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BLHA
Annual General Meeting

Saturday 5 December 2009
commencing 3pm.
Venue LHMU, 27 Peel St, South Brisbane
(opposite the QCU building)

Editorial

Dale Lorna Jacobsen

It sometimes happens that an unintentional theme runs through the articles submitted for *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*. The three main articles in this issue all bounce off the effect the American troops had on Australian society during World War II. But there is another far more important underlying theme: that of the struggle of those deemed as 'inferior' by sections of Australian society to establish an equal footing with other workers.

In "The Chinese Presence in Queensland", Connie Healy writes of the remarkable resilience of Chinese who came to this country, either voluntarily or as refugees, and how they overcame racial vilification and non-acceptance by the predominantly Anglo-Saxon population. Part of the war effort was the Victory Girls contest to raise money for "books for the boys" who were fighting Japanese armed forces in New Guinea and the South Pacific. Connie was part of this contest, and she can be found on the photo on the front cover of this journal.

The two articles by Helen Griffin have been adapted from the dissertation she presented for her BA: *Rockhampton and District Women in World War II*. It illustrates how 70,000 American troops can influence life in a quiet country town. In many cases the women's lives, as they formed the "Second Front", changed forever.

This issue also celebrates the launch of two books by BLHA members. In June, I was part of a grand affair in the Ithaca Room of the Brisbane City Hall to help BLHA Patron, Hughie Williams, launch his autobiography upon the world. In September, BLHA President, Greg Mallory, launched his book: *Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s*. This has been a labour of love for Greg, who has devoted much time and energy to this project. And the world is responding to it with justified enthusiasm. Good luck Greg.

On a sad note, Stella Nord passed away on 3 October. Those who knew her never doubted her unwavering passion for a fair and equal deal for women.

BLHA President's Column

Greg Mallory

The BLHA has had a fairly quiet period in the past few months as a number of Executive members have been busy with a variety of other activities, including work commitments.

Successful Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture

In May we held a very successful Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture, which was well attended. Professor Margaret Levi, from the University of Washington Seattle and former Chair of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies and Professor of American Studies at Sydney University, presented a paper on her comparative work on three American unions: the ILWU, the Teamsters and the ILA and the Australian union, the MUA. Prior to her talk Hughie Hamilton, Alan Anderson and Ted Riethmuller (deputising for Manfred Cross) spoke on Alex Macdonald's work in the trade union movement. A booklet of the night's presentations will be produced for next year's lecture.

Planned Events

There are a number of BLHA events coming up in the next six months. We will be holding our AGM in November, we have a number of concerts organised for the Woodford Folk Festival and in February we will be holding a Red-Green conference with a number of prominent guest speakers, including Jack Mundey and Tony Maher. Details of both these events are outlined in the Journal.

Overseas Trip

In April I visited Europe and the USA and spoke at a number of universities on my academic work. I was fortunate to be asked to present a paper at the inaugural Sport and Oral History Conference at the University of Huddersfield. The paper discussed my book, *Voices from Brisbane rugby league*, which has just been published. I also spoke at Ruskin College Oxford, London University and the Harry Bridges Center at the University of Washington. The papers I presented

there were mainly centred on the work of the NSW BLF and subsequent Green Bans of the 1970s. I came away from this trip firmly convinced that the work that the NSW BLF did in this area in comparison to unions then and now, was truly revolutionary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Executive of the BLHA for their work during the year. I would particularly like to thank Andrew Dallas, who was Assistant-secretary for a number of years, for his work. He has returned to New Zealand to pursue his academic career.

Greg Mallory pays his respects to Karl Marx, Highgate Cemetery, London, UK.

In Memoriam

Stella Nord: Industrial Crusader 1920–2009

Stella Nord, President of the Brisbane Working Women's Group of the UAW and union member of the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union appearing in 'Queensland Women Irate Over Insults', *Our Women*, October/December 1966, p. 20. Photo courtesy Fryer Library.

On Saturday 3 October, Australia lost a tireless crusader in Stella Nord.

She was born Stella Cynthia Olsen on 2 January 1920 in the East End of London where the family lived through the depression. Stella immigrated to Australia with her brother, Albert, in 1939 and had a daughter, Rosalind (Lindy), during her first marriage to James Ingram. From 1940 to 1968 she worked variously as a housemaid on a cattle station, shearers'cook, drover, dental assistant, egg sorter, strawberry picker and TLC office worker.

From the mid-50s to the mid-60s, Stella was employed at Swifts Meat Packing Company, Cannon Hill, Brisbane, in horrific working conditions. When the women complained to their union delegate, he patronisingly referred to them as "the sheilas" and ignored their complaints. So Stella forced the union to hold some meetings in the women's dining room (the sexes were segregated at mealtimes) to discuss issues that directly affected the women, such as the bosses secretly speeding up the conveyor line, and women needing to ask permission to go to the toilet. As the first woman elected to represent the Queensland Meatworkers Union on the Queensland TLC, Stella addressed

thousands of men and women at mass meetings for equal pay in Queensland.

Stella stood in the municipal elections for the Communist Party in 1961 and initiated a campaign for an auxiliary women's hospital. She raised 30,000 signatures and helped with the now famous slogan:

> Wynnum — population 34,000
> Drive carefully — no hospital

During the 1970s, the NSW BLF opened its books to women and helped them obtain jobs in the industry — the first union in the building industry to do so. Stella was among many women who became hoist drivers, first aid and safety officers and job delegates. When she encountered sexist opposition among the men, coming across nude photographs and furtive sexism from male builders, she argued it out with the offenders "boots and all". She campaigned during the Green Bans to save the Rocks area of Sydney.

In a paper to a union conference in 1971, she presented her analysis of why women were poorly represented in unions: that they were exhausted caring for their families as well as working shifts.

Stella was always realistic. She preferred conferences for women to be in the form of workshops where all could speak, rather than one person making a speech and a hundred listening passively. The effect of Stella Nord, and of other CPA feminists, on CPA policies came to light in 1972 when the Party adopted a policy of support for Women's Liberation and for other protest groups.

On 11 December 1981 she was readmitted to the Builders Labourers Federation, after having been expelled for seven years for alleged impropriety. She had made good use of the time, however, earning her BA in philosophy from Sydney University.

Stella also loved to write. She scripted a 20-minute comedy play on equal pay (produced by New Theatre in 1970); two articles for *Tribune* in 1973 ("Women's Lib at the BLF" and "On the Building Site"); and, in 1983, the book for which she is best known: *Migrant women workers — these are your rights*. The book was a huge undertaking during which she conducted around 400 interviews, normally without a tape recorder or taking notes, afraid she would scare off the migrant women she needed to talk to. The book was subsequently translated into half a dozen languages, and Stella insisted those working on the translations be paid. She aimed for the book to not only make migrant women more confident about their rights, but also enlighten male-dominated unions.

Stella was never a "gunna"; she put in the hours of work and the slog to achieve the result she wanted in print.

Her writing could be amusing, as in the play on pre-packaging, "They come in Threes".

In 1985 she wrote a screenplay, "A Thorn on the Site", about a woman who starts work as a builders' labourer: a script that could only have been written by someone who had worked as a builders' labourer on site.

