Were they feminine? An AWAS in uniform. ca.1944.
Source: Author’s personal collection
THE AWAS
A social history of the Australian Women’s Army Service
during the Second World War

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A thesis in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts Honours

History Department - Faculty of Arts
Central Queensland University
Rockhampton

1996
DECLARATION

I declare that all material used in this thesis has not previously been submitted for any other degree and that the main text of the thesis is an original work. Also, I declare that to the best of my knowledge, all sources used have been acknowledged.

July, 1996
ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the argument that enlistment of women in the Australian Women's Army Service during the Second World War impacted significantly on the social structure of the 1940s. It focuses on the question whether enlistment resulted in liberation for women from the restrictions of the social mores of the period, or whether it was merely an exchange of home discipline for military regimentation. By considering their work in units such as artillery batteries, it demonstrates that in the performance of the work allotted to them, members of the Australian Women’s Army Service played an important role in paving the way for acceptance of women into new and stimulating areas of employment which were not available to them pre-war.

The dissertation points to misconceptions based on an historicist perspective adopted by some modern feminist historians which misinterprets the social behaviour of servicewomen. It considers these misconceptions also arise from their failure to take Army organisation and control, and the range of circumstances in which women serving in the defence forces lived and worked, into account. Because their approach has perpetuated the view of servicewomen as immoral and unfeminine this work adopts a revisionist approach to the question of the immorality of servicewomen as presented by these recent historians.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to sincerely thank Dr Denis Cryle who as supervisor of this dissertation has given me his unfailing support and provided constructive criticism which has been of inestimable value.

I also wish to thank Dr Richard White for his kind permission to cite from his Paper presented to the Australian War Memorial Conference 11-15 February, 1985:

“Postmortems: the impact of war on Australian society”

Dr. White’s advice and information on further areas for research are also gratefully acknowledged.

My thanks too go to Dr Jeffrey Grey who arranged access for me to theses concerning ex-service women held by the History Department of the Australian Defence Forces Academy, Canberra and for making facilities available to me for their perusal.

A very special expression of thanks must go to Mrs. Tess Goodstate who with her husband Charles Goodstate welcomed me as a guest in their home where they entertained a group of eleven ex-AWAS from the Sydney area to enable me to conduct a group interview with them. My sincere thanks also go to Mrs. Tottie Showler who contacted ex-AWAS in Melbourne to facilitate arrangements for the group interview I conducted there.

I also wish to express my thanks to all the ex-members of the AWAS who participated in my oral history survey.

The assistance of the CQU library staff both in Rockhampton and Gladstone is also gratefully acknowledged. As too is the assistance of the library staffs of the University of Queensland, John Oxley Library, Victorian State Library, the ADFA, and the staffs of the Melbourne Branch of the Australian Archives and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
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ABBREVIATIONS

AA  Australian Archives
AACC  Army Ambulance Car Company
AAG(WS)  Assistant Adjutant General (Women's Services)
AAMC  Australian Army Medical Corps
AANS  Australian Army Nursing Corps
AASL  Australian Army Services
Ack Ack  Anti Aircraft
A/c  Aircraft
ADFA  Australian Defence Forces Academy
AIF  Australian Imperial Forces
AMF  Australian Military Forces
AMR&O  Australian Military Rules and Orders
AMWAS  Australian Medical Women's Army Service
AWAS  Australian Women's Army Service
AWL  Absent Without Leave
AWLA  Australian Women's Land Army
AWM  Australian War Memorial
AWS  Army Women's Services
BOR  Battery Operations Room
Bty  Battery
CO  Commanding Officer
CWAC  Canadian Women's Army Corps
DP  Defence Preparedness
ETA  Estimated Time of Arrival
ETD  Estimated Time of Departure
GROs  General Routine Orders
HQ  Headquarters
JOL  John Oxley Library
LHQ  Land Headquarters
L of C  Lines of Communication
MP  Military Police
NSW  New South Wales
NCOs  Non-commissioned Officers
NT  Northern Territory
Ops  Operations
Ors  Other Ranks
OTU  Operations Training Unit
RAA  Royal Australian Artillery
RAAF  Royal Australian Air Force
Rec.Hut  Recreation Hut
SLC  Searchlight Control
SP  Supervisory Personnel
TOET  Tests of Elementary Training
VAD  Voluntary Aid Detachment
### Abbreviations (Cont’d)

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<tr>
<td>VSL</td>
<td>Victorian State Library</td>
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<td>WA</td>
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<td>WAAAF</td>
<td>Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force</td>
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<td>WANS</td>
<td>Women’s Australian National Service</td>
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<td>Women’s Employment Board</td>
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### RANKS

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Introduction

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

The Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), was founded in 1941 to augment the Armed Forces and release men from defence positions for overseas war service during World War Two. This dissertation will argue that enlistment of women in the AWAS during the 1939-1945 conflict impacted on the social structure of the time and accelerated change in the status of women within Australian society.

Despite the fact that a large body of writing exists concerning the Second World War very little recognition has been given to the role of women in the armed forces. Yet the enlistment of women in the defence forces, in other than a nursing capacity, and on such a large scale, was a turning point in the history of Australian women. This phenomenon has been all but ignored by historians. The limited literature, inclusive of general and specific histories which is concerned with, or makes reference to, the AWAS is both fragmented and repetitive. Attempts to historically analyse the roles of women in the forces have mainly come from a feminist perspective. This has shown itself in some cases to be ill-informed and historicist in the sense that it has been considered from the social perspectives of the 1980s and 1990s. As commented by Jeffrey Grey

social history has been very much in the fashion in academic

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circles for several decades now [but] very little of it has spilled over into writing on the military.

Popular histories such as *You'll be sorry* by Ann Howard, *Australian Women at war* by Patsy Adam-Smith and *Women in Khaki* by Lorna Oliff have played a role in filling this gap. While documentation and bibliographic details in popular histories do not reach academic standards, this literature is a valuable resource as it is descriptive of the social conditions under which AWAS lived and worked during the 1940's. It also provides an insight into women’s perceptions of the meanings of the social mores of the time. Eileen Tucker’s book *We answered the call: AWAS of Western Australia* supports the oral history used in this work on the question of the cultural shock experienced by AWAS when they were first introduced to Army life.

A chapter by Saunders and Bolton “Girdled for war: Women’s mobilisation in World War Two” points to the disparity between the volume of historiography which exists concerning men’s role in wartime and that of women. This inequality is also addressed by Carmel Shute in Windschuttle, *Women, Class and history*. She demonstrates the progression of women’s wartime activities from the prescribed women’s role of knitting and “keeping the home fires burning” to working in occupations vital to the war effort. Shute also discusses women’s patriotism and the expression of their desire to participate in

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the defence of their country by joining para-military forces and later by enlistment in the armed forces⁶. The reasons for Australian women's enlistment in the services was not restricted to patriotism and this is addressed in Chapter One of this work.

Discussion concerning AWAS officers is taken up in popular history by Lorna Oliff and Patsy Adam-Smith. Adam-Smith gives a good profile of Lt. Col. Sybil Irving and discusses attitudes of other AWAS officers⁷ whereas Oliff takes a celebratory approach⁸. A more down to earth look at the role of officers surfaces in the oral history survey. AWAS officers often performed duties which included the administration of Army discipline. This relates to the question of regimentation, which was an important part of Army organisation, and it too is considered in Chapter One of this dissertation. The Chapter also demonstrates that regimentation was a key factor in all aspects of the life of AWAS during the period of their enlistment. This was made evident in documentary sources located at the Australian Archives and the Australian War Museum⁹.

Arising from the question of regimentation is the degree to which this induced a dependency on the state by servicewomen. This matter has been explored by Darian-Smith. She maintains that regimentation undermined women's

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⁶ Women's mobilisations are also the topic of a journal article by Helen Taylor. Taylor's article is concerned with ways in which woman-power was used in Queensland. "Total was is woman's war... All can serve: War mobilisation - a matter of geography" in *Queensland Geography Journal*, Vol.3, 4th series, 1988, pp.71-88.
⁹ AA,MP70, File No.139/1/2568; AA,MP508/1, File No.339/701/275. AWM, 709/34/2, GRO 169, 88/1/1, 4.2, AWM, 88/1/1, 10, AWM, 88/1/1, 18.
independence and encouraged a general sense of helplessness. However in an oral history interview the interviewees endorsed the opinion of one ex-AWAS who stated that servicewomen became independent adults during their time in the Forces. This demonstrates the historicist nature of some conclusions reached by recent historians which this dissertation maintains results in misconceptions.

This historicist viewpoint is apparent to a much greater degree in the introduction and the chapter by Ford in Gender and War edited by Damousi and Lake. Much of the argument in this book is valid, but on the issues of morality and femininity, discussion appears to be based on the malicious gossip about service-women which existed during the Second World War. Most Australian historians seem to infer that immorality consistent with these rumours was unique to Australia but as pointed out by Thomson the same rumours were prevalent in Britain and the United States of America while Forstell refers in her doctoral thesis to the circulation of the same insubstantial stories in Canada. Consideration of these issues by Australian historians is also discussed from the point of view of the 1990s, and in terms which were unknown in the 1940s. These aspects of the social history of the AWAS are considered in Chapters Two and Three. Replies of respondents to the written

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questionnaire and views of interviewees in the oral history survey conducted for this dissertation contrast markedly with the views of academic historians.

Morality is also the subject of a journal article by Gail Reekie. This article voices the concern of women in Perth about women both within and outside of the armed forces\textsuperscript{14}. Concern arose when there was an apparent lack of the implementation of the accepted moral codes of the time. The article highlights the ideological inconsistencies of wartime, when women were called on to accept new responsibilities under the pressures and sense of urgency created by the conditions of total war, and yet were still expected to abide by pre-war social codes. Also pertinent to the issue of morality and the way war altered social behaviour is the analysis of wartime memories and culture written by Darian-Smith. She draws attention to the perception of increased social, economic, and sexual freedom during this period in Australia's history as opposed to extensive and comprehensive state controls over all aspects of life\textsuperscript{15}.

The condemnation of servicewomen on the grounds of promiscuous behaviour in accordance with the social codes of the time, has assumed an undue importance in the historiography. This emphasis is quite out of proportion to the significance of their role during a time of national emergency. The issue has been raised by most academic historians who have referred to the role of servicewomen in wartime, while quite often the value of their service at the time and its consequences for women in later decades of the twentieth century have been ignored. However, Joyce Thomson considers assumptions of the immoral behaviour of servicewomen from another angle. She looks at the evidence

\textsuperscript{15} Darian-Smith, K., op. cit. p.
available on pregnancy rates for both AWAS and WAAAF and concludes that a
definitive statement cannot be made on the data available. However the
conclusions arrived at in Chapter Two of this dissertation based on the available
evidence do not indicate widespread promiscuity among servicewomen. One
exception to acceptance of the wartime myth of Australian women's low
morality is to be found in a journal article by Connors and Taylor in which these
historians point to oral evidence which shows that Australian women were
committed to the social mores of the time. Chapter Two of this dissertation
examines the myth and the reality of the morality of members of the AWAS from
the perspective of both the secondary sources and primary source documents and
oral evidence.

Chapter Three will go on to address questions raised by academic historians
regarding femininity and lesbianism among servicewomen. Finch looks at
consumerism in gender relationships and while much of her argument is valid
she does not take into account that the wants of women in the services were
minimal and they had little need for consumer products. Lake too does not take
this into account. Lake asserts that advertisements for cosmetics reaffirmed
gender difference despite the fact that women were doing men's work. She also
affirms that advertisements were designed so as to make it appear that the use of
advertised products would make women sexually attractive.

17 Connors, L., & Taylor, H., "The testing of the family and gender mythology of World War
18 Finch, L., "Consuming passions: Romance and consumerism during World War II" in
Damousi, J., & Lake, M., Eds., Gender and war, Melbourne, Press Syndicate of the
19 Lake, M., "Female desires: the meaning of World War II" in Australian Historical Studies,
Vol.24, No.95, October 1990. Republished in Damousi, J. & Lake, M., Gender & war, op.
cit.
Joan Davis approaches the question of the femininity of AWAS by reviewing articles in the Army issue journal *Salt*[^21]. It is interesting to note that Davis comments that the femininity of the AWAS was a "current civilian controversy" while a respondent to the questionnaire for this dissertation commented, "I suspect femininity was a journalistic construct". It was obvious throughout the oral history survey that views expressed about the femininity of AWAS contrasted sharply with the views of modern historians.

Ford's chapter in *Gender and war* in which she expresses her views on the prevalence of lesbianism among servicewomen is both speculative and lacking in substantial evidence[^22]. Chapter Three of this work produces specific oral evidence in contradiction of Ford's assertions that lesbianism was widespread. It also points to weaknesses in her arguments and in the insufficiency of her evidence.

It has been argued that post-war there was a strong affirmation of the feminine image[^23]. The fact is that women in the services in the 1940s never lost their femininity. Those women surveyed strongly denied that they had adopted masculine traits during their time of service in the Army. The greatest majority of all AWAS opted for the role of wife and mother after the war. However as discussed in the oral survey this was not seen as returning to a male defined role. The main feature affecting their decision was a certain amount of war weariness and the desire to "get back to normal". After their families reached adulthood

the self-confidence and wider interests many women had achieved as a result of their wartime experiences in the AWAS induced many to rejoin the workforce. This leads to the final chapter of the dissertation which is concerned with ways in which AWAS crossed the line of demarcation between what, prior to World War Two, were defined as women's roles and men's roles in Australian society.

