

What you should know

- The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.
- Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.
- For further information, phone 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au or visit the website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



The Women's Signalling Corps was a civilian voluntary organisation nationally established in 1939. The Wagga branch was formed in 1940.

Search room changes

FROM February 1, 2010, pre-1950 hardcopy issues of *The Daily Advertiser* will no longer be available in our Search Room.

This decision has been made following a recent professional assessment of their condition, which deemed that a significant percentage of the newspapers are deteriorating quickly and becoming too fragile for the constant handling they have been receiving.

It was therefore decided, for preservation reasons, that restricted access conditions would be placed on the pre-1950 hardcopy editions of *The Daily Advertiser*. As an alternative, *The Daily Advertiser* is now available on microfilm in our Search Room for the period 1868 to 1950. Copying services from the microfilm are also offered. Hardcopy issues from 1951 to 2007 are still available for viewing.

IN CODE

Women's Emergency Signalling Corps played a vital wartime role



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday

This is the last in our series of articles focusing on the dedication of women who volunteered their time to Wagga's "War Effort".

The Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC) was established in Australia in 1939 and was a civilian voluntary organisation during World War II.

The WESC trained women in Morse code so they could replace the enlisted men who had vacated positions in post offices and other communication areas, although initially, owing to prejudices, they found it difficult to gain employment.

The Wagga branch of the WESC was formed in June 1940 by about 40 enthusiastic ladies with Mrs E Scott, from the Australian Hotel, as Commandant.

After three-and-a-half months



Mrs E Partridge became the WESC commandant at the end of 1941. Photograph courtesy of Mr and Mrs Brian Partridge.

training, recruits were required to pass the 10 words per minute "C" grade test before being admitted as a member, thus earning the privilege of wearing their "forest green" uniform.

As the members of the WESC became highly proficient it was found necessary to open practice rooms in Fitzmaurice Street, Mrs A Souls, H Paul, J Barrand and the Ven Archaeacon West assisted in making the rooms operational.

It soon became apparent that they would need larger premises and they moved for a short period next to the Oxford Furnishing Company in Fitzmaurice Street. Later they made their headquarters next to the Rose Marie Cafe in Baylis Street.

Membership of the WESC increased rapidly and by January 1941 most girls were able to transmit 15 words per minute and they practiced three to four times per week, as their objective was to attain 25 words per minute as quickly as possible.

In October 1941, it was with regret that Mrs Scott resigned her position as commandant because she was leaving Wagga, however group leader Mrs E Partridge accepted the position to lead the girls.

Mrs Partridge and her second in command, Mrs G Winter, travelled to Sydney to attend lectures at headquarters so that the latest methods of Morse code teaching and instruction could be passed on to tutors in Wagga on their return.

Drill training was held in St Andrew's Hall and the signallers joined in many church parades, sporting events and Anzac Day marches alongside the Women's Australian National Service (WANS) and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD).

The three groups joined together for field days and camps so that instruction, as well as social interaction, was beneficial to the members of the women's voluntary services. When petrol was rationed, the girls would either ride their bikes or march to the venue.

On arrival, flag stations were formed and instruction was received in message and station procedure with Morse flag and semaphore flag. When the flag stations closed, members attended lectures and practiced in Morse key after which they marched several miles back into town.

Like all women's voluntary services, fundraising was ongoing. The WESC held dances, joined in the market days, picture nights and many enjoyable card parties which were held at the home of Mr and Mrs Partridge. Funds raised were used to maintain expensive equipment or were donated to various war projects.

The WESC celebrated their second birthday in July 1942 and a cake had been decorated in the corps colours; they also enjoyed a visit from Able Seaman Bruce Norman who had received tuition before he entered the Navy.

Free training was made available in Morse key and lamp signalling to men who were waiting for their "call-up" into the fighting forces.

The commitment of the WESC members to tuition became even more intense towards the end of 1942 when the signallers undertook to train the RAAF Air Training Corps.

Instructresses were always needed to join the WESC owing to many of their members enlisting in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) and the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) where their natural aptitude and high competency was needed.

Women in the WAAAF worked in areas such as decoding, signalling and communications which required the technical knowledge they had received during their time in the WESC. The WESC disbanded after the war.

D'i' dir dah d' dah ("no further message").

Compiled by June Dietrich
References: The Daily Advertiser June 1940; 23 Apr 1941; 12 Dec 1943; www.skwir.com.au