Around 1987–88 Stella and her third partner, Pete Thomas (a noted author), built a house in the Blue Mountains out of Sydney, which was stacked almost to the ceiling with useful documents and papers Stella hoarded.

Jack Mundey, in an interview with Robin Hughes in 2000 for the Australian Biography project, said this:

> People like ... Stella Nord were the leaders of the Builders' Labourers and played as important a part as many of the males in that union[,] and the union before was an all[-] male enclave.

Hers was a life not lived in vain.

Doug Eaton &
Dale Lorna Jacobsen

Information for this obituary was drawn from the following sources:

- The Olsen Family Tree (http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/olsen/tree)
- The Fryer Library (http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/worth_fighting/7.html)
- John Richard Elder, *The NSW/BLF Links with Wider Social Movements 1971–1974* (http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au)
- And a special thanks to Tony Thomas (Pete Thomas' son).

* * * *

The Chinese Presence in Queensland

By Connie Healy

The presence of Chinese workers in Australia has been recorded since at least the early 1800s. Chinese sailors had begun dropping off in Sydney before 1820. Some arranged to be paid off there, some undoubtedly jumped ship, while several Chinese men later married Irish girls.[1] Poor wages and frontier struggles caused graziers on inland stations to look overseas for suitable cheap labour sources. When attempts in 1845 and 1848 with bonded Indian labour and indentured Indian coolie labour failed, they turned to Chinese servants from Amoy. With increased demand, Chinese workers began arriving on the *Nimrod* in December 1848 to be "indentured at the same rate as the Indians". 'By 1852 it was estimated that 1,200–1,500 Chinese and exiles were shepherding half the flocks in the north. Three hundred Chinese shepherds on the Darling Downs alone controlled almost half a million sheep.'[2] In the same year Charles Winchester of the British Consulate at Amoy reported to the superintendent of British trade in China that 2,666 Chinese had left the port for Australia … including those who came from Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and most probably some from Canton, at least about 3,000 must have come into Australia.[3]

The gold rushes in various towns in North Queensland attracted a stream of migrants, Europeans, Chinese, as well as Aboriginals from other areas. Riots with Chinese miners were a frequent occurrence on many fields, the most notable being at Palmer River in 1873 where 18,000 to 20,000 Chinese joined the rush. As the Chinese began to equal half of North Queensland's migrant population, animosity to their presence led to rough treatment and discrimination against them, exacerbated by the revelation in 1877 that Hong Kong was deporting Chinese convicts to Australia, including 50 to Queensland in 1876.[4] Legislation was introduced in 1876 and 1877 to control entry of Chinese to the country. *The Gold Field Amendment Act of 1876* and *The Chinese Immigration Regulation Bill of 1877*,[5] by which a poll tax of £10 was levied on the Chinese, resulted in easing of the flow from China. The Chinese mainly worked on the alluvial fields — but as the gold ran out in these fields, they showed real versatility, turning to a variety of occupations. For example, when working on the big Croydon reefing goldfield, proclaimed in 1886, they took on the work of gardeners, cooks and carriers.[6] But racial antipathy permeated the whole of society and even Chinese market gardeners were driven from the goldfields by 1886–1887 and as late as 1918 there were 'even complaints from Burketown when local Chinese were employed carrying ballot-boxes'.[7]

But many Chinese settled in various towns in Australia from this time onwards, integrating into the community. For example, market gardens were established in Enoggera, a suburb of Brisbane. In the well-documented anti-Chinese riots of 5 May 1888 that occurred all over Brisbane 'many Chinese market-gardeners in Enoggera came into the city to seek protection while those who remained behind to defend their homes armed themselves with guns'.[8] Despite the fact that in this period Chinese represented only three per cent of Queensland's population, the campaign against their presence in Australia knew no bounds.[9] It is interesting to note that two of these market gardens survived the continual harassment. They were still in existence when I came to live in Enoggera in the early 1940s, as I recall the two flourishing market gardens where I purchased vegetables.

The Chinese Seamen's Union

From 1917 to 1925 Chinese mariners working for foreign shipping companies involved in the China trade were nominal members of the Chinese Seamen's Union. Founded in 1913, the CSU engaged in lengthy and successful strikes for better pay and conditions. However in China, the Communists and other militants were purged from the union in October 1932, leaving Chinese seamen with no organisational defence nor any industrial representation.[10] After the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 the Japanese advanced further south in the Pacific region impinging on European and British shipping. More than 20 vessels of the Hong Kong line, the US Blue Funnel and Dutch shipping companies sought refuge in Australian ports from Japanese attack between December 1941 and February 1942. They were manned by almost 2,000 Chinese seamen. The ships were commandeered by the Australian government to form a transport fleet to carry troops and supplies to war zones.

With their contracts terminated, owed months in wages, unable to send home family allotments and classed as stateless aliens, the Chinese seamen turned to the Australian Seamen's Union for help. On 22 January 1942, in the rooms of the Chinese Youth League at 66 Dixon Street, Haymarket, 300 seamen established the Australian branch of the CSU and elected union representatives, with EV Elliott (General Secretary of the Australian Seamen's union (ASU)) and Smith present. Because of the wartime shortage of labour, both the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) and the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) encouraged the development of the Chinese Seamen's Union. In early 1942 the Chinese KMT government's recognition of the Australian CSU and the Maritime Industry Commission (MIC), allowed the union to function under its legal and industrial authority.[11]

Eddie Liu, a well-known and respected figure not only in the Brisbane Chinese community but also in the wider community, arrived in Melbourne in 1937 as a student to complete his secondary education at Christian Brothers College and to join his father, a herbalist, who had been in Australia since the turn of the century. In 1939 Eddie went back to Hong Kong for school holidays and to visit his mother when World War II broke out. He says he was very lucky — he got the last boat from Hong Kong back to Australia, the *SS Taiping*, and eventually arrived back in Melbourne. Recruited by Manpower Department, he was sent north to Brisbane as the supervisor for an American project building landing barges in Bulimba. He remained there for six weeks in charge of 2,000 Chinese seamen engaged in working on this Bulimba Small Ship Division project. These seamen were allowed to stay in Australia until the war was over provided they continued working for the Defence Department, although "they refused to work on boats as they considered it too risky". They had to register with the Immigration Department, which issued them with an Alien Certificate, enabling them to move about freely.[12]

In 1942 Chinese seamen in Brisbane decided to establish their own union and they invited Eddie Liu to become their paid Secretary. He established the Chinese Seamen's Union office in Queen Street Brisbane opposite the General Post Office. Its role was to look after their welfare 'in sickness and health, for burials and working conditions generally'.[13]

Chinese Camp Established in Brisbane

The Pacific War led to the displacement and evacuation of Chinese to Australia from the Pacific Islands of Nauru and Ocean Islands in the Central Pacific in February 1942. In late 1942 and early 1943, 500 Chinese labourers, known as the *Native Labour Company*, arrived in Townsville. Initially employed in a mine near Alice Springs for about 18 months, they were then moved to the Townsville area in about November 1943, where they were housed in Armstrong Barracks. In about March 1944, part of the Unit, about 240 Chinese, was transferred to the *USA Barge Assembly Depot* on Apollo Road at Bulimba in Brisbane. In late 1944 there were only about 150 left in Townsville. The depot was also known as the *Bulimba Apollo Barge Assembly Depot* (USASOS) and as the *Engineer Boat Yard* Bulimba. Another group of the *Native Labour Company* moved to Cairns in June 1944. The *Apollo Barge Assembly Depot* was located on vacant land opposite the Hamilton Wharves on the other side of the Brisbane River.[14]