This Chapter looks at the differences between conditions of employment of women in industry and the work of the AWAS in the military forces. The conditions of work in the Australian Women's Land Army as reported by Beverage24 is also briefly discussed and compared with that of the AWAS. Oral history is used extensively in this chapter and use is made of popular history. The final chapter of Noel Hill's book concerning the operation of searchlight batteries by AWAS provides information authenticated by the oral history of the work of AWAS of the searchlight station at Fuller's Bridge, NSW25. Other primary sources such as typescripts compiled by ex-members of the AWAS26 were also used.

Although emphasis has been placed on the various types of work undertaken by AWAS, and the conditions under which it was performed, Chapter Four points out that this did not mean that servicewomen were consequently placed on an equal footing with men. As Richard White has demonstrated in his chapter in War and Australian society in McKernan and Browne, women were relegated

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26 Goodenough, T., Undated transcript, Copy in author's private collection.
Patterson, J., An ambulance driver's war, Copy in author's private collection.
to supportive roles and this made certain that male perceptions of their own superiority in the armed forces was vindicated\(^{27}\).

To complement the secondary source material wide use is made of primary sources such as records held at the Australian Archives and Australian War Memorial. These and other documentary sources are used in conjunction with oral history interviews with ex-servicewomen who served in Anti Aircraft Searchlight Batteries and on Anti Aircraft Gun Sites. Use is also made of the responses to a written questionnaire\(^{28}\) completed by those interviewed and other women who served in these RAA units. It has been found necessary in this dissertation to revise parts of the secondary source material and both documentary and oral evidence have been used for this purpose.

The decision to use oral history was made as it is believed that the historiography does not altogether impartially represent the conditions which existed for women serving in the AWAS during the Second World War. It was not possible to interview large numbers of ex-servicewomen so it was decided to request women to come forward who were prepared to complete a written questionnaire. One group of women then volunteered to take part in a group interview in Melbourne and others participated in another group interview in Sydney. In addition three other women took part in single person interviews. A questionnaire was used because it was deemed necessary to get answers to specific questions rather than memories of random events. It was found that the documentary evidence supported the oral history. As a result the assertions made in this work are based on primary source material.


\(^{28}\) See Appendix B.
Many of the women who wore uniform during the Second World War still take pride in the part they played in the war effort and the friendships they formed then are still an important part of their lives. It has been suggested by L.L. Robson that an extensive analysis of the roles of all women in the armed forces is needed\textsuperscript{29}. Joyce Thomson's book *The WAAF in wartime Australia* has fulfilled this need as far as the WAAAF is concerned. This dissertation only goes part of the way in fulfilling the same need in regard to the AWAS.

\textsuperscript{29} Robson, L.L., "Behold a pale horse: Australian war studies" in *Australian Historical Studies, Vol.23, No.90, April 1988. pp.115-126.*
Chapter 1

ENLISTMENT: LIBERATION OR REGIMENTATION

During the latter part of 1941 when it was decided by the Australian Government to form the Australian Women's Army Service Japanese troops were rapidly advancing Southwards. By the time the first AWAS were being sent to Recruit Training Camps in January 1942 the Japanese had invaded Sumatra, Ambon, and Rabaul\(^1\). In February, Singapore fell, Darwin was bombed, Australian nurses were massacred on Banka Island and Australian soldiers had been made Prisoners of War by the Japanese\(^2\). The continuing Japanese advance southwards engendered a very real fear that Australia would also be invaded. These events without doubt accounted for the patriotic motivation which attracted the enlistment of women into the AWAS and other women's defence services.

This dissertation does not question the patriotism which motivated women's enlistment. However it will argue, as shown by the oral history survey undertaken for this dissertation, that patriotism was not the only reason women enlisted. It will also argue, that contrary to the approach of popular history, care should be taken in making generalisations of the social conditions under which the AWAS functioned. Notwithstanding basic Army organisation, different conditions prevailed in the different camps to which they were posted.

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, popular history about the AWAS, by such authors as Patsy Adam-Smith, Ann Howard and others

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\(^2\) Ibid.
published between 1981 and 1990, is descriptive of the social conditions under which they lived and worked during World War Two. A celebratory, non-academic approach has been used which tells the story of "how it was" as seen by ex-members of the AWAS, and which, in some instances, emphasises the role of AWAS officers. Chapter Four of this dissertation which will discuss the work of the AWAS will take up and develop a number of the issues raised.

Unlike the uncritical approach used in the positioning of popular histories it is the purpose of this chapter to view the AWAS from the perspective of army organisation. In addressing their role in Australian wartime society discussion will focus on whether enlistment resulted in liberation or regimentation. Other questions which will be addressed are state control and welfare provisions made by the Army authorities.

Recruits came from a variety of social backgrounds and this was reflected in the author's oral history subjects. Nearly all said patriotism and the desire to help in the war effort was their reason for enlistment. Many also saw enlistment as an opportunity for excitement and adventure; the chance to do something different which would provide new experiences. Some also enlisted for personal reasons, a family military tradition, or because they did not wish to be forced by the Manpower to work in uncongenial employment.

Others said they enlisted because they disliked their jobs or couldn't find work. Prior to the 1939-1945 War employment opportunities were limited. The

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3 One oral history respondent stated the deaths of her parents and her brother missing in Singapore as her reason for enlisting.

oral history survey showed that approximately 1/3 of the sample of forty women obtained office work, (clerical, typing, shorthand) while approximately 1/7 got jobs in the retail trade. Most of the remainder gained work in the industrial, domestic, farming, and dressmaking areas of employment. At the outbreak of war in 1939 there were still many people unemployed and full employment did not take place until after Japan entered the war. Unbelievably by September 1942 there was a shortage of female labour. Single and married women without children who were aged between 16 and 34 and who were not gainfully employed were called up by the manpower officials to work in essential industries. When asked why she enlisted in the AWAS, Jean said she had been working in an unprotected job and it was a case of joining up or being called up by the Manpower:

A friend and I worked in the same store and we thought we'd join the Land Army. Then one day my friend turned up in the AWAS uniform and she looked very smart and told me about it and so I thought this is it.

Patriotism was evident as early as 1939. The majority of Australian women were of British stock and loyalty not only to Australia but also to the British Crown was significant in their wish to play a role in the defence of their country and the British Empire. They were patriotic and formed units of the various para-military groups in which they practiced skills which they believed would prove useful if and when the women's defence forces came into being. Members purchased their own uniforms and met incidental expenses associated

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5 Appendix B: Oral history questionnaire.
7 Ibid.
8 Interview 10 July 1995.
with membership\textsuperscript{10}. Opinions of ex-members of the Women's Australian National Services, (WANS) one of the largest para-military organisations in New South Wales (NSW) varied as to the extent of the usefulness of groups of this kind\textsuperscript{11}.

One informant came from a NSW country town. In retrospect she saw her experience in the WANS as mostly playing at war games as very old-fashioned methods of training were used. This contrasted with AWAS initial training which stipulated that the only acceptable standard was 100\% efficiency\textsuperscript{12}. Elsewhere ex-members felt they had received a good grounding for later service in the AWAS\textsuperscript{13}. This demonstrates a lack of co-ordination in training procedures. Certainly some training undertaken in para-military units was useful. As stated by Shute, the Women’s Air Training Corps formed the basis of the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) while “signallers from the Women’s Emergency Signalling Corps initially comprised the entire enrolment of the Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service\textsuperscript{14}.

War Cabinet approved the formation of the AWAS on 13 August, 1941. C.H. Jess, was appointed Chairman of the Manpower Committee formed early in 1942 to direct the use of Australia’s manpower in the best national interest and to classify non-essential industries. He directed that the Women’s Voluntary National Register (WVNR) would be used as the means through which recruitment for the Australian Women’s Army Service would take place\textsuperscript{15}. The

\textsuperscript{11} Interview, 10 July 1995.
\textsuperscript{12} DP4 AWS, Initial Training Syllabus, AWM54, 88/1/1 [38], (AWM).
\textsuperscript{13} Interview, 10 July 1995.
\textsuperscript{14} Shute, C., op. cit., p.368.
\textsuperscript{15} WVNR Circular No.6/1941, Sybil Irving Papers, Box 1, (VSL Melbourne).
Register was an official record compiled in February 1939 of the names of women prepared to work in a voluntary capacity in the eventuality of war.  

C.H. Jess’s directive stated that subject to regulations a woman could be enrolled in the AWAS if she was a British subject of substantially European origin or descent, and was not less than 21 years of age nor more than 45 years of age. Professional, technical or other qualifications approved by the Military Board were also a requirement. The Military Board also prescribed a standard of physical fitness which had to be met and all recruits had to be certified by a clergyman, a municipal councillor, a Justice of the Peace or an Officer of the Australian Military Forces to be of a good moral character. Later the minimum age was reduced to 18 years.  

It was decided that uniforms, clothing and equipment would be supplied to all recruits with a small cash allowance for the purchase of items not provided. Other matters which required deliberation were rates of pay, medical and dental treatment, and sick and recreational leave.  

Enlistment was for the duration of “The Time of War” and although members of other Army Women’s Services (AWS) the AAMC, AANS, and AMWAS were eligible to volunteer for overseas service, members of the AWAS were not. In 1943 Prime Minister Curtin was responsible for the introduction of a Bill in parliament by which

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17. WVNR Circular, No. 6/1941, op. cit.  
19. Ibid.  
20. AWAS were enlisted as members of the AMF which according to the 1903 Defence Act as cited by Main in *Conscription*, Stanmore, Cassell Aust. Ltd., p. 7, "restricted the national, call-up to time of war and stipulated that only volunteers might be required to give military
The Government be authorised to add to the Defence Act, in the
definition of the Commonwealth which at present defines the territories
to which this Act extends, the following words: "and such other
territories in the South West Pacific area as the Governor-General
proclaims as being territory associated with the defence of Australia"²¹.

This enabled a contingent of AWAS to be posted to Lae, in New Guinea,
towards the end of the war²².

In October 1941 Sybil Irving was appointed Controller, Australian Women’s
Army Service with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In August 1941 in response
to a telephone request from General Standke, Lady Wakehurst wife of the
Governor General of NSW, wrote to the General recommending four women
whom she thought might be suitable officers in the "new women’s auxiliary
army"²³. All four women had been in the WANS for over a year. Lt. Col. Irving
made the initial selection of officers after interviews with the women
recommended by Lady Wakehurst and others nominated by the WVNR and the
WANS²⁴. Later the practice of submitting applications to appear before Officer
Pre-Selection Boards was instituted for members of the AWAS seeking to obtain
officer rank²⁵. Board members were supplied with documentation, including a
psychology report, and the candidate’s civil and military qualifications. During
the interview each candidate discussed her qualifications, interests and hobbies
with the board members²⁶.

²¹ Inglis, K.S., "Conscription in peace and war, 1911-1945" in Forward, R. & Reece, B.
Conscription in Australia, St. Lucia, Queensland University Press, 1968, pp.55-56.
²² Letter, Blamey to Ford, cited in Beveridge, J., Women making history, Chevron Island,
²³ Letter, Lady Wakehurst to Gen. Standke, dated 28 August 1941, MP508/1, File
No.339/701/61 (AA.Melbourne).
²⁴ Irving, Sybil, Statement dated 22 October 1941, MP508/1, File No. 339/701/61 (AA
Melbourne).
²⁵ Unsigned document, AWM54 ,88/1/13, [4.1], (AWM).
²⁶ Ibid.
The same conservative hierarchy of rank existed in the AWAS as in the men’s ranks. Each rank was a step in the composition of the organisational structure of the Army. Both male and female officers were believed to be entitled to deference. Army protocol demanded that they should be saluted at all times by ORs, NCOs and officers of lower rank. Refusal to do so was considered disobedience to a lawful command. According to an ex-AWAS officer, officers did not expect to be popular. Jess’s comment that “it was the respect you paid to their rank” demonstrates a general acceptance of their superior position in the army hierarchy. Rules and regulations relating to the Army structure of authority were an important facet of discipline. It probably also accounts for the “I’m never going to do what I’m told again” reaction of some AWAS on demobilisation.

Recruiting took the form of advertisements in the media, and large posters on railway stations. Leaflets setting out rates of pay and conditions under which deferred pay would be made were readily available. These leaflets showed groupings of occupations on which rates of pay were based, allowance of food coupons, repatriation benefits, and opportunities for promotion available to members of the AWAS. They also stated that The Australian Women’s Army Service was formed in October 1941 to provide woman power for the Australian Military Forces so that fit men might be released for service in forward areas.

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27 Interview conducted by the author with Molly Peat at Gladstone, Queensland, on 22 September 1995. Hereafter referred to as Interview held on 22 September 1995.  
29 Interview conducted with Mavis Ward at Miriam Vale, Qld, on 1 June 1995. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 1 June 1995.  
30 Interview 26 June 1995.  
31 Recruiting Leaflet for enlistment in AWAS and AMWA5 AWM54, 88/1/1, [27] (AWM).
Application forms for enlistment in the AWAS or the AMWAS accompanied the leaflets\textsuperscript{32}.

Admittance of women into the Army called for a review of military law and regulations in the matter of discipline. Consideration had to be given to the questions of discharge of members of the AWAS, who could dispose of charges against them and under what circumstances, what punishments could be inflicted and by whom, and who would guard female prisoners. One important decision was that members of the AWAS may not be liable to trial by Court-martial\textsuperscript{33}. From the point of view of the Army organisation it was necessary to establish a workable system of discipline if it was to function as an authoritative command.

