



## WRAAF News

### Woman's role in Air Force History.



As part of the centenary of Air Force commemorations, a Women in Air Force lunch was held in Western Australia on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021 to recognise the contribution and sacrifice of all women who have served and continue to serve. The event was held at the Royal Australian Air Force Association museum at Bull Creek. Guests included current serving members, reservists, veterans, volunteers, wives and partners of women who have served over the past century as members of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF), Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Senior Officer of Western Australia AIRCDRE Fiona Dowse spoke of her experiences as a member of both the WRAAF and RAAF over her 45-year career. "This commemoration is not about singling out women as something special; rather, it is about appreciating the history of service by women and sharing our stories as we socialise and inspire each other," AIRCDRE Dowse said.



The WAAAF was formed in March 1941 after considerable lobbying by women who were keen to serve. It was the first military organisation in Australia for women that focused on skills other than tending to the sick or injured. The formation of the WAAAF set a precedent, paving the way for the establishment of similar organisations in Navy and Army. It was the largest of the World War II women's services, with about 27,000 women enlisting between 1941 and 1945. Some women joined the WAAAF because they saw it as their patriotic duty, others to see the world, and some to escape the social confines of life at home, reasons that haven't changed much with time.

Women performed a variety of roles and were posted to bases throughout Australia. The WAAAF was disbanded in December 1947, but it had made its mark on society. It was truly an Australian wartime success story. In 1950, the contribution made by the women of the WAAAF was recognised in the formation of a permanent WRAAF. It had been originally intended to let the



service grow slowly and limit initial recruiting mainly to ex-service women, however, interest in joining was high and, by October 1950, more than 2000 women had applied to join the WRAAF

Some changes were made to service conditions for WRAAF members, but employment categories they could work in were still restricted. It would continue to be a sought after service to join, but it was disbanded in 1977 and female personnel were absorbed into the mainstream RAAF. On transfer into the RAAF, women were allowed to do more jobs, but restrictions based on gender continued until 2013. Change has been slow, but it has been achieved and now women can apply for any employment category.

"When I joined the Air Force, there was no equal pay for women and childcare outside of relatives and maternity leave was non-existent," AIRCDRE Dowse said. "My recruit course was all-female and the curriculum was more like finishing school rather than preparing us for war. Male recruits handled weapons and we were taught how to handle a floor polisher. Within society, technological advances, medical advances and the realisation that women are capable of so much more has led us to today's women in the RAAF. If it wasn't for the Second World War, women may not have seen service in the Australian Defence Force until much later and if it wasn't for the tenacity, determination and sheer will of the women who went before us, women may not be where they are today standing beside the men in the Royal Australian Air Force as one team."

AIRCDRE Dowse encouraged the guests to share their stories as a way of paying tribute to the service and sacrifices of all women who have contributed to Air Force in its first century. "There is so much to celebrate today with all of these amazing women all in one room. I encourage you to speak with as many as you can to share your stories and inspire each other," she said.

To find out more about a career in Defence, visit [www.defencejobs.gov.au](http://www.defencejobs.gov.au)

## **WRAAF dining-in night, East Sale, 1967**







## WRAAF 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.



**L-R:** Lyn Humbert, Marj Jones, Judy Westone, shown here celebrating the 16th birthday of the formation of the WRAAF.





## Somewhere – 1968.



**L-R:** SqnOff Parsloe, SectOff Maredith, WngOff Pitman.

We don't know the where or the why, can anyone help. And surely these ladies have first names, anyone know?



D



SectOff Meredith and Marie Kearvell. Once again, we don't know when or where.



Once again, we have no info on the pic above, can anyone help.







East Sale WRAAF rec room - 1966



**Two little boys were at a wedding when one of them leaned over to the other and asked, "How many wives can a man have?" His friend answered, "Sixteen... four better, four worse, four richer, and four poorer."**





## Somewhere in Brisbane 1963



## Point Cook - 1963





## Robyn Dickson, Point Cook, 1973