Approximately 800 Chinese lived in barracks at Camp "A" near Apollo Road at Bulimba and were involved in building landing barges for the

Americans who lived in *Camp Bulimba Camp B*. These were the men of the 534th Engineer Amphibian Regiment 4th Engineer Amphibian Brigade. Five igloos and a slipway into the Brisbane River were built for the landing barge production facility. The tea-tree swamp in the area was filled in … Adjacent to the ferry, was a workshop for repairing small boats, run by the Americans and there were a few Chinese labourers with the area fully enclosed in barbed wire.[15]

In late 1945 I visited the Chinese camp "A" at Bulimba, along with ex-seaman Jim Buckley, at the invitation of Albert Chang. Albert (his Chinese name was Albert Chang Hee Shek),[16] was living at the camp at the time of the Dutch Shipping dispute. Albert was an Indonesian-born Chinese who had been imprisoned by the Dutch for his political activities in Indonesia. He was a Communist and may have been a member of the Chinese Youth League. He had arrived in Australia along with other Indonesians when the Dutch were forced out of Dutch territory in New Guinea. I met Albert at our home in Brisbane where many of the Chinese and Indonesian seamen met at the long table in our dining room and he appeared to act as an interpreter and mentor for them. The walk-off by the Indonesians (which gained the support of Chinese seamen also in port) marked the beginning of the renowned Dutch shipping ban, which held Dutch ships in Australia for four long years. To my knowledge, Albert was the only one of the seamen who spoke English, as well as Chinese and Indonesian. On our visit to the Chinese (or American camp as it was sometimes known) we were surprised to find that the Chinese appeared to be in charge and were running the camp! According to Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, assistant secretary of the Chinese Seamen's Union in Sydney, the Superintendent of the Chinese Camp was Bill Jong.[17]

Chinese camp at Bulimba during World War II. Photo courtesy John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

The "White Australia" Policy

The War ended in 1945 and all these seamen were repatriated to their home countries, but six of them, including Eddie Liu, decided to remain in Australia where he had married.[18] Resulting from racial conflict dating from at least the 1950s, the government decided to restrict immigration and deport any prohibited immigrants. *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901* was introduced for this purpose. It was not until 1978 that Australia's "White Australia" policy was finally abolished, thus permitting the application of an immigration program without racial discrimination, although various strategies have been used to set aside some very unfair aspects of immigration policy.

After the war many non-white refugees had married Australian citizens and wanted to stay. Protests followed the attempt by the first Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, to deport them, but in 1949 it was decided that 800 non-European refugees could stay and that Japanese war brides be admitted also. This was the first step towards a more liberal approach to immigration. A further revision of the *Migration Act* in 1958, the partial abolition in 1966 of the "White Australia" policy and a review as late as 1978 when new policies and programs to liberalise immigration policies were adopted. Today the stated policy for Australia's current migration policy allows people from any country to 'apply to migrate to Australia, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion or language, providing they meet with other criteria set out in law'.[19]

Chinese in Australia Assist Indonesians' Fight for Independence from Dutch Rule

During the war years Indonesia was occupied by the Japanese as Japan moved its forces down the Malayan peninsula in a bid to control the Pacific region. An appeal from the Indonesian trade unions was directed to the 'democratic and peaceful peoples everywhere, and especially to the working class in all countries of the world, to boycott all that is Dutch, all harbours, stores, roadways and other places throughout the world in the event of the outbreak of warfare in Indonesia.'[20]

After the proclamation of the Indonesian republic on 1 September 1945, the Central Committee for Indonesian Independence (CENKIM) in Brisbane called on all Indonesians in Australia to mutiny and asked for Australian support for the nationalist cause.

On the weekend 22–23 September 1945 in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, Indonesian merchant seamen walked off Dutch ships that were being loaded with supplies for Dutch re-occupation of the East Indies. The walk-off marked

the beginning of the boycott of Dutch shipping, which held Dutch ships in Australia for four years.[21] The 500 Indonesian seamen who walked off the ships were housed in the top floor of Trades Hall (the dance Floor) for three weeks. The Chinese community in Brisbane came to the aid of the Indonesians. Blankets were provided from American stores by Chinese working for the Americans at Bulimba Camp, and meals were brought from Chinese restaurants. [22]

Chinese Community and Chinese Seamen's Union Assist War Effort Against Japanese Forces

In 1943–44 the Queensland Trades and Labour Council co-operated with Army authorities to launch a Patriotic Fund Appeal to raise funds to buy "Books for the Boys": the Allied Forces, including Australians, who were fighting Japanese armed forces in New Guinea and the South Pacific.[23] A central part of the campaign was the *Victory Girls* contest. Unions were asked to nominate representatives and establish campaign committees to raise funds for this purpose. At the close of the TLC's £10,000 Appeal, the Chinese Seamen's Union (with the support of the Chinese Community) and their Victory Girl Miss Wong Hong Choy, gained first place as they raised the most money. The Victory Girl candidate for the Waterside Workers, Miss Connie Lovegrove, gained second place. [Miss Lovegrove is, of course, Connie Healey, who can be seen on the cover photo – Ed.] Organised under the slogan 'She helps to Keep the Ships Moving' her campaign committee, headed by Mr Les Hudson (a member of the union and a former Queensland Rugby League player), raised almost £1,000.[24] A Victory Girl Ball was held in the City Hall on Tuesday, 20 June 1944, at which prizes were presented.

Chinatown in Brisbane

Early Chinese immigrants to Australia established Chinatowns in several major cities such as Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. In Brisbane a small Chinatown existed in Albert and Mary Streets. It was situated in a very seedy part of the city where a number of brothels, gambling joints and small shops subsisted until after World War II. Most "respectable" people avoided walking down these or nearby streets in the city. However, the development of Chinese communities in Brisbane was curtailed by the "White Australia" policy of the early 20th century. But since the adoption of a Multicultural policy by the Australian government in the 1970s many more Chinese from Hong Kong, China and other South Asian countries and Indonesia immigrated to Australia.

The Chinese Club, opened in Auchenflower in 1957, was damaged extensively by the 1974 floods. The property was sold and the club then moved to Deagon and finally to the

Valley. It has now been sold again. Eddie Liu played an active role in the club for many years, and in the renovation of the derelict Chinese temple in Breakfast Creek, organising for its restoration and return of the land and tenure of "Joss House" to the Temple Society in about 1966.[25]

Chinese Joss House, Breakfast Creek, 1886. Photo courtesy John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

It was not until 29 January 1987 that Chinatown was officially opened in Fortitude Valley (or "The Valley" as it was popularly known). It became the hub of the commercial and cultural centre of Chinese activity in Brisbane, with Chinese supermarkets, restaurants and furniture emporiums selling Chinese furniture and artefacts. Streets were named in English and Chinese characters. It marked the recognition of Brisbane's Chinese population as an integral part of a multicultural city.