The evidence collected from ex-members of the AWAS in interviews and questionnaires for this thesis, points to an acceptance of army discipline by female soldiers during World War Two, as a continuation of the discipline to which they were subject in the home prior to enlistment\textsuperscript{34}. In one interview Molly, an ex-AWAS lieutenant, asserted that she had only ever put one girl on a charge sheet and that was under strong provocation\textsuperscript{35}. The opinion of an unranked ex-AWAS was that, especially among the early recruits to the AWAS, the approach to discipline was tentative rather than authoritative\textsuperscript{36}. Cpt. Mona Hornsby was OIC of Rookie schools in Perth. Patsy Adam-Smith asserts that this officer did not believe in Orderly Rooms\textsuperscript{37}.

\begin{quote}
Any girl in strife I brought her in and had a good talk to her and told her what a spot she was putting me in. Very few girls didn't respond
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Defence Act 1903-1941, Military Forces (Women's Services) Regulations, Part1., Draft, MP70, File No.139/1/2568, (AAMelbourne).
\textsuperscript{34} See questions 15,16 & 17 Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview 22 September 1995.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview 10 July 1995.
\textsuperscript{37} Adam-Smith, P. \textit{Australian women at war}, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984, p.262.
to a good talking to.  

Whatever their reasons for enlisting many new recruits received a culture shock on their first day in camp. Item seven of the syllabus for initial training of all AWAS and AMWAS stated that the conditions which the woman has to face on joining a unit are entirely new to her, and quite different from any that she has experienced in civilian life.  

This was true not only from a military point of view as for many girls the lack of privacy was a hurdle which it took time to overcome.  

Conditions varied from camp to camp. Recruits in Perth did their basic training at the Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) ground. They were handed a hessian bag and pointed in the direction of a pile of hay. Known as palliasses these were often the only mattresses AWAS were to know until the end of the war. In Perth they were placed on the seats of the grandstand where the girls slept under the stars “accompanied by the singing, stinging, mosquitoes”. According to this account in Tucker’s We answered the call many asked “is this why we joined the Army?” In stark contrast the rookie intake of which Nance Kingston was a member was quartered at Glamorgan, a boy’s school in Toorak Victoria, and a Toorak mansion taken over by the Army. They slept in...magnificent rooms where crystal chandeliers glittered down on palliasses, iron cots and chattering girls.

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38 Hornsby, M., cited in Adam-Smith, P., Ibid.  
39 Syllabus for initial training of all AWAS and AMWAS, AWM54, 88/1/1, [38]; (AWM), p.4.  
40 Ibid.  
41 Tucker, E., We answered the call: AWAS of Western Australia, Cloverdale, E.Tucker Publisher, 1991, p.18.  
42 Ibid.  
Conditions in camps varied according to the resources the Army had available. In most camps each girl had an allotted space in huts which housed up to 20 girls. For the most part beds were wire stretchers and the mattress was a straw palliase. Girls who were able to get a bed in the corner counted themselves fortunate. All clothing and equipment had to be stored in kitbags and laid out for inspection on demand and everything on issue had to be accounted for. For many girls the lack of privacy came as a shock.

Not only was there no privacy in the huts but in many camps the showers were open. As one lady put it, “I was very shocked. I wasn’t used to showering with other people.” Even the medical required for enlistment was devoid of privacy. In the 1930s and 1940s many girls were very shy and found it very difficult to adjust to these conditions. To some extent parental opposition, arising from Victorian attitudes and charges of immorality as will be discussed in Chapter Two, may have had their origin in this lack of privacy. Some took it in their stride but for the majority acceptance took some time. As pointed out by Tucker, Army rules which stated that recruits “must be on parade on time did not allow for ingrained modesty.”

Punctuality was an Army requirement which was instilled into each new recruit. It was an integral part of the initial training, normally of about three weeks duration, the object of which was to give recruits a firm basic training in military procedures. It was regarded as essential that every woman who replaced a man should be just as

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44 Interview 10 July 1995.
45 Interview 1 June 1995.
46 Interview conducted by Wing, J., with Goodstate, T., for Keith Murdoch Sound Archives, 10 January 1990, (AWM).
47 This was the consensus of opinion of all interviewees and respondents to questionnaires.
capable as he is of carrying out the duty to which she has been posted."

Military drill was used to "inculcate the habit of instinctive and automatic obedience to the word of command".

Being on time and obedience to orders were not only the basic requirements of military training but were also aimed at stimulating the new recruit's pride in herself and her unit. Obeying orders was a shared experience which challenged pre-existing social class divisions among recruits and created group relationships. This resulted in an esprit de corps which together with gender and age determined the experience of war for members of the AWAS.

General Routine Orders (GROs) covered the administration and control of AWAS personnel. They dealt with such administrative procedures as the allotment of AWAS to War Establishments (WEs), appointment of administrative officers to units in which both male and female personnel were posted, maintenance of discipline, morale, AWAS quarters, replacement of unserviceable clothing, amenities, health and hygiene, sick parades, messing, dress and deportment, censorship of letters, education, general well-being and guidance.

Members of the AWAS were accepted fully as members of the Corps of the Australian Military Forces (AMF) to which they were posted and consequently

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49 DP4 AWS, op. cit.
50 Ibid.
52 GRO 169, Administration and control of Personnel of AWAS, Appendix 9, AWM54, 88/1/1, [4.2], pp.1-2, (AWM).
Army discipline was the same as it was for the men\textsuperscript{53}. As stated by the Assistant Adjutant General (Women's Services) (AAG(WS)):

> Officers and members of the Women's Services as constituted by the Regulations are subject to Military Law and to the provisions (other than those applying in terms to males only) of the Defence Act, AMR&O, the Army Act and the Rules of Procedure\textsuperscript{54}.

Despite being accepted and subject to the same discipline as their male counterparts AWAS were nevertheless assigned inferior status by the Army organisation. By confining the role of AWAS to one of support, thus relieving men for service in the front line, a restraint was placed on any extension of women's liberation put into place by their acceptance in the armed forces. Popular history fails to consider the work of AWAS from this perspective. In the main it reflects on individual experiences and tells a story rather than analyses events.

Regimentation of military life for women in the 1940s induced a dependency on the state\textsuperscript{55} in as much as the Army instituted control of their time and activities. As stated by Darian-Smith:

> If wartime displaced the behavioural patterns attributed to particular age groups, it also emphasised tensions between the perception of wartime as a period of increased social, economic and sexual freedom and the introduction of extensive and comprehensive control over all aspects of life, including work, leisure, travel and information\textsuperscript{56}.

Certainly for women during World War Two there was liberation from pre-war social conventions and as work was readily available, some of it comparatively well paid, many became financially independent. Adversely,

\textsuperscript{53} Wardell, A.W., (Brigadier), "Report on organisation and control of AWAS", AWM54/88/1/1, [4.2] (AWM).

\textsuperscript{54} AAG(WS) History Part IX, p.112 and p.115-116 AWM113, MH 1/214 (AWM).

\textsuperscript{55} Darian-Smith, K., "War stories: Remembering the Australian home front during the Second World War" in Darian-Smith, K., & Hamilton, P., (Eds.), Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.145.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
train travel except on suburban lines was mostly reserved for the transportation of troops and supplies and to obtain one of the few available seats sometimes meant months of waiting. Censorship ensured that access to information was limited regarding all matters related to Australia’s defence.

The same restrictions applied to service women who usually remained in camp day and night except for their one day leave each week. Moreover even on leave they were still expected to behave according to Army regulations. Supervisory personnel (SPs) were responsible to oversee the conduct of AWS in public places, check that uniforms were worn according to regulation, for handling any cases of Absence Without Leave (AWL), to investigate complaints, and for guarding and escorting members under close arrest. Responses by interviewees to questions regarding SPs who were commonly referred to as provosts, showed no animosity towards them. A typical response was:

I had experience with the provosts about four times. I did not like to wear my army hat and I invariably got caught, “Gunner! put your hat on!”

As pointed out by interviewees in NSW, a counter balance to the restraints imposed by strict regimentation was possibly that service in the AWAS also allowed members to develop an independence which was not permitted in the home environment. As stated by Mary:

In a way I think we were freer of a sort of parental discipline. We became independent. We grew up and enjoyed the life...we didn’t have men living with us. We lived on a station and we learned to cope. We had our fights here and there but we didn’t have any ambition to do the wrong thing. I think we just became adults.

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57 AAG(WS) History, Part IX, op. cit.
58 Interview 26 June 1995.
59 Interview 10 July 1995.
At the other end of the spectrum SPs foremost duty was “the welfare and care of the troops of the Women’s Services”\(^6\). They were also involved with visiting AWAS who were in hospital.

The Army set out to minimise offences by making welfare and morale the concern of all officers\(^6\). This was mostly seen to mean physical and, to some extent, spiritual welfare. Social welfare was not a concern as Army organisation and discipline was believed to exclude any problems in this area. It was deemed the duty of all officers to see that the troops were properly fed. Officers visited the mess at each meal time to ask were there any complaints but in practice that was sometimes only a formality. As one ex-AWAS put it:

> It wasn’t much good complaining. We threw the cook out in Rocklea. He was a terrible cook. He was a dirty cook so we told him to get out and we’d do it ourselves. Us girls did it\(^6\).

Boredom was seen as a major cause of discontent and officers were advised to organise and join in sports and voluntary entertainments with the troops\(^6\).

Four voluntary organisations were officially recognised by the Army, The Australian Comforts Fund, The Young Men’s Christian Association (this was later extended to include The Young Women’s Christian Association), The Australian Red Cross and the Salvation Army\(^6\). These organisations were commented on by interviewees at the Sydney interview. Beverly remarked that:

> When we got time off we found that the rec hut was always filled with writing paper and envelopes and things like that and the most wonderful were the Salvation Army. Other religious groups were certainly very dedicated but the Salvation Army women were

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\(^6\) AAG(WS), History, Part IX, op. cit.
\(^6\) Secret correspondence files 1941-1947, CRS B5506/1, File No.82/0/4, (AA Melbourne).
\(^6\) Interview 1 June 1995.
\(^6\) Secret correspondence files, op. cit.
\(^6\) Ibid.
everywhere and helped in the most positive way.\footnote{Interview 10 July 1995.}

Mavis also commented on the Salvation Army:

> We had a ping pong set the Salvo’s gave us. The Salvo’s were very good actually. They would bring round magazines and they’d ask if there was anything you really needed and they didn’t push religion on you. In our rec hut at Rocklea we didn’t have a thing when we first went there. They brought out all sorts of recreational gear for us.\footnote{Interview 1 June 1995.}

Welfare officers were appointed from within the AWS to work among members of the Services who might have problems in relation to their families and home life. They co-operated with YWCA and Salvation Army representatives attached to the Army as welfare workers.\footnote{Army Women's Services document, AWM54/88/2/2, (AWM).} In cases where individual help of a spiritual nature was required and a YWCA or Salvation Army welfare worker was not qualified to assist AWS officers were expected to inform the unit chaplain.\footnote{Spiritual Welfare - Army Women's Services, AWM54, 88/1/1, [22], p.2 (AWM).}

In December 1943 a liaison officer was appointed to work between the three heads of the AWS and the five Chaplains General, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist and Other Denominations to ensure that the policy of consideration of the special needs of service women would be remembered.\footnote{Ibid, p.1.} The duty of the liaison officer was to visit every unit in which women worked and confer with the Commanding Officer (CO), Chaplains and AWS officers on such topics as the role women could play in the religious life of a unit, the formation of study groups, choirs, libraries, religious play readings,
and the making of hangings for huts where accommodation for a service had to be improvised\textsuperscript{70}.

Like everything else in Army life much depended on the conditions and situation of the camps. In large camps it was compulsory to attend church parades every Sunday morning and conscientious objectors were not encouraged. As Mavis commented:

\begin{quote}
We had Catholics, we had Lutherans, we had bits of everything. It didn't worry any of us. We even had one bloke who was a conscientious objector but only for one Sunday. He got kitchen duty peeling spuds. He was at church the next Sunday\textsuperscript{71}.
\end{quote}

Personal experience indicates that AWAS encamped in small groups such as AASL stations rarely, if ever, received a visit from a chaplain and few attended church services.

In her book \textit{You'll be sorry}, Ann Howard states that a book of verses, prayers and devotions designed for the top pocket of the AWAS service dress was published and issued to AWAS\textsuperscript{72}. The result of enquiries made among some ex-AWAS has revealed no knowledge of it. These books were undoubtedly issued to AWAS in certain areas but not in others. Books such as Howard's present a good descriptive overview of life in the AWAS but are not usually specific about the conditions existing in different situations. Popular history has also mostly ignored the issue of the morality of the AWAS.

It seems that contemporary condemnation of AWAS and other service women in the 1940s, on the grounds of what was perceived as promiscuous behaviour, has led some academic historians to focus on this issue. As a result it has

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, p.3.
\textsuperscript{71} Interview 1 June 1995.
assumed an importance quite out of proportion to other changes in social
behaviour occasioned by enlistment of women in the defence forces. It therefore
becomes necessary to examine this issue in some depth.
Chapter 2

IMMORALITY: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to make value judgements on the morality of servicewomen during the Second World War. Rather the intention is to consider the accusations of their immorality which arose during the period of their enlistment in the defence forces and to discuss recently published views of feminist historians. It will be maintained that an understanding of army organisation needs to be taken into consideration before conclusions can be reached. However feminist historians writing on this subject have not only taken an historicist approach to the subject, they have demonstrated little knowledge about military organisation and war

Pre-marital sexual relationships for women were considered to be the height of immorality in the 1940s and ex-nuptial pregnancies were always deemed to be the fault of women. Despite the many rumours of so-called sexual misconduct, military organisation, as demonstrated in Chapters One and Four of this dissertation, allowed little opportunity for promiscuous behaviour by members of the Army Women's Services (AWS). Training programmes and the military preparedness of the Army in wartime accounted for most of the time AWAS spent in camp, leave was limited, and whenever possible mostly spent at home. Moreover in recent interviews ex-members of the AWAS strongly denied the accusations of immorality and widespread promiscuity made against them.

