowingly in those years of service which could not have been born or experienced in any other time”.<sup>115</sup>

Director Stevenson, eager to cement the WAAAFs in our understanding of the Australian war experience, wrote that our record of the Second World War would be incomplete without our airwomen.<sup>116</sup> While their stories may not be ones of intense glory or combat bravery, they are nonetheless those that form our national character.<sup>117</sup> Although it was a “strange old life”, as

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<sup>111</sup> Lowe, “Reflections on Gender and Memory,” 170.

<sup>112</sup> Lowe, “Reflections on Gender and Memory,” 159.

<sup>113</sup> Beryl Manion, *My Life in the WAAAF 1942-1945* (Balwyn, Vic: Self-Published, 1992), 77.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Cameron (Betty), Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force, interviewed by Isabel Fox and Chris Houghton (Australians at War Film Archive UNSW Canberra), 20 May 2003, <https://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/167>.

<sup>115</sup> Essie Over, *Ad Astra and all that WAAAF* (Kalamunda, WA: Literary Mouse Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>116</sup> Royal Australian Air Force and Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force, *They wrote it themselves: a book of the W.A.A.A.F.*, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Royal Australian Air Force and Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force, *They wrote it themselves: a book of the W.A.A.A.F.*, 7.

the first women to enter the RAAF and perform roles that were previously the prerogative of men, none forgot their service years, even the “fun and tears”.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> “How can it be?” poem by Alma Campbell in Private Records of Margaret Hutchison, AWM PR01795.

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