After many years of difficulties and hardships, the Chinese in Queensland showed remarkable resilience in overcoming racial vilification and non-acceptance by the predominantly Anglo-Saxon population. Today, Chinese newspapers are published in both Cantonese and Mandarin. The Australian public broadcaster, SBS, provides television and radio programming in both languages. Over the years the numbers of Chinese in the population fluctuated as many were deported in the early years or returned to their homeland, China, voluntarily, frequently because they found a lack of acceptance in this country. But According to the 2006 Australian Census, 206,591 Australians declared they were born in China, 71,803 in Hong Kong and together with the disparate remainder, accounted for 304,775 or 1.5 per cent of the total counted by the census. Sydney and Melbourne have large Chinese populations while Brisbane registered 50,908 or 2.9 per cent of the total, whilst the largest portion of Taiwanese-born residents are in Brisbane (34 per cent).[26]

Despite relatively small numbers in relation to the total Australian population, Chinese-Australians can be proud of their contribution to the community, particularly in academia, in politics and the arts and entertainment. Chek Ling has recorded many of the moving stories of the many who endured and survived.[27]

Notes

1 Eric Rolls, *Sojourners: the epic story of China's Centuries old relationship with Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992, pb 1993, p12.
2 Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2007, p.65.
3 Eric Rolls, *Sojourners*, p.46.
4 Eric Rolls, ibid., p.248.
5 Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland*, pp.106–7, 170.
6 Eric Rolls, *Sojourners*, p.215.
7 Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland*, pp.129–131.
8 Raymond Evans, & Carole Ferrier, (eds), *Radical Brisbane, an unruly history*, *Anti-Chinese Riot, 1888*, p.70, The Vulgar Press, 2004, p.70.
9 Raymond Evans, & Carole Ferrier, (eds), ibid, p.70.
10 Drew Cottle, *Forgotten foreign militants: The Chinese Seamen's Union in Australia*, *1942–1946*, *Rough Reds Australian stories of rank and file organising*, pdf download, p1.
11 Drew Cottle, ibid.
12 Phone conversation with Eddie Liu by author, 20 June 2009.
13 Eddie Liu, *This is my life story in Australia*, p.3. Made available to author by Mr Liu.
14 Eric Rolls, *Citizens. Flowers and the Wide Sea,* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996, p.476. They were sent to Bulimba to assemble barges from pre-fabricated components made in the US … In 1994 a shipbuilding yard was still next door to the barracks Norman Wright & Sons, established 1909.
15 Peter Dunn, Australia@War www.ozatwar.com - dunn/ozatwar/chinese bulimba.htm, accessed 2 Mar 2009.
16 Phone conversation of the author with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang on 18 June 2009. He was assistant secretary of CSU's Sydney branch and knew Albert, whom he saw in Sydney just prior to the latter's repatriation to Indonesia.
17 Ibid.
18 Eddie Liu, *His Life history in Australia*, and Connie Healy, *Recollections of the 'Black Armada' in Brisbane*, *Vintage Reds* (on line) Australian Stories of rank-and-file organising.
19 *Media: Fact Sheet 8*, *Abolition of the White Australia Policy*, p.3.
20 Margo Beasley, *Wharfies. The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, Halstead Press in association with Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, 1996, p.128. A quotation from the Minutes of the Federal Council Waterside Workers' Federation Minutes, 24 July 1947.
21 The embargo began in Brisbane and held up 559 vessels. See Margo Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 129–130.
22 Connie Healy, *Recollections of the 'Black Armada' in Brisba*ne*, Vintage Reds Australian stories of rank and file organising.*
23 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 March 1944, p.2.
24 *Port News*, official organ Waterside Workers Brisbane Branch, June 1944, p.1, and *Qld Guardian*, 29 March 1944, p.2.
25 Eddie Liu, OBE, OAM.
26 *Chinese Australian,* From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia.
27 Chek Ling, *Plantings in a New Land, Stories of Survival, Endurance and Emancipation*, Society of Chinese Australian Academics of Queensland, Box 2434 Brisbane and Cathay Club Ltd, Box 1582, Fortitude Valley, 2001.

The "First Line of Defence": Rockhampton and District Women During World War II — Preparation and Readiness*

By Helen Griffin

Rockhampton, settled in the late 1850s on the bank of the Fitzroy River, was a busy beef production and service town in Central Queensland when World War 11 placed extra responsibilities on its municipal authorities and citizens. With its population tripled through the "occupation" of Rockhampton and district by up to 70,000 American troops, the whole fabric of the small city was geared to the war effort. It was an opportunity for women to demonstrate that they were able, not only to work on the home front — the traditional "second line of defence" — in an expanded role because of the American presence, but also to prepare for a direct contribution through an organised and concerted effort to be ready when needed in the auxiliary and paramilitary services.

Continuity and Change

Activities in the local branches of the Women's National Emergency Legion (WNEL), the Women's Auxiliary Transport Service (WATS) and the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) were an early, practical response by women in preparation for a national emergency. Newly acquired paramedical skills through membership of such organisations allowed more women to become involved in the nursing services — a mostly traditional area of involvement for women. However, training also permitted a testing of new areas of employment and activity, and women, for the first time in Australia's history, became directly involved in the women's auxiliaries of the Army, Air Force and Navy.[1]

Although both government and the media made a conscious effort to align women's independence, military activity, and at times heavy manual work with femininity when manpower shortages became pressing, women hardly needed that kind of reassurance (see Figure 1). Women joined up because of the glamour and excitement certainly, but women also wanted to take a more active role than had been possible in the past. Mushrooming women's paramilitary groups by mid-1941 demonstrated this push for recognition and assistance, which initially proved to be something of a nuisance to male officialdom.[2]

High Visibility of Women in the Services

The uniforms and associated glamour, along with advertising campaigns, ensured the exposure of women in the services and paramilitary groups, while local training activities and the enlistment of local women attracted

Figure 1. Photo courtesy Australian War Memorial.

their fair share of positive coverage. Women were featured beside their male counterparts with details of training and enlistment accompanied by photographs. The extent of British women's involvement on a larger scale provided an example for Rockhampton and district women, and in 1943 high profile visitor, Eleanor Roosevelt, made time to address the women of Rockhampton in Connor Park.[3]

Flight Officer B Dow told mothers that they need have no concern about their girls, as the Service took special care of them in every way. Interestingly, this campaign, in August 1943, took into consideration the post-war opportunities that could be afforded by an association with the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). Women accepted would have the chance of many specialised technical jobs and thus be equipped for a commercial and industrial career after the war.[4]

This approach was out of line with accepted discourse — what most women experienced, understood and accepted (see Figures 2–3). Their involvement was to be temporary: an adventure. However, some still required further reassurance on this matter. For example, when the Transport Union objected to members of the WATS accompanying drivers of Brisbane city firms' delivery wagons, Mrs R Philp said:

> We have not the remotest intention to put any girl into a permanent job as a driver … there may be fighting for all able-bodied men to do and if that ever comes we shall be trained to step in and play our parts.[5]

Not surprisingly, high visibility had its costs. Similar to the sensationalist nature of coverage the American troops attracted in England and Australia, were attitudes to women in the services. This may be one reason why Dow felt reassurance about the care of female recruits was in order. In November 1942 Mr Hanlon, Minister for Health and Home Affairs, found it necessary to defend the morals of servicewomen in the North, and