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An obvious lack of understanding of military organisation has resulted in misconceptions by feminist historians in a recent publication\(^2\). The editors of *Gender and war* in asserting that “women adopted masculine dress and lived in communities with other women” use as a reference *Thanks girls and goodbye*: *The story of the Australian Women’s Land Army 1942-1945* edited by Sue Hardisty\(^3\). Ruth Ford, the author of chapter four of this book, includes the Australian Women’s Land Army (AWLA) in her discussion of women in the armed services\(^4\). While the women who served in the AWLA did form a part of the general mobilisation of woman-power during World War Two they were not a part of the armed services and did not come under the jurisdiction of the Australian Army.

In the introduction of their publication Damousi and Lake refer to women as being auxiliary forces to male armies\(^5\). Although the word “auxiliary” was retained in the title of the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF), members of this service together with the AWAS and the Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS), were enlisted “members of the Forces under the Defence Act\(^6\). As such they were required to take the oath of service as set out in Section 37 of the Defence Act\(^7\).

It is also stated in the introduction to *Gender and war*\(^8\) that “in the Australian Army the corps of Armour, Artillery and Infantry remain closed to women”\(^9\).

\(^3\) Ibid, p.5.
\(^5\) Damousi, J., & Lake, M., op. cit., p.4.
\(^6\) War Cabinet Agenda, 349/1942, MP508/1, File No.339/701/275, (AA, Melbourne).
\(^7\) Ibid, Enclosure “B2”.
\(^8\) Damousi, J., & Lake, M., op. cit., p.18.
Certainly AWAS did not serve in the Infantry but as it will be demonstrated in Chapter Four of this dissertation they certainly did serve in Artillery Batteries. The Army Education journal *Salt* also mentions that AWAS worked on tanks in vehicle maintenance sections\(^\text{10}\).

In Chapter Four it is also shown that social conditions were governed to some extent by the demands of the work of the AWAS in the different units to which they were posted, and which varied from place to place and unit to unit, and involved military regimentation. This factor has not been taken into account by the editors of *Gender and war* yet from an historical point of view it is a feature of army life which needs to be considered. Not only did this give rise to social divisions between different units, there were also differences between wartime social conditions for civilian women and servicewomen.

Except to mention that servicewomen lived in camps in all female communities there is no discussion in the analyses in *Gender and war* concerning ways in which the pressures of wartime existence affected their lives and the lives of civilian women differently during World War Two. These differences were largely the result of military control which, within the armed forces, was seen to be of major importance in the military training of women in preparedness for defence. Therefore the omission of an examination of the military social organisation of the period leads to failure by the editors of this book to discern the differences between the regimented lifestyle of servicewomen and the comparative freedom of civilians. Within the restrictions

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\(^9\) Ibid, p.4

wartime placed on the activities of all women, civilian women had freedom of action outside of working hours which servicewomen did not. The only restraint on this freedom for civilian women was that imposed by family discipline and this was not always enforced.

Chapter Four will demonstrate that daily routines, guard duties and night operations in army camps on numerically small stations, left many AWAS with little or no free time. However in larger camps spare time activities were organised in which AWAS were encouraged to participate, on evenings when not rostered for duty, or on days off. These were usually supervised. The normal practice for leave for personnel attending dances or “picture shows” within the camp precincts, was that it expired quarter of an hour after the show or dance finished. Inspections were made by duty officers and/or duty NCOs after lights out to ensure all beds were occupied. No visitors of either sex were allowed within the lines at any time although in some camps it was permitted for visitors to be entertained in the Rec huts until 2230 hours.

Army organisation provided amenities for classes which were arranged through Army Education. At 53 AWAS Barracks, Alice Springs, for example, classes were held in dressmaking, photography and homemaking. The Church under the leadership of Padre Yarnold produced a nativity play with a cast of 22. As a result these activities together with the women’s personal chores, washing, ironing, and a full work schedule left little time or opportunity for the

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11 MSS. Visit to 53 AWAS Barracks, Alice Springs, April 1943, Sybil Irving Papers, MS10050, Box 3, (VSL Melbourne).
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
immoral behaviour of which members of the AWAS were accused. As Jess and Lola remarked:

Jess: There was guard duty and there was cooking. You were either working or you were sleeping. One or the other.

Lola: All our time was taken up. We didn't have a lot of time to ourselves. You were flat out getting your washing done so you could get out to wherever you wanted to go when you got leave.

Even on leave women in uniform were constantly under surveillance. Hotel or guest house accommodation was practically impossible to obtain, especially after the American troops arrived in Australia. As remarked by Connie there was nowhere to go where you could be alone with a male companion except the parks. Even there, as everywhere else that they went, servicewomen came under the watchful eyes of AWAS Supervisory Personnel (SPs) Military Police (MPs) and the civilian Police. As Jess related:

We didn't have a place to bring them [boyfriends] home to. We certainly didn't bring men to tents and huts and the men were in the same position as ourselves and there wasn't anywhere to go. My boyfriend was in the Navy and he was home on leave and we were in the park and because we had our ankles crossed we were spoken to by a policeman.

All interviews conducted by the author showed the general tendency for AWAS when they left camp on leave was to go out in groups and return in groups except when travelling to their own homes. They also revealed that many service-women had formed attachments with men in the armed forces prior to enlistment and preferred to attend dances and other entertainments with a group of their friends.

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14 Group interview conducted on 26 June 1995 at Melbourne. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 26 June 1995.
15 Ibid.
16 AAG(WS), History Part ix, AWM113, CMH 1/214, p.35, (AWM).
17 Interview, 226 June 1995.
Ellen    We used to go to Wagga [from Kapooka] and we’d go down to the river and swim...there might have been a dozen of us or better and [afterwards] there was a little park near the Railway Station and we’d sit in a circle and just talk till train time\textsuperscript{18}.

Dorothy Sometimes we’d come up to the city and go to the Women’s Weekly Club. We went to the flicks. On a wet night you took your greatcoat and your tin hat but you had to wait until the lights went down before you could go in and some silly galah would go and drop their tin hat\textsuperscript{19}.

Phyllis When we went into town we’d go to the dances or to the pictures\textsuperscript{20}.

From a psychological point of view the unconscious use of the word “we” applied to different groups by individual interviewees, would seem to indicate the truth of their statements. It also seems obvious that there were no indications of covert homosexual inclinations as inferred by Ruth Ford. Ford cites from an interview with Elizabeth Lucas held at the Australian War Museum, during which Lucas states that in Darwin 300 AWAS were encamped in a barracks compound which was fenced and guarded. She goes on to assert that 20000 men from the three Armed Services were stationed in the vicinity and that men would break in and be found in the huts in the AWAS barracks\textsuperscript{21}. This dissertation considers that without evidence of the numbers of women involved, giving some indication of how many engaged in sexual activities, this does not establish a prima facie case of an excessive degree of heterosexual activity by AWAS in Darwin as she infers. In addition it does not coincide with evidence of an absence of widespread promiscuity produced in other oral sources.

\textsuperscript{18} Group interview with ex-AWAS on 10 July 1995 at Birrong, NSW. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 10 July 1995.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} It is unclear from Ford’s reference whether this statement originated with her or with Lucas.
However evidence which possibly supports Lucas's statement to some degree was produced in one of the interviews conducted for this dissertation.

Tottie related that:

"My father was up in Darwin with the Civil Construction Corps and my mother got a letter...[in which he had written] that if I was sent up there he had put some money in the bank and he was going to send me straight home again. It must have been very bad in Darwin at that time. He was very worried about what he had seen in Darwin."

Notwithstanding this comment she made it obvious that she did not believe this was general behaviour among AWAS. She continued:

"but if he had seen us in our different Searchlight locations I don't think he would have had even one little worry. There was no such thing went on."

It also needs to be borne in mind that, as will be discussed later in this chapter, civilian gossip maligned servicewomen on the subject of their perceived immorality.

As pointed out in the introduction to this dissertation a small minority of AWAS were promiscuous. This too will be discussed later in this chapter as it was an underlying factor in charges of the immorality of members of the AWAS. However there were other considerations. It is possible, for example, that army discipline was lax in some camps and/or that the AWAS officer in charge was not able to carry out her duties efficiently. One reason for this eventuality could have been interference from senior male officers. As reported by Molly:

"I came from Toorak with a commission. I walked into the orderly room to meet the CO and he said, I don't want any AWAS officers round here...He said I'm sending you out with a Sergeant who will be able to do everything and from then on I had a lot of trouble with him."

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22 Interview, 26 June 1995.
23 Ibid.
No such considerations were taken into account by Ford who goes on to state that:

The Army's lectures on sex hygiene for the women's services acknowledged the reality of women's heterosexual activity, covering sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptives. Lesbian sexual activity and relationships were not mentioned.²⁵

With regard to the Sex Hygiene lecture this statement is somewhat misleading. It was compulsory for men to attend similar lectures and as enlisted personnel the AWS were subject to the same regulation. The intention may have been to inform but it can be inferred that it was more a case of using scare tactics to discourage promiscuity and possible unwanted pregnancies in keeping with the social practices of the day.²⁶ Five and a half pages of the eight page lecture were devoted to comprehensive descriptions of syphilis, gonorrhoea, soft sore, and mention was made of lymphogranuloma venereum and granuloma inguinale.²⁷ To young women whose knowledge of venereal disease at that time was for the most part limited to signs in public toilets on railway stations it was somewhat sickening. Recruits were assured that syphilis could be contracted by kissing but that most people who contracted the disease did so as a result of sexual intercourse with an infected person. They were also assured that promiscuous intercourse would result in infection "in the long run if not in the short".²⁸ Most of the young recruits were very innocent. Lola remarked during the interview in Melbourne:

I think they had brothels in Queensland. And I think if the men were desperate they'd be lined up. After I'd been in the Army

²⁴ Interview conducted with M. Peat on 22 September 1995 at Gladstone, Queensland. Hereafter referred to as Interview 22 September 1995.
²⁵ Ford, R., op. cit., p.91.
²⁶ Scott-Young, M., Capt., "Lecture on sex hygiene", AWM54, 481/12/99, (AWM).
²⁸ Ibid, p.2.
for nearly two years I asked some of the girls what’s that light and why are they all lined up. I had no idea\textsuperscript{30}.

Recruits were also assured that statistics had been compiled on the usefulness of contraceptives which showed they were of no use at all\textsuperscript{31}. Half a page was devoted to the flowers and the birds and the bees\textsuperscript{32}. This was the 1940s in an age when young women’s sole instruction before marriage, was, ‘some things happen when you marry, but don’t worry about it, it’s over quite quickly if you don’t make a fuss’\textsuperscript{33}.

The question of moral standards of service-women was not unique to Australia. An abstract of a recent doctoral thesis discusses the same problem as it applied to members of the Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWAC) during World War Two. Forstell writes:

The thesis examines what the author terms the whispering campaign of malicious rumors and gossip directed against members of the CWAC during World War II to discredit them on moral grounds\textsuperscript{34}.

As stated by Thomson similar vicious rumours circulated concerning women in all women’s services in the United Kingdom, and in the United States of America members of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps were subjected to “dirty jokes, snide remarks, and cartoons”\textsuperscript{35}.

In Australia servicewomen suffered the same treatment and these same attitudes gave rise to the many accusations of immorality that abounded during

\textsuperscript{30} Interview, 16 June 1995.
\textsuperscript{31} Scott-Young, M., Capt., op. cit., p.8.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.7.
\textsuperscript{33} Adam-Smith, P., Australian women at war, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984, p.282.
the war years. As a result it was no wonder that parents felt apprehensive about their daughters enlisting in the AWAS and other women’s services.

Campbell writes that it was asserted that 43 WAAAF were once “removed from Australian Officers’ beds at the Seaview Hotel and sent to a city gaol”, and that a whole railway car of pregnant WAAAF had been sent South from Queensland36. Joyce Thomson has produced evidence showing that Service Police traced this back to the matron of a large RAAF hospital:

When interviewed the matron said that a friend of hers knew somebody whose son was a railway conductor and that the story had come from him37.

Campbell also writes that it was alleged the deputy mayor of Townsville stated that American servicemen were pushing girls whom they had made pregnant under trucks to save themselves the cost of an illegal abortion38. According to Campbell these rumours even went so far as to assert that in Brisbane a special maternity hospital had to be built for pregnant servicewomen39.

As indicated by the title of the Canadian thesis, “The Victorian legacy”, the writer is concerned with the prevalence of Victorian attitudes to women during the period prior to and including the 1940s. In Australia too, Victorian attitudes were still prevalent in this period. Middle class girls in the early decades of the twentieth century were still being brought up to be an ornament in their husband’s home. Working class girls very often worked in domestic service, low paid factory jobs, as dressmakers, or work of a similar nature. All girls

37 Thomson, J., op. cit., p.185.
38 Campbell, R., op. cit., p.98.
39 Ibid.
were expected to marry by the time they turned 21 years of age. The social stigma imposed by being called an “old maid” was still a very real one.

Gail Reekie has pointed out that women’s organisations placed a high value on the sexual ideology of family life. She cites the President of the Women’s Justices’ Association who in 1945 pleaded for a return to pre-war stability:

After this terrible war and its terrible consequences, many women will need love, sympathy, faith and trust to help them rebuild their lives and their homes.

Ideological inconsistencies existed between ideas of women who were passive and needed male protection, whose role in society was to be domestic and nurturing, and the demands made on woman power during a time of total war. These demands brought about a conspicuous change of status for AWAS and other servicewomen and as a consequence moral judgements, often misinformation, were made by the civilian population.

During street marches in wartime it was commonplace, as remarked by Dorothy, to hear comments such as “Here come the army groundsheets”. Other interviewees in NSW recalled acronyms such as “Always Willing After Sunset” or for VADs, “Volunteers After Dark”. As stated by Thomson it was impossible to stop these malicious remarks and certainly servicewomen were not angels.

