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# Women working for boys on the frontline

at the archives  
 Wayne Doubleday



n continuing our series on women's contribution to the Wagga's war effort during World War II, we will look at Australia's largest women's non-sectarian and non-political organisation, the well-known Country Women's Association (CWA).

The CWA, which was formed in Australia in 1922, was based on its counterpart's association in Canada (formed in the 1890s) and England (formed in 1913). The Wagga branch started in 1924.

The aims of the CWA focus on supporting the welfare of all women and children, especially those living in the rural and remote areas of Australia, by providing for a wide variety of needs, from fellowship for members to scholarships for students.

In the early years they raised funds to build rest rooms and develop baby health centres in most country towns.

In November 1939, a war-time policy circular was received by the Wagga branch of CWA from the state president, Mrs Beveridge, which pointed out that as there wasn't a precedent for war-time policy it was "absolutely necessary for the association to retain its own identity and not merge into another association".

Mrs Beveridge urged for the work of the CWA to continue in caring for women and children by maintaining the baby health centres and holiday homes, however, the organisation had been given permission for socks and comforts to be given to local units and a depot at the CWA head office would receive donations for the Lord Mayor's fund.

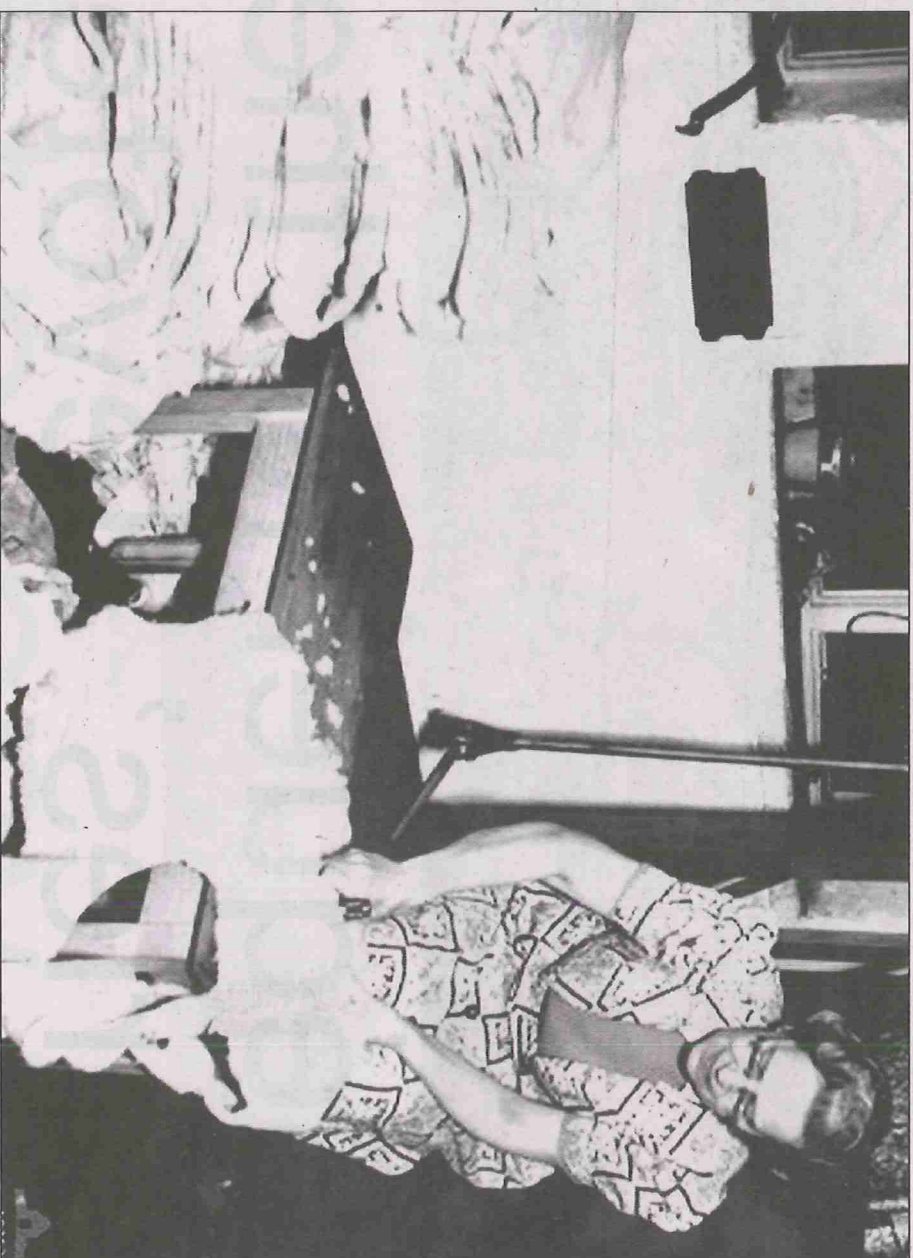
It was inevitable the CWA was to become involved in assisting the war effort and at the same time worked towards the aims and goals of their organisation, as well as raising funds for the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS).