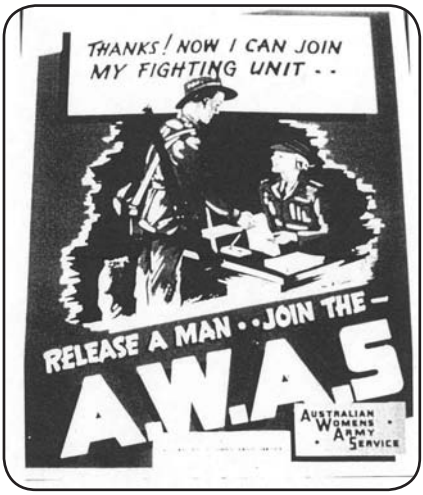

Figure 2. Photo courtesy Australian War Memorial.

to denounce the slanderous stories circulating. However, according to the reports from superior officers, the 500 WAAAFs were all doing a first class job. Enlisted women, not surprisingly, attracted much positive coverage from organisations such as the Country Women's Association (CWA) and local schools, as reported in the *Rockhampton Girls Grammar (RGG) Magazine*. [6]

Readiness for Duty Through Training

Harriet Voss, and other community leaders, were influential in the effective channelling of women into such training pools as WNEL, WATS and the VADs. Voss saw preparation and readiness as being all-important for purposeful work. The government was to gratefully use these trainees when the acute shortage of men for employment in the Air Force as wireless telegraph operators became apparent. Demands from the other services followed quickly. Three hundred and fifty women had reached various stages of training in voluntary organisations and were available after further short training courses early in 1941.[7]

WNEL

WNEL was one of the first patriotic bodies formed after the outbreak of war. The Rockhampton branch was established on 13 October 1939. The girl legionnaires received training in home nursing, signalling and Morse code, air raid precautions, first aid, shooting, drill, motor mechanics and transport driving. Regular training

Figure 3. Photo courtesy Australian War Memorial.

sessions and field days were features of the group. More than 100 girls received initial training from WNEL. The civil defence organisations were the first to make use of these legionnaires in the fire squads, Air Raid Precaution (ARP), and in the operation of the control station of the Voluntary Air Observers Corps (VAOC).[8]

Grace Darling Murray, the first Rockhampton woman to enrol as a wireless operator in the WAAAF, was a member of WNEL in Rockhampton. Murray was well qualified, holding certificates in first aid, home nursing and invalid cooking, motor mechanics and signalling.[9]

WNEL member, D McCarthy, one of two women selected from Central Queensland in 1941, passed the necessary tests to start work as a fabric worker. Her duties entailed making material for the wings of aeroplanes, and repairing damaged planes by replacing patches on the wings.[10]

For Gloria McPherson, WNEL was the first important step towards achieving her goal of entering the services. Her boyfriend had enlisted and she wanted to contribute in the same way. McPherson felt strongly that priorities were wrong. Her boyfriend, risking his life fighting for his country, was earning less than she was in a comfortable office. At first her parents refused her permission to enlist and she joined WNEL as the next best option until her mother relented. After the war and marriage, McPherson and her husband decided that they could manage without her re-entering the workforce.[11]

The VADs

Like WNEL, the various VADs (see Figure 4) were also a launching pad for direct service into the auxiliaries and the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS), as well as a training option for many women who were unable to commit to full-time duty. Hazel Mitchell, for example, was needed at home in her parents' hotel at The Caves. Her father was an invalid and the war years were busy, especially when Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA) guests numbered up to nine at a time.[12]

The Red Cross VADs were originally trained by Dr and Mrs Paul (Harriet) Voss, who relinquished this duty around November 1939. Training was continued by the Red Cross, the State Joint VAD Council depending on the Red Cross branches for its continuity. There was antagonism in the local community towards the centralised nature of Red Cross control, and the resignation of the Vosses was possibly a result of the consequent loss of autonomy for local branches.[13]

VAD training objectives were to prepare the women for any service in a state of emergency. Training areas

included first aid, invalid and other cooking, catering and canteen work, home nursing, air raid precautions, anti-gas and transport work, Morse code and signalling, mechanical repairs, and evacuation procedures.[14]

Dorothy Ross moved to the Greenslopes Hospital, Brisbane, in 1943 from one of the Red Cross VADs. The threat of imminent invasion and the resulting excitement and patriotic feelings motivated this move. After the war, Ross's involvement as a VAD, and later in the AAMWS, re-directed her into a career of nursing in which she progressed to the position of matron at the Lady Goodwin Hospital, Rockhampton. Maggie Toms, another VAD graduate, also became a member of the AAMWS. From being on call at Rockhampton Base Hospital at weekends for a number of years, Toms served in hospitals at Redbank, Greenslopes and the Atherton Tablelands, before she was called home on compassionate grounds.[15]

Despite the allegations that boyfriends in the militia were training some of the women in certain things in their spare time, and that some women were wearing their uniforms without earning the privilege, Rockhampton women took their training seriously: 519 passed First Aid exams and 319 passed Home Nursing exams.[16]

Rockhampton branch of Red Cross VAD (No 1 Detachment). Photo: *Central Queensland Herald*.

Adventure and Patriotism Foiled or Delayed

Not all women were able to enlist. Like Hazel Mitchell, Joan Hempenstall was not given permission to enlist until later in the war. Edna Royal's sister keenly wanted to join up so removed her glasses thinking she would have a better chance, but failed her medical. Edna Royal was so eager she attempted to join the AWLA as soon as she left school, before her father stopped her on account of her age. Later she became a clerk in the WAAAF at the age of 18. Thelma McCabe (Mt Morgan), posted in Townsville as a nurse during the war, also tried to enlist. She was attracted to the better conditions, marvellous privileges and more interesting life. MacCabe was rejected, as the authorities wanted nurses to remain in their current posts in case of invasion. Similarly Gus Moore, matron of Hillcrest, was encouraged to stay

in Rockhampton. Ivy Baker did not go: she felt she was 'doing a good job slaving here'.[17]

One member of the AANS, Myrtle McDonald, who had trained at the Rockhampton Base Hospital, paid the ultimate sacrifice. She was killed when her ship went down at the bombing of Singapore.[18]

The AWLA

In October 1942 there was an urgent appeal for 2,000 women for the AWLA. National spirited women were required, and it was promised that the conditions would be good (see Figure 5). Similar to other campaign drives, the rigours and tough conditions were glossed over or hardly mentioned. As for men, there was a moral obligation to volunteer, and for some, the AWLA was the most convenient. Gloria Dixon was too young for the auxiliary services so decided on the AWLA for both patriotic and personal reasons. Carlton uses her interviews with Avian Thomasson and Norma Schatowski in Rockhampton to illustrate this point. The Land Army was a means of escape from boredom: a chance for excitement and an independent life. Elfreda Cooke decided to enlist because she did not fancy city life and was aware she may have been sent anywhere under the government's Manpower regulations. She enjoyed her work looking after poultry, tending crops of pineapples, peanuts, grain, maize, cotton and sunflowers — the first experimental sunflower crop to be grown in the area. Cooke had to individually turn down the heads of the flowers to stop rain rotting the seeds. She stayed on in the job after the war and received rates of an experienced, agricultural worker.[19]

Figure 5. Photo courtesy Australian War Memorial.