Consequently the society at large used any small misdemeanour to crucify service-women on the grounds of immorality. As further stated by Thomson this represented an outlet for their own wartime frustrations and also reflected “the

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41 Ibid.
42 Forestell, D.G., op. cit.
43 Interview, 10 July 1995.
44 Thomson, J., op. cit., p.238-239.
puritanical standards of the times45. This author also draws attention to similair mischiefs perpetrated against women in the Great War. She writes that:

In 1918 wild tales of immorality had circulated about the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps in France. However a ‘Commission of Enquiry’ had found that ‘a vast superstructure of slander had been raised on a small foundation of fact’46.

It was revealed in interviews that it was the married men who seemed to be most at fault in their estimation that women only joined the services as sexual partners for servicemen. Mavis related an experience in one camp with a lieutenant who thought every girl should go out with him and be prepared to have a sexual relationship.

The boys used to laugh if they saw you cleaning the latrines the next morning as they knew you didn’t go out with the lieutenant the night before... He was a married man - we found that out ... and of course any sensible girl is not going to go out with a married man47.

Molly related that as a lieutenant on one Battery she had a problem with one male officer:

I’d met his wife and he had five children. He was sleeping with one of the girls so I thought, let him stay with her and then he’s not annoying half a dozen others48.

Lola related an experience where violence was used:

He punched me in the stomach because I said, No, I wasn’t interested in that sort of thing. He was pretty brazen. The girls put the searchlight on him but they couldn’t find him because there was too much bush. Later on I found out he was married49.

45 Ibid, p.239.
47 Interview conducted with Ward, M., on 1 June 1995 at Miriam Vale, Queensland. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 1 June 1995.
48 Interview, 22 September 1995.
49 Interview, 26 June 1995.
One result of the public belief that there was widespread immoral behaviour among servicewomen, was that women wishing to enlist encountered parental opposition. However the prejudice seemed to be directed more against the WAAAF than the AWAS. Research has revealed nothing to indicate why this was so. Lola said she had originally wanted to join the WAAAF but her sister had said "only bad girls" joined the WAAAF. In Sydney Cath said she too had wanted to join the WAAAF but her brother who was in the Army said, "You're NOT joining the WAAAF". Heather said she had opposition from her mother who she thought was just frightened for her.

Remarks in answer to questions eighteen and nineteen in the written questionnaire, (Appendix B), concerning instances of opposition to enlistment in the AWAS were varied. One respondent had found antagonism from the soldier she relieved for overseas duty, another remarked that her former boss said she was just looking for glamour, others found men didn't like women in the Army, while yet another endorsed Beverly's statement that male officers and NCOs didn't know how to relate to women in the army ranks. Opposition also came from women. One person replied that she was criticised by some ambitious women, someone else found some apprehension from her mother and was accused by other women of just wanting to chase men. Another respondent said it appeared that most civilian women thought we were "nuts" while another replied that older women thought only "bad" girls joined the Army. "Bad girls" were those who participated in pre-marital sexual activity.

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50 Ibid.
51 Interview, 10 July 1995.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
As previously mentioned the historiography on the subject of this dissertation is limited, and research into primary sources has shown that estimates of the number of AWAS who were discharged because of pregnancy vary considerably. In a cursory note McKernan mentions a figure of 16% of AWAS discharged for cyesis. Some doubt must be put on this figure as McKernan’s reference appears to be a work of fiction. Adam-Smith, (Appendix C), cites figures for single women discharged because of pregnancy for each year 1943-1945 but makes no reference as to their source. Her figures correspond to a total of 2.1% of all AWAS enlistments being single women discharged for pregnancy. This is very different to the figure cited by McKernan, and as the following conclusions arrived at from official sources will show, very much closer to the reality.

Research into the “Sybil Irving Papers” held in the La Trobe Australian Manuscript Collection revealed statistics compiled by AAG(WS), (Appendix D). These figures are also cited by Thomson and are comparable to those cited by Adam-Smith. Thomson also indicates a difference between the figure of 142 single pregnancies among AWAS between May and December 1943 as shown in the AAG (WS) figures, and the figure of 97 single pregnancies in a chart attached to War Cabinet Adendum No.318/1943 for the six months of May to October of that year. It can be argued, that the difference between the AAG(WS)figures and those attached to the War Cabinet Adendum, for 1943

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55 McKernan, M., op. cit., p.263. McKernan’s reference (30) follows his figure of 16% and appears to be associated with his statement regarding the character of an AWAS who died as the result of an illegal abortion in Come in spinner by Dymphna Cusack and Florence James.
56 Adam-Smith, P., op. cit., p.285
57 AAG(WS), “History of matters affecting Army Women’s Services”, Sybil Irving Papers, MS10050, Box 1, held at VSL.
rather than being seen as disparate, are comparable and that unstated variables and the use of dissimilar methods and time scales could explain the discrepancies.

Because the AAG(WS) figures are officially documented they suggest the rate of 1.07%, (Appendix D), is more likely to be a true evaluation than the rate of 2.1% put forward by Adam-Smith. The following table translates figures shown in the tables, Appendix C and Appendix D.

Table 1

Comparison of Pregnancy Rates Among Unmarried AWAS as reported by P. Adam-Smith and AAG(WS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P. Adam-Smith</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAG(WS)</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bearing in mind that very little was known about methods of contraception, these figures support the conclusion that despite rumours to the contrary during wartime, and misconceptions by recent historians, promiscuity among AWAS was not widespread. Thomson cites Dr. Edith Summerskill, a member of an Empire Parliamentary Delegation to Australia in 1944, who states:

that the incidence of single pregnancies in the service [WAAAF] approximately 1.49 per cent of total strength and was lower than the civilian rate.\(^5^9\).

\(^5^9\)Thomson, J. op. cit., p.241.
Notwithstanding the range of variability in the figures available, it is not unrealistic to assume on the basis of Dr. Summerskill’s figures, and given the social values of the 1940s, that single pregnancies in the AWAS were similar to those for the WAAAF. No comparable figures for single civilian pregnancies were found in the research for this work. Examination of records in *Commonwealth Year Books*\(^{60}\) of ex-nuptial births 1943-1945, suggest there was a similarity in the incidence of pregnancies among single civilian women and servicewomen.

The dissertation also asserts that there is no foundation to the myth of servicewomen’s widespread immorality on the grounds of promiscuity. As remarked by Connors and Taylor:

> In hindsight, the continued commitment of Australian women to the family and to conventional sexual mores under very trying circumstances was...remarkable\(^{61}\)

It also submits that this concern has emerged in feminist writing as a major item of importance, quite out of proportion to the value of the promotion of women’s place in Australian society which occurred as a result of the role of servicewomen in war-time. As members of the armed forces they helped to raise the status of women from that of gender inferiority to recognition of women’s abilities. As will be discussed in the next chapter not only has the morality of AWAS been called into question by their contemporaries and recent feminist historians, so too has their femininity.

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Chapter 3

WERE THEY FEMININE?

In the last two decades it has been recognised that femininity, like masculinity, is an historical construct and feminist concepts have emerged using terminology which did not exist in the 1940s. It will be argued in this chapter that feminist historians have interpreted femininity and lesbianism in the 1940s from an historicist perspective.

The generally accepted view of women's role in society in the 1940s was that it was linked to social mores of the time which stated that "a woman's place was in the home". Women's acceptance into the traditional male workplace during World War Two was only temporary, and enlistment in the Services was "for the duration only". The traditional belief was that after the cessation of hostilities men would return to the workplace while women would marry, become housewives and have a family.

One of the main social concerns about women entering the Armed Forces was the question of how they would conduct themselves. The very newness of the formation of women into the AWAS and other women's services, meant they came under wide observation by people from all walks of life. Most had some opinion on how they should behave. The question of whether members of the

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AWAS would retain their femininity became a social issue which is still debated today. Occasionally fears were expressed as to whether they would develop masculine traits. To some extent these fears were exacerbated by the work of cartoonists who had a field day lampooning women in military uniforms apeing masculine characteristics.


This chapter will discuss contemporary views of the 1940s about the femininity of servicewomen and contrast the opinions of ex-AWAS with the views expressed by recent historians concerning this issue. It will also argue that the view advanced by Ruth Ford\(^5\) that lesbianism was prevalent among servicewomen is without foundation.

In her interpretation of femininity\(^6\) Lake maintains that established historical


\(^6\) Lake, M., op. cit., p.268.
approaches, overlooked the emergence in the 1930s of the new woman, who
incorporated ideas of "sexuality, sexual attractiveness and youthfulness". She
asserts this replaced the concept that femininity was embodied in the notion of
women as housewives and mothers. She further asserts that this belief was
reinforced by women's experiences of World War II. Lake states that contrary
to being pressed to return to traditional roles World War Two advertisements

invited [women] to step into an alluring exciting future. In place of the adventure of economic independence, women were offered the advantage of sexual romance.

This change in ideas about the meaning of femininity was pursued by The Australian Women's Weekly which in its early years promoted a new deal for women. Campbell cites an extract from an article published in this magazine written by the then Anglican Bishop of Goulburn in the issue of 5 September 1936:

Woman is emerging from the old fashioned home and it is not likely that she will ever desire to consent to return to it. The home of the past is idealised by sentimentalists and there is no need to disparage its good qualities. But there were serious disabilities in it, and it is a good thing that women are escaping from it.

During the war years the change in the meaning of femininity was certainly the statement made in advertisements for consumer items for women. Whether it reflected women's own ideas of their femininity or whether advertisers set out to persuade women into acceptance of this belief is arguable. The social code of the day required that women must in no way appear masculine. Advertisements which depicted women insisting on their need for cosmetic products while

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, p.269.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, p.26.}\]
performing tasks categorised as men's work, can therefore be defined as a socio-economic construct, which confirmed gender differences.

As Lake has pointed out, by doing men's work "women demystified" it, and while this resulted in an admission of female capability, it did not bring about a "blurring of gender distinctions". Instead, it "reaffirmed sexual difference" by the use of advertisements such as:

When working on our jobs on munitions we don't neglect our appearance - but still keep our feminine charm by always having our Escapade lipstick with us.

Another facet of this debate is the austerity campaign of the war years. Rationing of consumer items made life difficult for women who had to manage the household requirements. Despite the shortages brought about by state control of industry, women were urged to make the best of themselves. Austerity was seen as a form of patriotism. To boost morale, and cope with rationing, articles appeared in women's magazines suggesting ways in which old garments could be made over to appear new. To compensate, advertisers suggested women could make greater use of products such as make-up, which was not rationed, and still conform to the austerity culture of the time. They thus used the need to boost women's morale to promote their products.

Finch has demonstrated that during the war magazines presented a conservative ideal of gender relationships in which 'women were expected to exercise self-control in restraining their impulses and emotions' in the purchase of non-essentials.

However, as pointed out by Wright, advertisers nevertheless

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11 Lake, op. cit., p.269.
pounced on her [sic] concern for her femininity, and their advertisements proceeded to place [servicewomen and] the working woman - along with the product - in a feminine perspective.  

Female sexuality was always implied, never openly stated. Advertisements such as this adhered to the current social mores by suggesting women would be better wives and mothers when they assumed these responsibilities after the war, if they purchased advertised consumer items. The advertisements used depiction and terminology to infer, stopping short of open assertion, that the advertised products would make women sexually attractive to their boyfriends and husbands. As cited by Finch, Gail Reekie took the idea of consumerism one step further by linking it with the American innovation of dating in which women's company was seen as a commodity to be bought and traded, and in which a man invested his money.

Ford approaches the question of the femininity of AWAS from a different perspective. She points out that there were continual reassurances in the media and propaganda that women in the services weren’t masculine or “amazons”, didn’t lose their femininity in the services and really desired to be engaged or married. However she ignored the possibility that there was truth in these reports. The only evidence she has presented of the alleged concern in the AWAS hierarchy of “anxieties about uniformed women appearing masculine”, is confined to the discussions and decisions about the AWAS uniforms. Certainly Sybil Irving

15 Finch, op. cit., p.105.
16 Ford, op. cit., p.85.
insisted on hats and not caps, which she perceived as being masculine\textsuperscript{17}. That was her opinion and her prerogative to choose. The concern of one officer that the wearing of battledress - trousers, jacket and boots - as opposed to skirt, stockings, gloves and shoes, needed to be restricted to their proper use\textsuperscript{18} is interpreted by Ford as "an implicit suggestion that many women preferred the more masculine traditional military dress\textsuperscript{19}. This cannot be admitted as evidence supporting her contention that AWAS officers were concerned about the possible emergence of masculine traits among AWAS. Boots, battledress and jeans (overalls) for members of the AWAS were only issued to women serving in the field. Boots were a necessity because AWAS issue shoes would not stand up to the rough conditions. As reported by one ex-AASL operator,

\begin{quote}
I remember early in the war we had trouble with our shoes. One time I put one of my mother's letters, which were always about six pages thick into one of mine, because it had a big hole in the sole\textsuperscript{20}.
\end{quote}

In New Guinea, tropical jackets and trousers were needed as protection against malaria carrying mosquitoes. Battledress was not worn outside camp precincts, except on route marches, on the Australian mainland. It was used for warmth while on guard duty, or standing out in the middle of a paddock in the early hours of the morning in pouring rain or freezing cold to operate searchlights, or perform other duties. At Kapooka where it was not unusual to wake in the morning in winter to find the taps frozen, AWAS were even glad of the issue of men's "long johns" for added warmth\textsuperscript{21}. 

