

Women in Uniform

By: Peter Jensen

On 13 July I sent an email about an exhibition 'Women in Uniform' to be produced next year by the Army Museum South Queensland at Victoria Barracks, Brisbane. I have not received any requests for further information and have compiled the following summary of women who served in Australian Survey Corps units and Survey Directorates as members of Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC), Royal Australian Survey Corps (RA Svy) and other Army Corps. Sources include: the Royal Australian Survey Corps Nominal Roll 1910-1996, Australia's Military Map Makers by Chris Coulthard-Clark, Map Makers of Fortuna by Val Lovejoy, National Bulletin of Survey Corps Associations

and Australian War Memorial photographs. I welcome comments before I send the article to the organisers for their considerations.

The ceremonial chief of the Royal Australian Survey Corps was its Colonel-in-Chief, Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales (Diana). The Corps and the Princess of Wales shared their birthday, 1 July. Unfortunately the Corps' ceremonial connection with its Colonel-in-Chief never included her visiting Corps units, but birthday wishes and Christmas cards, often with family photos of the two young Princes, were always exchanged. Diana's ceremonial appointment as the Royal Australian Survey Corps' Colonel-in-Chief was her only official connection with any unit of the Australian Defence Force.

Women first served in survey units in the Second World War

Australian Army Women's Service - enlistment by States

- New South Wales - 2
- South Australia - 5
- Tasmania - 1
- Victoria - 73
- **Total - 81**

Of the 600 people who served at Land Headquarters Cartographic Company (Bendigo) 1942 - 1945, 80 were AWAS. From early-1945 at least four of the eleven staff of Directorate of Survey Headquarters First Australian Army at Lae in New Guinea were AWAS. They were amongst the 500 authorised by the Australian Government to serve in an active service area, to release men to serve in the forward operational areas. AWAS private soldiers serving in survey related positions had the rank 'Sapper' like their male equivalents.



Survey Directorate (Lieutenant-Colonel Alan Kurrle) Headquarters First Australian Army, Lae, New Guinea - May 1945. AWAS soldiers are believed to be Private Olga Finucane, Sergeant JM Thomson, Sapper Joy Bailey, Sapper Joan Streicher. (Photo: National Bulletin of Survey Corps Associations No.12, September 1976)



Twenty-three year old draughtswoman Sapper Joan Streicher from Adelaide SA updating maps at Survey Directorate Headquarters First Australian Army, Lae, New Guinea - May 1945 (Photo: Aust War Memorial)



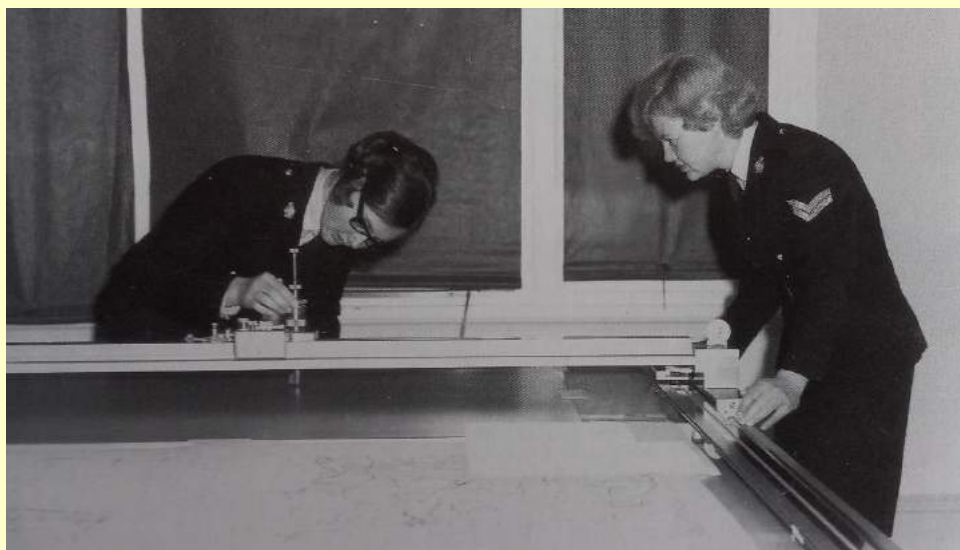
Twenty-two year old Sapper Joy Bailey from Sydney NSW using a stereoscope and aerial photographs to update maps at Survey Directorate Headquarters First Australian Army, Lae, New Guinea - May 1945 (Photo: Aust War Memorial)

Post Second World War (1952 - 1996)

At the end of the war most women were discharged from the Army and AWAS was disbanded in 1947. When the WRAAC was formed in 1952, draughtswomen served with the Southern Command Field Survey Section based in Melbourne. In 1957, the WRAAC detachment moved to Army Headquarters Survey Regiment (Bendigo).



AHQ Survey Regiment, Bendigo VIC - 1964 Topographic Draughtswomen editing map compilations, by scribing over light- tables, before photographic processing to prepare for lithographic printing (Unit photo album)



AHQ Survey Regiment, Bendigo VIC - 1970 Topographic Draughtswomen Sapper Desi Asaris (left) (from South Australia) and Corporal Kalen Sargent (from Queensland) scribing a map grid on the coordinatograph, one of the early computer assisted mapping equipments (Unit photo album)

In 1977 the soldier survey trades Topographic Surveyor and Topographic Draughtsman were reorganised as one trade, Technician Cartographic. Training for women was the same as for men including qualifications in field survey, photogrammetry and cartographic draughting. Women also served in other RA Svy sponsored trades of Technician Photographic, Technician Print, Illustrator Reprographic and Photographer Still. When the WRAAC was disbanded in 1983, women who were qualified in a RA Svy sponsored trade were transferred to RA Svy. But it was not until 1987 that women were allowed to serve in field survey units and deployed on operations. In 1989, there were nine women of the fifty-eight members of 4 Field Survey Squadron (Adelaide).



Army Survey Regiment, Bendigo VIC - 1991 Technician Cartographic Sapper Jeanette Lane (from NSW) plotting three-dimensional digital topographic data from aerial photographs using a computer assisted stereographic photogrammetric plotter - WILD B8 part of Automap 2 computer assisted mapping system



Army Survey Regiment, Bendigo VIC - 1991 Technician Cartographic Sapper Jodi Bowman (from NSW) editing digital topographic data as part of cartographic completion on a graphic edit workstation - part of Automap 2 computer assisted mapping system

Female officers and soldiers also served in other than technical roles such as command, staff, administration and discipline. Marjorie Knight was the first female Warrant Officer Class 1 in the Survey Corps, serving in Army Survey Regiment (Bendigo) as Technical Warrant Officer, Squadron Sergeant Major and President of the Sergeants Mess Committee. Alison Black, a graduate of Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham, UK, was the first female officer of the Survey Corps to be promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel. In 1998 Alison was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for her service. Tara Bucknall was the first female Survey Corps officer to command an Engineer Regiment and to be promoted to Colonel. Other women who started their Army service in the Survey Corps later rose to senior positions in other Corps.

Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC), Royal Australian Survey Corps (RA Svy) and other Army Corps women who served in survey units - enlistment by States post-Second World War

- Queensland - 72
- New South Wales - 153
- Victoria - 165
- South Australia - 43
- Western Australia - 61
- Tasmania - 17
- Northern Territory - 3
- Papua New Guinea - 2
- **Total - 516**

This is about thirteen percent of the 3,948 men and women who served in Survey Corps units after the Second World War. At that time, that was a higher percentage of women than the Army average, which for 2023 the target is fifteen percent.