Rockhampton's own army of women land workers in WNEL possibly softened attitudes towards AWLA workers to be stationed in the district, despite expectations of resistance to the employment of women on the land by the General Director of Manpower, in 1942. Local residents saw the more practical problem of accommodation as the main difficulty with women workers. In one case, it was the distance from town and the lack of entertainment

that prevented a Parkhurst dairy family from having a land army girl, despite their labour difficulties. Some women used local hotel accommodation until other arrangements could be made. Hazel Mitchell remembered the local farmers collecting and dropping the girls every day from her parents' hotel at The Caves where they were boarding. Ted Lindley built quarters on his farm to permit two of the girls to stay.[20]

Mr JP Conachan, in his address to the Central Queensland Advancement League on the girls' performance as cotton pickers, painted a very positive picture. In August 1943, when an influx of 105 AWLA women visited Rockhampton following a three-month cotton-picking season in the Callide and Dawson valleys, there were impressive reports of 100 lbs of fluff cotton being picked daily despite the conditions.[21]

A World of New Experiences

Many local women had the opportunity — for most it was the first opportunity — to live, train and work with other women away from home. Land army women usually had the chance to experience camp life as well as being billeted singly or in small numbers.

Ruth Carter described her time with the Royal Australian Cypher Office:

> it was a wonderful experience in those years packed full of excitement, work, interest and a deep feeling of responsibility towards the country which in our humble way we believe we helped to defend.[22]

Kit Walters enlisted on the suggestion of a colleague. Walters moved from her position of matron at Isisford into the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) where she served at the No. 2 Camp Hospital at Chermside. Walters carried vivid memories of her trip south passing northbound trains with trucks full of white crosses, and a carriage load of AANS women dressed most unsuitably in their tweed suits and felt hats. She recalled the totally different world in a military hospital: the short-arm inspections, the confusing terminology of army routine and the interminable darning of lisle stockings until informed by younger AANS recruits that it was possible just to line up for a re-issue of stockings.[23]

Patricia Ryan recalled her trepidation before reporting to recruiting officer Captain Brown during enlistment procedures. However, Ryan's fears disappeared when she discovered that Brown was an old school friend, Mildred Hunting.[24]

After the favourite sport in the Services of filling in forms, it was the routine that Maud Woolcock remembered. Making the bed was more like unmaking it in civilian life.

> The palliasse was folded in three and placed at the head of the bed, next the three blankets were folded and rolled and set on the palliasse so that the blue stripes were exactly in line, and on top of them came the pillow, the whole forming a neat pile.[25]

Dorothy MacKelvie in the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) stationed in New Guinea recalled the discomfort ("those palliasses"), and all the red tape. When the Americans arrived, conditions improved markedly: overnight there were canteens and comfortable messes. MacKelvie remembered the terrible trouble women experienced with their Modess supplies (nicknamed Vitabrits in this particular unit). Besides their undisputed practical value, their decorative use, unexplored by the manufacturers, provided embarrassment as well as an aesthetic dimension when pads were festooned gaily on the native's goats: hung from their ears, horns and down their tails.[26]

A touch of exotica — unusual in wartime — was a highlight for Sister Dulcie Williams (Mt Morgan). While stationed in Cairo at an army hospital, Williams was one of the first nurses to attend to King Farouk and three of his staff following a car accident. Before the King left, by way of thanks he presented decorations to the matron and nursing staff.[27]

At times, however, the nerve-wracking and soul-destroying work was also recalled. According to Gladys Weisse, who served in the signals section of the WAAAF, the work was hardest: there were 'no breaks in routine … quite a few breakdowns'. Walters felt that the life was not glamorous, and living with 23 girls was a 'real eye opener'. Despite this, the general opinion was: 'I'd do it again'.[28]

Conclusion

Rockhampton and district women responded well to the call to help defend their country for patriotic and personal reasons. Both on the local and wider stage women proved that they could handle new responsibilities well. Their experiences on the "front line of defence" provided a relatively brief but memorable interruption to their lives. Living with other women, away for home, and working together in the national interest was a unifying, maturing and generally enriching experience.

Notes

*This article has been adapted from Helen Griffin's dissertation, *Rockhampton and District Women in World War 11*, submitted in partial fulfilment for a BA, October 1982.

1 There were 8,846 women in the nursing services and over 4,000 aides in base hospitals in Australia. One thousand women in New Guinea from

the AAMWS gave support to military nursing and medical staff. In B Lewis, 'Australian Women in War 1939–1945', in *Agora*, HTAV, February 1982, p. 3.

2 P Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939–1941*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1952, p. 401.

3 L McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia 1981, p. 123.

4 *Morning Bulletin (MB*), 21 August 1943 (Rockhampton City Council (RCC) Clippings).

5 The *Evening News (EN*), 27 November 1940, p. 5.

6 IN Moles, 'Townsville During World War Two', in *Lectures on North Queensland History*, James Cook University 1974, p. 229, as footnote quoted in D Wectar. 'The Aussie and the Yank', *Atlantic Monthly*, 177 (May 1946), pp. 52–56; in N Harper, *Australia and the US*, Melbourne 1971, pp. 154–155; *Central Queensland Herald (CQH*), 5 November 1942, p. 19; Queensland CWA Central Division *17th Annual Report*, 1 September 1941–31 August 1942, p. 4; *RGGS Magazine* 1939, pp. 51–53 & 1940, p. 45.

7 *MB*, 18 May 1939; Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, p. 503.

8 *MB*, 24 March 1942 (RCC Newspaper Clippings); *CQH*, 12 April 1941, p. 37.

9 *CQH*, 29 May 1941, p. 17.

10 *CQH*, 15 September 1941, p. 31.

11 G McPherson phone interview. (All interviews cited in this article conducted 1980 and 1981.)

12 H Mitchell phone interview.

13 *CQH*, 30 November 1939, p. 17; T. Ritchie interview; L. Twigg phone interview.

14 For details of the training program and personnel see *CQH*, 30 November 1939, p. 17.

15 D Ross interview; M Toms phone interview.

16 *EN*, 22 May 1939 (RCC Newspaper Clippings).

17 J Hempenstall (Sydney), E Royal, T McCabe (Mt Morgan), G Moore (Yeppoon) phone interviews; I Baker interview.

18 K Walters interview.

19 *CQH*, 1 October 1942, p. 23; H. Wilson, 'Glamour and Chauvinism: *The Australian Women's Weekly* 1940–1954', *Occasional Papers in Media Studies*, No. 15, NSW Institute of Technology, February 1982, p. 11; P. Carlton, *The AWLA in Queensland July 1942–December 1945*. BA (Hons) Thesis, Adelaide 1980, pp. 45, 47–49, 69.

20 Ibid., p. 74; *CQH*, 27 August 1942, p. 5; M. Birkbeck phone interview.

21 *CQH*, 27 August 1942, p. 5; *CQH*, 5 August 1945 (RCC Newspaper Clippings).

22 *RGGS Magazine* 1945, p. 62.

23 K Walters interview.

24 Sister John (Range Convent) interview.

25 *RGGS Magazine* 1945, p. 65.

26 D MacKelvie interview.

27 *CQH*, 9 March 1944, p. 9.