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{20} Group interview conducted with ex-AWAS conducted on 26 June 1995, at Melbourne, Victoria, hereafter referred to as Interview 26 June 1995.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Skirts were unsuitable for wear during the maintenance of trucks, searchlights, and other field equipment, or for lying on one's stomach at the rifle range. For many AWAS it was the first time they had worn trousers and they were appreciated for the freedom of action in the performance of their various duties. Military propaganda which "insisted that servicewomen were real women beneath the uniform" was absolutely correct. As stated by Mavis:

You might have been doing a man's job or taking a man's place but you didn't want to look like a man. You wanted the right to use a little bit of powder and perfume and you wanted to go out with the boys to a dance and be treated a little bit like a lady. I don't think anybody lost their femininity because of it [enlistment] as far as I could see\textsuperscript{22}.

The question of femininity was taken up by the Army Education journals \textit{Salt}\textsuperscript{23} and \textit{Army}\textsuperscript{24}. The reports approached their subject from different angles but each was centred on the ability of women to adapt to Army life, and at the same time retain what was regarded as their feminine qualities. Both articles reflect the paternalistic attitudes manifested by the social mores of the time. The \textit{Army} report emphasises gender differences

They scramble out of camouflage practice, strip off the leaves that decorated their hats, and gathering round one of their number who has an anniversary they sing "Happy birthday to you" with what can only be described as girlish abandon\textsuperscript{25}.

\textsuperscript{22} Interview conducted with Mavis Ward, at Miriam Vale, Queensland, 1 June 1995. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 1 June 1995
\textsuperscript{24} "AWAS can take it" in Army, Vol.1, No.4, May 1944, Australian Army H.Q., File No.540994 A741, (AWM), pp.50-58.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p.50.
Searchlight maintenance. Because skirts hampered freedom of movement during field maintenance of searchlights trousers were a welcome alternative. Photograph taken at Kapooka, ca 1943. Source Author’s personal collection.
Davis takes the position that the title of the *Salt* article, “Are they feminine? Who, and why, are the AWAS?” indicates that feminine qualities are believed to be at risk. Davis also maintains that the opening statement of the report that, “this was a current civilian controversy”, implies that it was an external debate and there was no prejudice against the AWAS within the Army. This journal was not generally accessible to civilians so as Davis correctly points out the article was mainly addressed to a male audience. To a certain degree Davis’s conclusions are valid, but she has not taken into consideration that there was some opposition to the enlistment of women in the Army, and it was both political and Army organisational policy to counteract male resistance within the ranks. Davis is probably also correct in her assertion that this report served as an additional inducement to increase recruitment for the AWAS. She cites an AWAS driver’s response to the *Salt* article:

> [t]he article, long overdue, will, I hope, put an end to the silly controversy on the subject of our femininity (or lack of it). Far from losing femininity, the majority of servicewomen have gained patience and understanding of their fellow men and women, qualities greatly needed for post-war years.

Much of the argument presented by feminist historians on the subject of femininity is useful and demonstrates how women were used to promote the growth of consumerism. However Army organisation was such that the AWAS was self sufficient. No jewellery was permitted with the exception of engagement and/or wedding rings and the extent of members roles as consumers was limited to the purchase of cosmetics and a few personal items. In addition

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27 Ibid, p.74.
26 Ibid, p.73.
pay rates, to be discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, show that service
women had little money to spend on consumer items.

All respondents to the questionnaire and all interviewees emphatically
denied any loss of femininity due to enlistment in the armed forces. Only two
replies to the questionnaire mentioned that consumerism might play a part in
their understanding of the word. One commented "I suspect that "femininity was
a fashionable term in the magazines", while another replied that:

I never thought of it and have really only heard of this femininity
thing lately. Looking back we were encouraged to wear
make-up and present ourselves smartly and behave in a manner
which showed we were proud to be in uniform and to
be women. Dyomee Girl, a shop in Castlereagh St. opposite David
Jones, sold very pretty bras and scantees[sic] sets which they
advertised as being designed to make us feel more feminine.

Despite Ford's assertion that

women in military uniform ran counter to traditional
understandings of femininity

the interviews conducted for the oral history survey for this dissertation resulted
in a strong denial that the uniform encouraged AWAS to adopt masculine traits.
Responses to the question regarding the word femininity, as it was posed in the
oral history questionnaire, related to the wearing of pretty clothes, good
grooming and traditional values of what was accepted as ladylike behaviour in
the 1940s. Only one respondent made a gender related connection and replied
that femininity was "the ability to appear well-groomed and attractive (to
males)".

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29 Appendix B, question 23.
30 Lynch, A., reply to questionnaire, Appendix B, question 23.
31 Ford, R., op.cit., p.85.
32 Appendix B, question 23.
Whether on route marches, travelling by train, or as was more often the case, travelling in the backs of trucks, and around a piano whenever one was available, AWAS spent many hours singing the popular songs of the day. Many of the respondents to the questionnaire replied that they were able to relate to the words of the songs. Typical remarks were that it was the age of innocence and we soaked it all up like blotting paper\textsuperscript{33}, that "we were young and romantic\textsuperscript{34}", that the words created pictures and stories\textsuperscript{35}, and that love songs were always a part of our lives\textsuperscript{36}. This would seem to indicate the lack of sophistication among most young women of the time and their acceptance of their predestined role in society as wives and mothers in which they would live "happy ever after".

On the whole young women in the 1940s were not consciously aware of sex appeal in the ways in which it became an important component of gender relations in later decades. Sexual differences were not openly discussed and implied sexual connotations were not acknowledged publicly. Making the most of their appearance was considered by most women a matter of personal pride and a part of growing up.

In a report in The Australian Women's Weekly of April 1943 the journalist writes of the work done by AWAS on an "Ack-ack station...somewhere in Northern Australia"\textsuperscript{37}. Most of the article is about the work and conditions on the station but it also relates that the girls are spoilt by the men on the station.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
who will "do anything for us", and cooking for supper parties in the rec hut which were "turned on by the men". Dunstan reports that:

A Lance Bombardier [male] in a poem dedicated to the ack-ack girls sums them up, thus:

They're ready to meet our deadly foe
And are waiting for the chance
To prove to us and Tokio [sic]
They are not here for romance.\(^\text{38}\)

In 1943 a programme to recruit women for service in Artillery units was in operation\(^\text{39}\) and as mentioned in Chapter One there was a shortage of female labour. By demonstrating the opportunity for women to take part in interesting work while maintaining their femininity and supporting the war effort, this report appears to be a flagrant use of the media in state control to encourage recruitment into the Women's Services. At the same time it seeks to affirm the femininity of the AWAS.

Almost without exception the friendships that were made during their time in the AWAS were acknowledged among servicewomen as being the most rewarding part of Army life. Women are excluded by their gender from the Australian male concept of mateship, and yet living in mostly single sex environments service women formed strong friendships, many of which have lasted all their lives. For others AWAS friendships are renewed at annual reunions. This was wartime and it was a daily routine to look through the lists of men killed, injured, missing in action or taken prisoner-of-war, which were issued every day. Service women shared any sorrow resulting from the above which affected any members of their units, grieved with them and supported them.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

as best they could. This created lasting bonds. In their work, as for instance, in the operation of a searchlight station, they worked together as a team and this also had the effect of bringing them closer together.

All who responded to the questionnaire commented that although they were glad when the war was over they were very sad to be leaving their friends. Many had lived and worked together for long periods and there existed within their friendship all those attributes of male mateship. Their friendships were strengthened by the circumstances under which they were formed. It is quite possible for an ex-servicewoman fifty years after the end of World War Two to meet a group of women who served in the same unit, but whom she has never met, and to be immediately welcomed and made to feel one of them.

Notwithstanding this, some close friendships between servicewomen were occasionally publicly perceived as being of a sexual nature. The archival research undertaken for this dissertation is extensive but nowhere within the "silence" about lesbianism was any evidence found of "an obsession with masculinity - and inadequate femininity" as reported by Ford. Ford suggests that there was acute anxiety about lesbianism. Experience in the AWAS suggests the contrary and this was confirmed in the open discussion during the oral history interviews. In the 1940s very few girls had ever heard the word

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40 Group interview with ex-AWAS conducted 10 July 1995 at Birrong, NSW. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 10 July, 1995.
42 This was the author's experience when conducting group interviews for this dissertation. In single interviews too, there was an immediate sense of rapport with the interviewees.
43 Ford, R., op. cit., p.85.
44 Ibid, p.83. Ford also refers to articles in Truth, Melbourne. The authenticity of Truth articles was always a matter of some doubt.
45 In three and a half years service in the AWAS I never saw any evidence of undue concern about possible masculinity among AWAS nor was it ever discussed among staff in the psychology unit to which I was posted during the last months of my service. Interviewees with the one exception cited in the following text were also unaware of any concern.
lesbian and were completely ignorant of the fact that sexual relationships were sometimes formed between women. Nevertheless it is inconceivable that AWAS officers and NCOs would not have been made aware that such relationships could be formed. Marie stated that on one occasion when she was second in command (2IC) that

we had an instruction that everyone had to stay in their own bed at night. We never had anything like that there but we were given the instruction to make sure it didn’t happen.\(^{46}\)

Ford has also asserted that based on an Army memo from World War Two correspondence\(^{47}\) that notwithstanding their awareness of lesbian practices within their ranks Women’s Services hesitated to make it an issue in case it led to adverse publicity. This dissertation maintains that the evidence cited which reads that

it was “neither desirable not practicable to interfere with or attempt to control rigidly, the private conduct or morals of individual members of the forces, but any conduct which would tend to prejudice the reputation or morale of the army is to be suppressed”. Memo, LHQ SM 10960, 20 March 1943.\(^{48}\)

does not necessarily refer only to lesbianism. Not only this but recent historical feminist discourse presents a different interpretation to events than was intended in a different time frame. In the 1940s it was still considered by large sections of the population to be immoral for women to wear trousers, to smoke in public, to enter a hotel, to show affection to the opposite sex in public and many other similar actions which are now considered socially acceptable.

Ford goes on to suggest that there were probably lesbians among the hierarchy of the various women’s services and this may have contributed to a

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\(^{46}\) Interview, 10 July, 1995.
\(^{47}\) Ford, R., op. cit., p.102.
\(^{48}\) Ibid, p.102.
lack of concern regarding female homosexuality⁴⁹. Her evidence for this statement is an invalidated footnote which states that

some senior officers of the women's services remained unmarried and lived with a female friend/companion for many years suggests the possibility of lesbianism⁵⁰.

While the suggestion is possibly true there is nothing to substantiate it. This statement is mere speculation and as such does not constitute historical evidence.

The footnote goes on to state that

A history of lesbians in the American army women's services points to the existence of lesbian officers [in the AWAS]⁵¹.

This is not evidence that they existed in the Australian women's services. Ford further suggests that a possible reason for silence by the women's services on the subject of lesbianism within the ranks, was that pregnancy and venereal disease had visible consequences which negatively affected recruiting, whereas female homosexuality did not⁵². Again this is an unsubstantiated submission.

These assertions are largely a matter of supposition and since no official records which endorse these statements have come to light they cannot be verified. It is maintained here that such flimsy evidence as that which Ford has produced excludes the possibility that her allegations can be regarded as history.

However as she has stated it is quite true that oral narratives reveal that lesbianism did occur among women in the services⁵³. The oral history survey conducted for this dissertation endorses her findings but affirms that the

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.93.
⁵⁰ Ibid, p.102.
⁵¹ Ibid.
⁵² Ibid, p.93.
⁵³ Ibid, p.98.
instances that occurred were very isolated. Obviously, however Ford has never lived under Army conditions during wartime. Her statement that

same-sex environments - and life in huts, under canvas and barracks - provided opportunities for women to act on their lesbian desires

is completely misinformed. The absolute lack of privacy, discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, and the fact that the majority of women would not have condoned overt lesbian activity, excluded opportunities for this type of sexual behaviour. Pat related an incident which occurred when she arrived back in camp from leave to find another girl in her bed:

I said 'what are you doing in my bed' and she said 'just keeping it warm for you'. I told her to get out and get into her own bed, not realising what she meant. She just got out and went.

Further discussion revealed that a number of women knew this same girl, and while all said they knew nothing about female sexual relationships at the time, they all realised that there was something different about her. It was the differences in her behaviour that resulted in clear memories about her and later gave meaning to her actions.

Over periods varying from two to five years in different camps, and among different groups of AWAS, the oral research for this work revealed only three known cases of lesbianism by the eighteen women interviewed. In the absence of documentary evidence to the contrary this dissertation strongly supports the contention that lesbianism was not prevalent among AWAS.

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54 Ibid.
55 Interview, 10 July 1995.
56 Ibid.
Chapter 4

WORK IN THE AWAS: A STUDY OF THE UNITS

The focus of this chapter is on the way enlistment of women into the AWAS and their deployment into fields of male expertise contributed to the social change in Australia during World War Two. The accepted view of most historians is that employment of women in industry and enlistment in the women's services dissolved the masculinist myth that women were only suited to work in their traditional roles as nurturers.

The range of skills practised in industry and the armed forces helped lead to broader acceptance of women in the workforce in later decades. McKinley expresses the view of mainstream historical thinking, that although World War Two led to acceptance of women into the wider work place as a matter of exigency only, it nevertheless strengthened moves towards equal pay which were initiated in this period.

Lake has noted that during World War Two, trade unionists who fought against employment of women during the 1930s on the grounds that they were low wage substitutes for men, were equally vehement that their employment should, like the enlistment of women in the armed services, be for the duration only. Lake also points out that the formation of the Women's Employment Board (WEB) resulted in relatively high wages during wartime for women

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taking over men's jobs. This created one of the major differences between women in industry and members of the AWAS and other women's services. AWAS relieved men for the front line by taking over defence duties on the mainland but did not have redress to mediators for improvement to their pay and conditions.

