

## 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](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au) or visit the website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



The WANS in 1943 – centre front is Kath Higgins, commandant.

Picture courtesy of Libby Blake

# GIRL POWER on the homefront

at the  
archives

Wayne Doubleday



**T**his is the second article in the series of women's voluntary services in respect of the work of the WANS.

The inaugural gathering of Wagga women who were interested in training in the different branches of the Women's Australian National Service (WANS) was held at the Capitol Theatre on July 5, 1940. The area officer was Dorothy Davidson of the Gurwood Street School, assisted by Kath Higgins of Wollundry Avenue, who later became commandant.

It was not easy for women to break into the traditionally male dominated fields, so the WANS trained rigorously in many different areas.

The motor transport course consisted of weekly lectures as well as practical work and ran for a period of three-and-a-half months.

It was essential for recruits to have held a driver's licence for at least 12 months and that they should be of "good physique".

Mr Harvey from Browne Bros Motors had trained similar groups in the past and offered his expertise to the WANS.

Business firms and the council also assisted by lending trucks and, with this cooperation, the women were able to accompany regular drivers which enabled them to gain the valuable experience necessary to pass the examinations to obtain their motor mechanic's certificate.

The WANS contribution to the salvage collections which was consigned to Sydney for the Mayor's Patriotic Fund was reported to be invaluable.

Mr MP Loth, superintendent of Wagga District Ambulance, stressed the importance of



The Voluntary Aid Detachment march in formation at the Wagga Showground.

working smoothly and having poise and confidence in an emergency.

He instructed the WANS and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) together for stretcher practice to encourage the girls to feel comfortable with other groups; this also helped them with the home nursing course.

In 1942, the canoeing unit was training on a regular basis and 30 Wagga WANS members were engaged in the making of camouflage nets.

In addition to all their training, the WANS members worked with a will and enthusiasm to raise funds by making and selling goods for market days and running card parties; each platoon was also responsible for holding fundraising dances on a regular basis.

The WANS members demonstrated their excellent training in December 1942 when, under the command of Kath Higgins, they were able to display their work to 150 people present on the evening.

They wore their smart blue uniforms and they marched to the flagpole in formation and were led by a bugler and drummers.

As well as drill and first aid competitions, they also demonstrated their ambulance work.

Because of their training, WANS members had become honorary staff of the District Ambulance Service as stretcher bearers and drivers.

The WANS worked remarkably hard on becoming fit and with corporal Tom Lacey, as instructor, they attended squad drill on a weekly basis at the drill hall between Docker and Dobbs street.

They marched in public for the first time, together with the VAD and the Women's Emergency Signalling Corp (WESC), on ANZAC Day in 1941.

The WANS marched on a regular basis and joined many patriotic gymkhanas and street marches, as well as church parades for special occasions.

At the end of August 1941, the first NSW Instruction Camp was held in Sydney, near Turramurra, for a period of 10 days.

The camp was primitive and quite a shock for the six attending Wagga WANS members.

On their return, Mrs Higgins and Miss Cox reported on the experience and despite the discomfort they said they were looking forward to the next camp.

An interesting report regarding the camp, written by Mrs Higgins, can be found in *The Daily Advertiser* on September 19, 1941.

The WANS disbanded after the close of the war; however, the women would never forget their experiences.

References: *Wagga Wagga, A History* by Sherry Morris; *The Daily Advertiser 1940-1944*.  
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