28 D MacKelvie interview; G Weisse & G McPherson phone interviews.

Women at Work in Rockhampton and District During World War II:Employment Opportunities

By Helen Griffin

Women's voluntary work and involvement in the auxiliary services during the war years was lauded and acknowledged in the community. However, their contribution to the workforce was largely ignored. Women themselves viewed their work as their contribution to the war effort — within the constraints set by the prevailing ideology in which reproduction and nurturing were women's primary roles. Many women assumed new responsibilities and ventured into new areas of employment — some of which were to remain open to women after the war. The manpower shortage was the catalyst needed to draw women from the home, and it often meant a halt or interruption to careers and plans when women were used to replace men. There was plenty of work in traditional areas of women's employment and a brisk demand from local businesses because of the drain on womanpower through the new, attractive option of the auxiliary services. The substantial American presence of up to 70,0000 troops meant jobs in the workforce and in the home, with a not surprising impact on the young female workforce. Women's paid work provided a vital, cheap source of labour at any time. However, Beaton's views on women's work becoming visible in time of war are possibly more applicable to the national arena: in Rockhampton, women's paid contribution remained ignored. Women's own perceptions and community attitudes in a provincial city ensured this.[1]

Disruption and Change

For many women, the war years offered new experiences and employment opportunities that developed and enhanced skills, and created new or unexpected pathways. All experiences were not positive. A chosen lifestyle was interrupted when Ida Kent was forced to return from her mission work in New Guinea. Kent became Matron of the boys at St George's Home for Orphans, Yeppoon, until she was able to return to her post. Kent had opted to stay in New Guinea earlier in the war, but by 1943 it was too dangerous.[2]

On farms in the district women stood in for absent brothers — interrupting or preventing a chosen career before marriage. Nell McLaughlin, an ex-Rockhampton Girls Grammar student, helped with station work. And as soon as Alexis Gilmour finished her schooling at St Faith's she returned to her parents' property, *Mt Kelman* (near Springsure), where she worked as a jillaroo:

> mustering, branding, dipping, drafting, dehorning the yearling steers, repairing fences, replacing log crossings in the creek after heavy rain, snaring wallabies, tracking and scalping dingoes and collecting 75d each from the Bauhinia Shire Council.[3]

Again, in the absence of the men, women were also required to run the family business. Eva Stone went straight from school into the branch shop of her family's cycling business. Phyl Landsberg, Stone's eldest sister, put family first when she interrupted a successful teaching career to manage the branch shop when her younger brother enlisted. Following her eldest brother's enlistment she moved to the main shop, with Stone looking after the branch office. Both women considered the cycling venture their chief war effort. During a Brisbane interview, they pointed to the importance of bicycles for the numerous shift workers.[4]

Dr Doris Skyring carried on the medical practice when her colleague, Dr TA Parry joined the AIF. Another female doctor, Dr Harris from Bathurst, was appointed to the Rockhampton Base Hospital during the war years. This appointment triggered considerable hostility and controversy in the Rockhampton Hospital Board and City Council.[5]

In the teaching profession, no new staff was employed, and the remaining men and women experienced major disruptions. Vegetable gardens, cotton plots and air raid trenches adorned school playgrounds, air raid practices interrupted school routines, and staff shortages meant a re-shuffling of staff and timetables. One Central Girls school teacher recalled rolling bandages, making camouflage nets, working on census forms in readiness for evacuation when not teaching.[6]

Ada Reaney, a commercial teacher, became an instant expert on the boll weevil when she was seconded to the Agriculture and Stock Department as a typist, while male teachers and parents were digging trenches at Rockhampton High School early in 1942. Reaney also worked three nights a week at the Technical College, for which time-and-a-half was promised but not received. There were no complaints according to Reaney.[7]

Labour Shortages for Domestic Work

Between 1933 and 1947 the numbers of women employed in domestic service in Australia dropped from 125,000 to 42,000. This national figure was reflected in Rockhampton and district with shortages of labour for positions available.[8]

Irene Bambrick turned to domestic work in her father-in-law's Lakes

Creek Hotel when she lost her job in her father's cane goods business, which closed when the war prevented the importation of cane and seagrass. The hours were long with no labour-saving devices. When Bambrick left to have a baby her employers had difficulty finding a young female replacement. Later, older women were employed. Similarly, Gladys Parker worked in her mother-in-law's guest house during the war years. Her duties included providing breakfast for batches of soldiers from the nearby Archer Street barracks.[9]

Grace Turner had to knock work back — there was such a demand for part-time assistance in private homes. Turner worked in various private homes as well as in the Union Hotel before she found work more to her liking on a station west of Dingo, earning £2/16s a week for cooking and laundry. Old girls from Rockhampton Girls Grammar living at the University Women's College in Brisbane were required to do their share of domestic chores because of labour shortages. In 1944 the roster system was still in force.[10]

When St Faith's moved to Barcaldine in 1943, the School Chaplain, Mr Kinly, his wife, church officers and members of various church societies and guilds helped to overcome the severe domestic shortage. At St George's Home for Orphans, when situated at Yeppoon, the somewhat heavier duties of the sisters, teaching and domestic staff were noted with appreciation by the Executive Council — one instance of acknowledgement on record. In 1944, the following year, it was necessary to keep back two of the girls who had reached the employment age of 14 years.[11]

The families not affected by labour shortages were those that could afford the live-in retainer. Evelyn Thornbury lived with the Lawrence family for 17 years after leaving St Georges Home for Orphans. During the war years she accompanied Mrs Lawrence to the American Red Cross where she helped with waitressing on her day off.[12]

Thelma Ritchie was another woman closely associated with one family. She commenced duties in the Voss household as a housemaid, and later became the nanny for their only son for eight years. During the war years Ritchie, part of the family and a companion to Mrs Harriet Voss, shared the excitement of her employers' involvement and socialisation with the American troops, and their commitments towards the war effort.[13]

Nursing

Generally nurses saw the war years in a favourable light despite the fact that nurses remaining at home bore the brunt of shortages and wartime conditions. In Brisbane, 1941, the Queensland board of the Australian Trained Nurses

Association abandoned its intention to push for better conditions and salaries for the duration of the war with patriotic reasons behind this decision.[14]

Gertrude James recalls the valuable assistance provided by the Voluntary Aid Detachments at the Rockhampton Base Hospital, the short supply of equipment and stretched resources. By way of example, James recalls the arrival of troop trains. Thirty to 40 men at a time would stay for a day or two in transit. Most had malaria and some were accident cases. The sister on duty had to cook eggs and bacon whenever the troops arrived. From 1942 the nurses on duty would get terrible frights with Americans walking in at any time during the night looking for female company. Ivy Baker remembered being 'a bit of machinery with the work piled on'. However, staff efforts failed to impress the matron, who considered staff 'very lethargic'.[15]

Kit Walters remembered preparing a woman for labour during brown-out with a torch under the bedclothes, while there were 'plenty of blazing lights to be seen' on the Range where the American officers' parties raged. Gus Moore, matron at Hillcrest during the war years, commented on the way the staff worked hard and co-operated together. However, not all women felt that war was a consideration when job demarcation was involved. While Sadie Spresser was Assistant Matron at Westwood, inmates and officialdom alike came to resent what they saw as her arrogant ways. Her refusal to give an inmate a bedpan — and her Prussian extraction — was, according to one inmate, '… the sort of thing our gallant troops in Europe are fighting and it should not be allowed'.[16]