## Camouflage nets

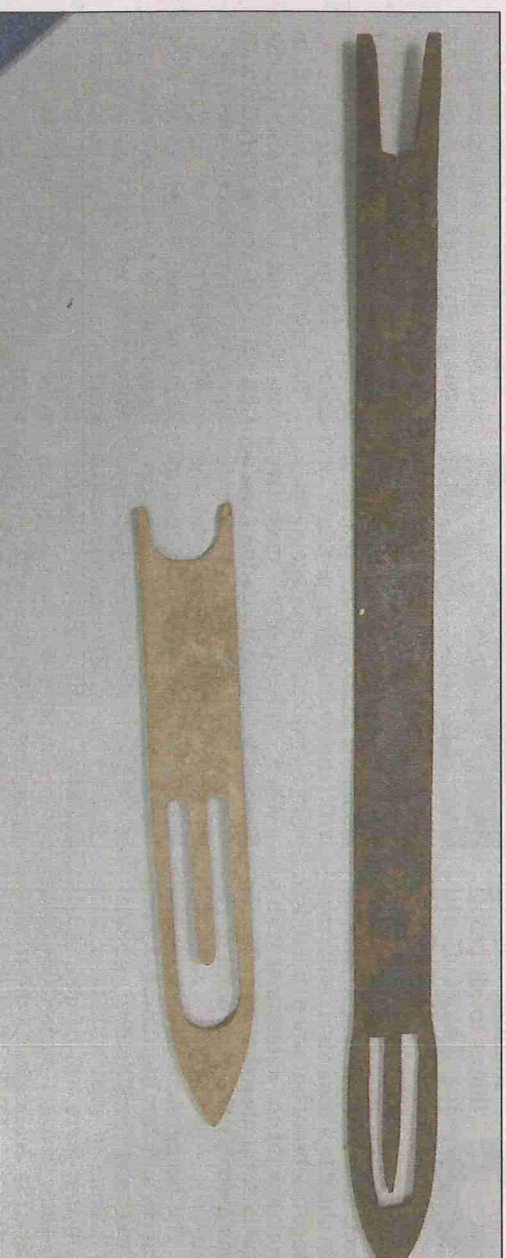
THERE was a big demand by military authorities for camouflage nets for security purposes and in June 1941 the president of the Wagga branch, Mrs EM Commins, offered instruction for others to learn the art of net-making and spent each day at the netting rooms in Edmondson's building.

Local Wagga residents were extremely generous and in July of that year, the seven stands bought to make the nets were paid for by donations. Hardy's Ltd donated a further six stands, Mr Jenkins added to the number, and Mr Robert Spiers of Temora forwarded three steel needles for use to make the nets.

Making camouflage nets was a positive way for the CWA to assist in Wagga's war effort and by October 1943, Mr Forde, the minister for the Army, announced that there were enough nets on hand. Wagga CWA had contributed over 5000.



Sheepskin vest being clipped prior to assembling by a CWA member at a depot in Sydney. Waste wool was supplied to the Red Cross for filling wheelchair covers. (Australian War Memorial Photographic Collection 108028)



Needles used for camouflage net making. Needles supplied courtesy of Kay Turner, Ganmain.

## Vests, gloves and slippers

THE CWA was the official organisation to collect sheepskins so that the pelts could be made into vests, gloves and slippers.

By January 1941, there had been 2800 pelts sent to the sheepskin vest committee at CWA head office from Wagga, with the assistance of M Rava and Company, Green and Company and the Apex Club. The Department of Railways were persuaded to transport the skins for free.

It became more difficult to collect the sheepskins by the end of 1942 once the government began to pay farmers to supply the pelts. Forty-thousand vests and 24,000 other sheepskin articles had been

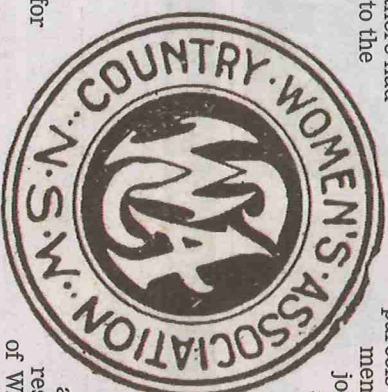
distributed to the forces by the end of the war from the Wagga district.

The members of the Wagga branch were also knitting socks, hot water bag covers, and balaclavas and they met once a month in the Red Cross rooms to pack comfort parcels for sons of

members who had joined the AIF. They also included any other known local boys.

## A homely touch

IN MARCH 1942, the CWA was approached to assist in providing a rest room for the use of WAAAFs when they were in town and, in conjunction with the mayor's patriotic fund, the furnished room was opened on April 11, by Alderman HE Gissing, the mayor of Wagga.



The furnishings were donated from private citizens and business houses in Wagga and for the opening, the room was decorated with flowers.  
 Mr T Wood added a "homely" touch by artistically arranging shrubs and pot plants.  
 Mrs Wilton, AOB, was in charge of the WAAAFs and about 50 airwomen from Forest Hill and Urangundy were in attendance at the opening, where Mrs Wilton expressed her appreciation that the rest room had been made available for the comfort of the girls.  
 The CWA joined together in unity to supply comforts for the servicemen and women and were tireless in their effort to use resources available to members to assist in Wagga's war effort.

References: CSURA: RW1668 CWA Minutes, *Serving the Country: The History of the Country Women's Association of NSW* by Helen Townsend; *The Daily Advertiser*: 17/9/1939, 13/4/1942, 13/11/1942. Compiled by June Dietrich