As indicated, the work performed by AWAS was a part of the broader issue of women's work during the 1939-1945 conflict. Further comparisons therefore need to be made with the work of women in industry. In the introduction to her book *Australian women at war* Molly Bayne points to ways in which the demand for women's work during times of war increased in each conflict beginning with the Crimean War. Bayne maintains that during this conflict there was a need for female shop assistants and that they remained established in that occupation. Similarly, after the 1914-1918 war when women entered clerical and commercial occupations, they continued in this work after the war was over. However, as Bayne has asserted, in wartime women were welcomed as workers but "only as workers of inferior status." This trend was repeated in the 1940s during World War Two and applied equally to both civilian women and women in the services.

Conditions for women in the AWS were similar to conditions for women in all three services and all provided training for skills needed in the forces. Pay for AWAS was two thirds of that paid to men and this was comparable with the

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1 Ibid, p.207
2 Bayne, M., (Ed.), *Australian women at war*, Melbourne, Research Group of the Left Book Club of Victoria, 1943, p.5.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
pay rates of women working in industries such as textiles in which women were paid approximately 54% of the male wage⁸. Pay for privates varied between 4/4 and 6/8 per day with 3/- per day subsistence for those living at home. For minors, those under 21 years of age, pay varied between 3/10 and 4/4 per day plus 3/- per day subsistence where applicable⁹.

An important difference between women working in industry and servicewomen, was that industrial workers had recourse to direct action and other means to increase pay rates, which servicewomen did not. Women working in munitions, aircraft and shipbuilding industries could earn 90% to 100% of the male rate¹⁰. Bayne, who is mainly concerned with economic questions and whose views come from an Australian Communist Party perspective, asserts that this led to discontent among servicewomen because they earned so much less than the men with whom they worked side by side¹¹. This may have occurred but research for this thesis has not revealed any evidence to support her contention.

Women in industry were also protected to some degree by the WEB. An instance of this is that the WEB insisted that women were not to lift weights in excess of the equivalent of 15.88 kgs¹². In comparison AWAS posted to AASL Batteries removed, lifted and replaced front glass and steel reflectors from both 90 cm and 150 cm projectors during daily maintenance.

Members of the Australian Women’s Land Army often had to tolerate similar pay and conditions as AWAS and other servicewomen. In the Dawson Valley,
Land Army women were billeted in a commandeered hotel and had to supply their own cup, plate and cutlery. Each day they were driven by truck to farms to pick cotton which was needed for ammunition. For this they were paid three pence a pound (approximately 500 grams). The work of the AWLA was also seen as being “for the duration” only. Opposition in some quarters to the advisability of encouraging women to join the AWLA, was based on the concept that if the men were left to run the farms and the women were sent to work in the munitions factories, it would be easier to send the women home after the war than to find work for the displaced farmers.

On the Australian mainland AWAS served as far North as Port Hedland on the Western Australian coast, Adelaide River in the Northern Territory and Cairns on the East coast. The degree of difficulty, and type of work varied from place to place according to the work involved in the different units to which AWAS were posted. Conditions often depended on location and as pointed out by Molly, COs could also be a deciding influence on the circumstances under which AWAS lived and worked. One CO was

very slack and he spent most of his time in the Sgt’s mess... [and] nothing went on and there were no Battery parades... I battled on with him for about 18 months. Then I had another CO who believed that AMR&Os were there to be obeyed implicitly.

Wherever they were employed in traditional male roles during wartime there was a certain amount of apprehension that women might take over men’s jobs

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14 RAA Schools document, AWM54, 88/1/1, [3], (AWM).
15 Lake, M., op. cit., p.206.
16 Interview conducted with Molly Peat on 22 September 1995, at Gladstone, Queensland, hereafter referred to as Interview, 22 September 1995.
which they could not handle competently. Within the Army there were instances in which men thought it was beneath them to train women. However this often turned to respect when it was found that the AWAS not only were capable, but were prepared to do everything that was asked of them.\(^\text{17}\)

The technological ability shown by AWAS helped to overcome male opposition to women’s intrusion into the field of “men’s work”. As has been noted by Joan Davis the first report on the women’s services in the Australian Army Education Service’s publication *Salt*, referred to in Chapter Three, did not appear until 1944.\(^\text{18}\) She attributes this to her perception of the journal as endorsing the myths of mateship and the “digger-Anzac” which did not include women.\(^\text{19}\) It is demonstrated by Davis that the *Salt* article, while “praising the women’s mastery of technical skills and their proficiency in men’s work”, took the view that it was only possible for women to do this work as a result of contingent circumstances.\(^\text{20}\) Davis also maintains that the article inferred that this efficiency was the result of the reinforcement of Army discipline.\(^\text{21}\)

Published soon after the report in *Salt*, an article in an issue of *Army*,\(^\text{22}\) endorsed the attitude expressed in the *Salt* report. Attention was drawn to the fact that after training in the handling of automatic weapons, girls’ “shooting is as good as that of men”.\(^\text{24}\) In this instance the inference is that women only had

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\(^\text{17}\) Group interview conducted with ex-AWAS on 10 July 1995, at Birrong, NSW, hereafter referred to as Interview, 10 July, 1995.


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid, p.64.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid, 67.

\(^\text{21}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{24}\) Ibid, p.55.
these skills as a result of male expertise in training techniques. However even this limited form of recognition of the abilities of AWAS did not extend into the post-war period. Davis asserts that the "digger" image of the self-sufficiency of the Australian soldier was maintained and women were excluded25.

Australian attitudes of the period further distanced AWAS from the dominant ideology as evidenced by the view, that it was not "seemly" for young women to wear uniform, especially trousers, or to be doing many of the jobs AWAS were called on to do. Older people in particular, found it difficult to accept that such things were necessary, even to meet the exigencies of total war. They believed that women "lowered their standards" if they joined the services26. However as is exemplified in the following citation AWAS ably fulfilled their role as members of the defence forces:

Special Searchlight Detachment - Commendation

6th April 1945

It is my privilege to draw your attention to the commendable work of the Special SL Detachment at present based at No 1 OTU East Sale under command of NF444294 Lieut A. Lynch, AWAS. At approx. 2200 hrs on the night of 24 February 1945 the weather in East Gippsland deteriorated rapidly when a bank of low sea fog swept in from the coast closing in the aerodromes at Bairnsdale, East Sale and West Sale. At this time there were 17 Anson a/c from GRS Bairnsdale and 3 Beaufort a/c from this Unit airborne and emergency preparations were made for their safe landing. At approx. 2230 hrs SLs were requested at East Sale and despite the fact that the SL detachment was quartered some 3/4 mile from the lights, these were exposed at 2240 hrs. SLs operated continuously from 2240 hrs during which time they were responsible for assisting a Beaufort to land at West Sale and one Beaufort and five Ansons to land at East Sale. By their prompt action and efficiency, the operators of the SLs were instrumental in assisting some seven a/c and their crews to be

26 Robertson, W., Sgt. Yes Madam. Published by AWAS, Victoria, in aid of the Prisoners-of-war Fund, December 1943, p. 5.
safely landed at either East or West Sale. Particular reference is made to the efforts of L/Bdr June Thomas and L/Bdr Woof who were in charge of the SL crews.

(Sgd) GD Nicholl, Wing Commander
Commanding No 1 OTU
RAAF East Sale

Photograph taken at East Sale 24 February 1945 as referred to in the above citation.
Source: Author’s personal collection.

This citation demonstrates that not only were AWAS capable of carrying out the duties assigned to them, but also that they could adapt procedures they had been taught to meet other exigencies.

In a document entitled "Army Women’s Services" there are over fifty occupations listed to which AWAS could be posted. Some of these were of a highly technical nature. Because of the limitations imposed on this study it is not possible to examine the work involved in all units to which AWAS were posted.

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27 Copy supplied to author by Lt. Col. Robinson, AA Searchlight Assocn, Gordon, NSW.
28 Army Women’s Services document, op. cit.
Therefore, discussion will be restricted, for the most part, to the work undertaken by AWAS posted to Anti Aircraft Searchlight Batteries, although the work of AWAS in some other units will be mentioned.

The first searchlight station to be fully manned by AWAS was 62 AASL Bty at Fuller's Bridge, NSW\(^2\)\(^9\). Buildings comprised three huts, one for accommodation, a mess hut and an ablution and toilet block. The projector, generator, sound locator and spotters chairs were close by in what was then vacant land. There was also a sand-bagged dugout for a Command Post protected by a corrugated iron roof. This cramped facility was barely large enough for one person, a telephone and a plotting board-computer (manual).

![Image of AWAS cleaning her rifle](image-url)

An AWAS cleans her rifle in readiness for guard duty, Kapooka, NSW ca 1943. Source: Author's personal collection.

Guards armed with the Lee Enfield .303 rifle were mounted at 1800 hours and duty consisted of two hours on and four off although some preferred to work “four hours straight”\textsuperscript{30}.

Daily routine was always the same. The cook was awakened by the patrolling guard at 0600 hours - “reveille”. Roll call was followed by emu

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Regular camp fatigues. An AWAS cleans the ablution block, Brighton, Victoria ca 1943

Source: Author’s personal collection.

parade, ablutions and breakfast. This was followed by routine maintenance of the equipment and inspection of the lamp electrodes. If the equipment has been used during the night more time would be required for inspection and maintenance \textsuperscript{31}. Fatigue duties and camp maintenance were always regular duties. The cleanliness of the huts, latrines, and ablution blocks, required attention on a daily basis and on most AASL stations all took turns with the cooking and mess duties. Digging a new latrine pit or drains, necessary to the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p.138.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
maintenance and smooth running of the station became necessary from time to time\textsuperscript{32}. In addition there were drills: rifle, respirator and manning drills; there were route marches, and instruction on equipment and machine guns. Hill writes that the Short Lee Enfield .303 rifle was thrown around and caught and the weight taken in one hand only, which as he relates, was not easy. However AWAS learnt to handle these movements well\textsuperscript{33}. Conditions at searchlight locations varied. One location was very low lying by a muddy river where mosquitoes and other insects swarmed each night, another on a rocky hill where heavy cables had to be dragged over steep rock and another was situated in sand hills where the sand blew continually\textsuperscript{34}. At Fuller's Bridge there was a stove in a hut but at some stations the cooking was done at an improvised fireplace under a tent fly, open to both the flies and the weather\textsuperscript{35}.

Camp hygiene. Food scraps were separated from other refuse and collected by farmers for pig feed. At an AASL Station at Brighton, Victoria AWAS scrub the returned tins, ca.1944. Source: Author’s personal collection.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.137.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} History of AWAS Second Australian Army, Appendix “B” to History, AWM54, 88/1/1, [13].
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p.138.
Transport drivers too, especially those attached to searchlight stations undertook work usually assigned to men. Testing potential drivers, according to Connie was a rather scary procedure:

I remember the first time I had ever been behind the wheel of a car I had to drive along Sydney Rd [Melbourne] with trams and transports zooming past us and I was a nervous wreck. Driving three ton Bedford trucks was no easy task for AWAS. There was no power assisted steering and it was necessary to double de-clutch to change gears. For drivers attached to searchlight stations loading and securing projectors onto the back of trucks was heavy work, as was the hitching of gen

AWAS drivers ready for call-out at East Sale, Victoria ca 1994
Source: Author’s personal collection.

sets so they could be trailed, and the loading of heavy cables. The drivers were also responsible for carrying out their own maintenance.

36 Group interview conducted with ex-AWAS held on 26 June 1995, at Melbourne. Hereafter referred to as Interview, 26 June 1995.
37 Ibid.
Not only did AWAS serve in the field on AASL stations they were also employed in Zone Operations Rooms.

In Sydney, HQ was known as Z1 (ZOR) and was situated in the Railway Tunnel which is now part of the City Circle, between St. James and Circular Quay. Also in the tunnel were an Ack-Ack Operations Room and a RAAF Operations Room. At ZOR all aircraft movements into the Sydney area were plotted. Each aircraft was identified by the first AASL station in line with it's entry into the area. This information and its direction was then phoned through to the appropriate Battery Operations Room (BOR) who would in turn phone Z1. At HQ the flight of the aircraft was then plotted until it passed out of range. Goodstate, an ex-AWAS, who was a plotter in the AASL ZOR recorded in a typescript that

Personnel on duty at Z1 were involved in the action on the night the Japanese submarines bombed Sydney Harbour and sank the "Kuttabul".

In a report in The Torch, a Bankstown, NSW newspaper she is quoted as saying:

On one occasion, just as we were preparing to go off duty a 'red Alert' was sounded and I took part in plotting an unidentified plane coming in from the East and travelling in a South-Westerly direction. Richmond Air Base was alerted, but failed to intercept the plane. It is believed to have come from a submarine off shore and to have been a reconnaissance plane.

A letter to the editor of The Torch, 4 May 1994, queried that a plane could come from a submarine. In the same paper on 22 June, 1994, there was a rush of replies stating that this was possible. One stated that "several, if not all, of the ten '115' class Japanese submarines carried at least one seaplane each".

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40 Ibid.
Marie worked in the Ack-Ack Operations Room in the tunnel in Sydney mentioned by Goodstate. The procedure here was somewhat different to the AASL ZOR. Their job was also to plot all aircraft movements in the Sydney area but in this case the information was passed on to the gun sites. Information passed to the Operations Room from the radar stations in the area was processed and fed into the predictors on the gun sites, then to the guns. The height finders would then track the aircraft until it was out of range. As Marie reported:

"You had to be fast and accurate... It was thirty seconds from the time it [sic] came from the radar until it reached the gun sites." 

The operation of the guns was always the preserve of men but AWAS worked on predictors and direction and range finders, on the gun sites.

AWAS posted to Army Ambulance Car Company (2AACC) fared a little better with bedding than Artillery personnel. As described by Jean Patterson, instead of straw palliasses:

"Twenty-four beds crowded the hut lined up regimentally, barrack-room fashion... each of angular black iron, a striped ticking mattress turned back to reveal a lamentable lack of springing and the harsh grey blankets were sombre and uninviting."

However like AASL stations and Ack-Ack gunsites the sight of "a shivering, bedraggled AWAS standing guard in the rain by a sentry box" was standard in winter. Like all drivers in Army ranks ambulance drivers had to maintain their own vehicles. In the AMR&O it was stipulated that daily checks of water, oil and petrol were maintained, and that ambulances must be greased at regular 100 mile intervals. In addition there was "weekly maintenance, monthly

42 Interview, 10 July 1995.
43 Ibid.
44 Patterson, J., An ambulance driver's war, undated typescript, (Copy held by author), p.9.
maintenance, yearly checks, 1000-mile checks, oil changes, gear oil changes and so on.46

Conditions for AWAS posted to the Australian Corps of Signals Training School at Ivanhoe also left much to be desired. Memories of Grace Sutherland nee Hammond included:

Two inches of water running over the ablution block floor when the showers were used...cleaning out the “big coppers” and dixies that the porridge and potatoes were cooked in...field wireless sets...using male urinals in the toilets by the lecture rooms because there weren’t enough other toilets...learning to drip dry my work dress because there weren’t enough irons...trying to cope with the rigours and new training of Army life, in strange surroundings.47

Audrey McKenzie nee Youn remembered the

huge bags of potatoes we had to peel...a group of girls taken on a swimming parade to the Yarra to be photographed...[photo] featured in The Sun, “Wonderful recreation in the AWAS” etc... but the truth was it was out of bounds!48

The term “for the duration” had very real meaning for both servicewomen and those employed in other spheres of traditional male employment during World War Two. Notwithstanding the fact that women had shown their capability and adaptability in technological skills during World War Two, Australian society could not immediately accept a levelling out of culturally acquired gender differences.

Soldiers who returned home after the cessation of hostilities had been promised their pre-war employment would again be available to them after discharge from the armed forces. This was an endorsement of the heroic status of the ex-serviceman which entitled him to preferential treatment on his return to

46 Ibid, p.16.
civilian life. The same heroic status did not apply to ex-servicewomen, including those who served overseas in medical units, although some had their pre-war jobs held open for them. Therefore the engagement of female labour in industry and enlistment of women in the armed services for "the duration", meant they were expected to forfeit the independence they had gained and return to their pre-war status as housewives.

This argument is valid but does not take into consideration the pressure most women had been under during the war years, the economic situation, or the desire, as expressed by participants in the oral history survey for this thesis, "to get back to normal". Beverly expressed the feelings of many ex-AWAS after the war was over:

To a certain extent when the war was over there was a feeling that we wanted to forget a bit and we wanted to be women and have a family and stay home for a while...there was also the policy of "give the men back their jobs".

The majority of women who enlisted in the AWAS believed they had played a worth while role in the defence of Australia and had happily accepted the conditions of their service. Notwithstanding this they were glad the war was over and looked forward to a return to civilian life. Not only was there the official policy of "give the men back their jobs" but women wanted "a return to normality". Normality was seen in terms of the pre-war social structure and as Mavis commented:

They wanted more or less a normality in their lives. A loving, a caring. I don't think women wanted a family just for the sake of having a family. There was more to it than that...You wanted someone to love and cherish of your own.

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49 Interview, 10 July 1995.
After the war so many people had lost husbands, brothers, even sisters in the nursing service.... You wanted something you could hold on to. A sanity in the world after all the insanity that had gone on.

Many did not realise that the changes brought about in human relationships by total war were here to stay. In particular women who had lost husbands or the boyfriends they had expected to marry after the war ended still required places in the workforce in the post-war period. As has been pointed out by Richard White the impact of the Second World War had measurable effects on the proportion and sort of women going out to work, on female wage structures and principles, and on the kind of occupations being filled.

This was not so evident in the immediate post-war period. In many cases skills acquired by women in industry and members of the AWAS and other servicewomen during the war, were not utilised in post-war reconstruction. The emphasis was on returning men to civilian occupations.

As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation women power was used during the war in unforeseen ways but this did not mean that women acquired equality with men. Even when there was the threat that Australia might be invaded by Japanese forces, servicewomen were not seen as being part of the fighting units. This remained the prerogative of men and maintained the myth of male superiority that relegated women to supportive roles. As White points out this “confirmed rather than challenged the status quo” and war thus had a far greater

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50 Interview conducted with Mavis Ward, 1 June 1995, at Miriam Vale, Queensland, hereafter referred to as Interview, 1 June 1995.
52 Ibid, p.408.
53 Ibid.
“impact on gender relations in both public and private life”\textsuperscript{54} in relation to maintaining historical gender roles.

The work performed by servicewomen and women employed in essential industries during the Second World War, did not give them heroic status, nor did the hardships of women left to cope with families on very small incomes\textsuperscript{55}. However this dissertation maintains that the role played by the AWAS in the workforce in wartime did impact on Australian society. It accelerated the change from the position of women as providers of cheap labour in uninteresting work situations in the 1930s, to the wider training and work opportunities of the later decades of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Davis, J., op. cit., p.73.
CONCLUSION

At the "Australia Remembers Celebrations" held in Canberra on 15 July 1995, the [then] Prime Minister Paul Keating said we made a massive contribution to the story of Australia and that our generation of Australian women were both pioneers and defenders of the Australian faith, we just did what was asked of us.

Paul Keating's words, as presented by an oral history participant, recognise the role played by women during the Second World War. This role was of great significance in Australian society and the part played by women in the AWAS and other armed services, was an essential component of the infrastructure of the defence forces.

It has been the purpose of this dissertation to demonstrate ways in which the role played by the AWAS impacted on the social structure of the time. The objective has also been to establish that they played an important part in accelerating change in the status of women within Australian society. Chapter One has considered the mobilisation of women during World War Two and ways in which military organisation impacted on the lives of women who enlisted in the AWAS. This is followed, in Chapters Two and Three, by a revision of views put forward in recent historiography which perpetuate the wartime myth that servicewomen were immoral and that the military uniform brought about a levelling out of gender differences. Finally Chapter Four demonstrates that new work experiences established the fact that women could successfully be absorbed in many fields of endeavour within Australian society.

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1 Baird, J., Response to question 33, written questionnaire (Appendix B).
While expressing agreement with much of the recent feminist historiography of World War Two this thesis has questioned some of conclusions presented in recent publications. A major contribution of this thesis has been to argue that the existing historiography on this thesis is not only very limited but some of it has been based on untenable assumptions. These assumptions derive from neglect by historians of army organisation and its effects on servicewomen.

There has been a failure to differentiate between ways in which wartime state controls affected civilian women, and the ways in which servicewomen were affected by military regimentation and discipline. Extensive research undertaken for this thesis has shown that postings within the AWAS were very diverse. Notwithstanding that living and working conditions of servicewomen related to the units to which they were posted recent historians have generalised about conditions of army life.

Not only were working and living conditions disparate so too were the social conditions in different camps. Some camps provided amenities such as Army Education classes and the organisation of religious activities. In others there were recreation huts which provided facilities for recreational pursuits and where friends could be entertained. Elsewhere there were open-air “picture shows”. Sometimes none of these facilities were available. In remote areas the Army supplied transport for day leave, while in others servicewomen relied on public transport.

Much of the work published by feminist historians on the subject of this thesis usefully challenges assumptions that the role of servicewomen during World War Two was insignificant. However at the same time it adopts an
historicist approach when it looks at the social mores and the changes that took place. This has produced a devaluation of the morals and femininity of the women of that period and their conceptions of themselves.

The evidence points to pre-marital sexual activity being regarded as the height of female immorality in the 1940's. Much of the historiography appears to accept what was, mostly civilian, condemnation of servicewomen on the grounds of this so-called immoral behaviour. In some cases unsubstantiated evidence has been used to confirm the assumption that overt sexuality was accepted among AWAS and other servicewomen. While admitting that some AWAS were promiscuous it is maintained that for the most part they behaved according to the current social codes. This is borne out by the oral history survey conducted for this dissertation and figures on official documents for pregnancy rates among single members of the AWAS.

The femininity of AWAS has recently been called into question. In taking up this theme it is argued that the term femininity is a recent historical construct. Feminist historians have pointed out that advertisements in the media used servicewomen, and other women employed in what was at that time perceived to be “men's work”, to reaffirm sexual differences. This argument is valid, but it is demonstrated in this work that to women in wartime this was not a concern, as all social issues were orientated towards the needs of the men in the fighting forces and affairs of national interest. Feminist history has also raised the subject of female homosexuality. It is argued that AWAS and other servicewomen lived in single sex environments, so therefore inclinations and
opportunities to practice lesbianism would occur. This work maintains that no substantial evidence in support of these claims has been presented.

The final theme to be explored concerns the employment of women in what was traditionally men's work. The work of women in industry is compared with that of the AWAS. Work in camp maintenance which was common to all units was considered and differences occurring as a result of work requirements and place were also noted. The thesis affirms that although this did not increase work opportunities for women in the immediate post-war situation it did lead to the acceptance of women into training and wider fields of employment in the following decades.
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<td>*McWhirter, H</td>
<td>Millwood</td>
<td>NF453700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monk, E.</td>
<td>Mitchell</td>
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<td>Selwood, E.K.</td>
<td>Petfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elliott, M.</td>
<td>Robinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Witton, P.N.</td>
<td>Smith</td>
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<td>Jarvis, J.</td>
<td>Stewardson</td>
<td>NF453214</td>
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<td>Bracken, M</td>
<td>Sutton</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Tuckey, J.</td>
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<td>NF455490</td>
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<td>Carter, N.</td>
<td>Vasey</td>
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<tr>
<td>#Farrington, M.</td>
<td>Peat</td>
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Appendix “A” (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Married Name</th>
<th>Army Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queensland:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hart, S.G.</td>
<td>Abutomey</td>
<td>WF3024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadd, C.L.D.</td>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>WF15738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamieson, J.</td>
<td>Davies</td>
<td>VF396218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Davis, V.</td>
<td>Hutchison</td>
<td>QF142622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berg, I</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>QF143520</td>
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<tr>
<td>Astley, L</td>
<td>Jeffreys</td>
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<td>Mulcahy, B.M.</td>
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<td>Anderson, B.</td>
<td>Siedzielnik</td>
<td>VF395967</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patulls, I.M.</td>
<td>Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggleston, M.</td>
<td>Wight</td>
<td>WF93318</td>
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<tr>
<td>#Quinn, M.</td>
<td>Ward</td>
<td>QF268096</td>
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Note:  
*Denotes interviewees who also completed questionnaires  
#Denotes Interviewees only
APPENDIX B

Written Questionnaire used in oral history survey

1. Would you tell me where you went to school and how long you were there?
2. Were you able to get a job when you left school?
3. What sort of work did you do?
4. While you were at school prior to the war did you have any ambitions?
5. Did you ever think about getting married?
6. Were you involved with the Church?
7. If so, which church?
8. Prior to 1939 were you aware that there might be a war?
9. Did you think of yourself as Australian or British?
10. Did you have any personal ties with Britain?
11. Were you a member of a para-military organisation between 1939 and 1941?
12. What made you join the AWAS?
13. Can you explain to me how you felt about communal living on your first day in rookie school?
14. Remember those open showers. Did you feel as shocked as I did? Would you tell me in your own words how you felt?
15. Can you tell me about the discipline to which you were subject in your home before you enlisted?
16. Can you tell me if you think there were things boys were allowed to do which girls were not?
17. Did you find that Army discipline curtailed any freedom you thought you would gain when you enlisted?
18. How often did you come up against instances of opposition to the enlistment of women in the AWAS?
Appendix B (cont’d)

19. Can you tell me what form this opposition took:
   (a) From men
   (b) From women

20. Looking back do you think men felt threatened by the idea that women were to be admitted into the armed forces? If “yes” can you tell me about any instances you encountered?

21. I have been told by one lady that she experienced discrimination on religious grounds. Can you tell me about it if you ever heard of or experienced any instances of this?

22. During the war there was a lot of talk about women in uniform retaining their femininity. Can you explain to me what this word meant to you?

23. Can you tell me in what way you think we related the words of the songs we used to sing to our own lives?

24. What were the sorts of things you found in The Australian Women’s Weekly which you found the most interesting?

25. What were the sorts of things you liked about Army life?

26. Can you tell me about the things you disliked about Army life?

27. Tell me about the part of the work you did in Searchlights/Ack Ack which you enjoyed the most?

28. Tell me about the sorts of work in these units you most disliked?

29. What sorts of things did you do for entertainment in camp?

30. What sorts of things did you do for entertainment on leave?

31. Can you tell me how you felt when the time came for demobilisation?

32. Why do you think so many girls opted for marriage after demobilisation?

33. Do you think enlistment in the AWAS and doing the sort of work which that entailed had a bearing on the greater participation of women in the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s?
APPENDIX C

Table 2

Pregnancy figures for AWAS 1943 to June 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Number Enlisted</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>21700</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>1328</td>
<td>22800-</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-June 1945</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>16000</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>2451</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1</td>
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</table>

APPENDIX D

Table 3

Pregnancy figures for AWAS May 1943 to June 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Maximum Strength</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Single %</th>
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<tr>
<td>May-Dec 1943</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>19873</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec 1944</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1287</td>
<td>20051</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-Dec 1945</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>17026</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan-June 1946</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>10482</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>2161</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>2885</td>
<td>67432</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figures taken from the "History of matters affecting Army Women' Services" compiled by AAG(WS) to August 1946. Sybil Irving Papers MS10050, Box 1, held at VSL.
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