Editha Haynes, who worked with Miss E Duckman and Mrs R Poole in the Maternal and Child Welfare Clinic, moved to the Casualty and Outpatients Departments at the Rockhampton Base Hospital after the war, taking acting positions as Deputy Matron and Matron because of continuing staff shortages. During the war, Haynes took on the St Lawrence and Ogmore clinics when they were added to their workload. Haynes used to arrive at St Lawrence after travelling on what was known as "the Midnight Horror". With the disruption of railway timetables, she often arrived back in Rockhampton closer to 11am than 7am and was required to go straight to the clinic.[17]

New Job Opportunities

Experiences and opportunities varied considerably. Joan Hempenstall, as a young woman from a well-to-do family, was expected to remain at home. The war years broke this pattern and Hempenstall, and women like her, were able to enter the workforce — in Hempenstall's case, when the Australian Government mobilised both manpower and economic resources after Japan entered the war. Refused

permission to work or to enlist earlier in the war, she became a telephonist in the family firm, James Stewart Co. Pty Ltd, in 1942. Later Hempenstall returned to the workforce and pursued her educational interests, studying for a Master of Political Science in Sydney.[18]

At the Rockhampton City Council extra women were put on to handle areas connected with the war — processing war-damage insurance and compiling the pay and time sheets for special war employment, such as the upgrading of the airport. Thelma Cheshire, who had worked at the Council when single, went back as a married woman. (Single women, once married, lost their jobs in local government well into the '70s in Rockhampton.) Joan Ilott recalled the long hours — a working day sometimes extended from 7am to 9pm — and the black-outs and brown-outs did not help working conditions.[19]

In the Johnston's bus company, Florence Johnston became Rockhampton's first woman bus driver. Another young woman, Joyce Spyve, was employed by Hopkins's bus company from 1942–1945. The Johnstons had the Lakes Creek run, and Heather Carson remembered Johnston driving the big clipper and wearing overalls: 'We thought she was wonderful'. Johnston earned a man's wage besides an excellent reputation.[20]

According to Vera Tyson, Aboriginal women made their own contribution to the war effort. Tyson, along with a number of her friends, was a seasonal worker. She picked beans, potatoes and onions, and cut cane.[21]

There was more responsibility but no immediate reward for Stella Newton, promoted from clerk-typist to an invoice clerk in charge of a section at Walter Reid and Company. Her duties included handling the big orders for stations and stores, as well as training younger women who, once trained, were often snapped up by local businesses offering slightly higher wages. Newton regretted missing out on service life, but was glad for the job. It was not until the late '60s that Newton demanded and received payment for overtime and the male award for the responsible position she continued to hold in the firm until her retirement.[22]

Another typist at Walter Reids, Thelma Baker, also took on extra responsibilities in a traditional male sphere. Baker was responsible for outwards and inwards consignments of galvanised iron, spouting and ridging, and had to ensure that small consignments from a Newcastle (NSW) firm were divided fairly between the 20 or more plumbers waiting on materials. After the war, Baker managed the Travel Department in the same firm.[23]

The local media suffered from both the loss of staff and the shortage of newsprint. One local journalist to leave

was Ann Murtagh, who had written under the pseudonyms Uncle Sam and Cousin Ruth until 1941. Murtagh took on the position of considerable importance as Queensland Controller of the Australian Women's Army Service.[24]

Two women stepped into men's jobs in the Postmaster's Office for the duration of the war and returned to the Phonogram Section, a traditional female area, after the war. One of these women recalled being very well treated, but remained on the female assistants' pay scale. Women also made their first appearance in the Mailing Room at this time.[25]

At the Lakes Creek Meatworks, where women had been part of the workforce since 1938, more jobs were available because of the shortage of men and the rising demand for canned meats. In 1940 women were introduced into the Canning Department; their duties included weighing cans and hand packing sheep and lamb tongues.[26]

Merle Carson worked in the Export (or Packing) Department, where women were always a feature of the landscape. The female workforce peaked at 250 during war years, with two forewomen appointed. The Packing Department worked around the clock with three shifts operating to meet the needs of the Armed Forces and allies.[27]

Mrs M Schulz's husband was not happy with the idea of his wife working, but eventually accepted the practical economic sense of his wife living on her wage and saving most of his soldier's pay. Schulz worked in the office, first as an assistant, and later in charge of payments in the Egg Section. A total of 407 women were employed in the Meatworks during the war years, including the 15 women who worked in the Laundry.[28]

The employment of so many young women had its difficulties for the Company:

> [The girls were] … having such a good time with Yanks. If they are not going to a dance, they are tired out from the dance the night before and do not turn up.[29]

The complaints were not one sided. The scandalous conditions under which the girls worked on the preserving floor in the new potato factory were only one bone of contention in 1943. Both men and women were involved in a three-week stoppage from 30 April to 12 May 1943 over the suspension of foreman Mr EG Stafford. Non-union staff was used from the office to help out during the strike, but the use of non-union labour did not become an issue, as was the case in the 1943 Duly and Hansford strike in Sydney.[30]

Post-war work opportunities for women in the three departments

continued until the mid-1950s, with new areas of employment available in the 1960s.

Approximately 12 women were employed in the Rockhampton Office of Queensland Railway in a new area of employment for women: in the General Manager's office as steno-typists. Before the war, women had been employed on duties in the refreshment rooms, and office and carriage cleaning. In a Worker's Employment Board decision in November 1943, permission was granted for the employment of women in 33 different grades of work in Queensland Railways. Rates of pay were fixed at 80 per cent of male rates; although juvenile women were to be paid 100 per cent of the rate paid to juvenile male workers.[31]

Employment Opportunities Through the American Presence

Two local women worked on the American switchboard at the Town Hall. More traditional employment openings existed in the American Red Cross for administrative and canteen work. Claire Geddes' wages jumped from £3–£4 at NZ Dalgetty Loan Company to £11 a week on the administrative staff of the American Red Cross. A small number of women were employed in the Base Section Engineers Office, and some became drivers for the American Army.[32]

Workloads increased for local dressmakers. Win Mason recalled that in Emery and Connors there was plenty of work — especially in embroidering Australiana onto tablecloths and other linen goods purchased by the Americans as souvenirs.[33]

Plenty of commercial opportunities were generated in the home by the American presence. Women and couples washed for the troops on a private basis, and there were a couple of larger private concerns that took the pressure off the commercial laundries in the city. Americans were generous with pay, and stories of fortunes made and notes found in pockets were often recounted. Grace Turner recalled how the Americans loved her mother and her Irish friend, Molly Kirsten; the visitors appreciated their card playing skills as much as their efforts in the laundry.[34]

Aboriginal and South-Sea-Islander community members also participated in this enterprise. Evelyn Parter from Joskeleigh washed and ironed for a unit assisted by her husband, who carried the water and handled the payments. Mabel Edmund remembered how she and her brother had to cart water from the Council's water pipe in North Rockhampton in a 100-gallon drum in their old horse and cart. Edmunds also ironed the handkerchiefs and underpants.[35]

A few enterprising women, in a traditional sphere of women's work, used the favourable conditions brought about by a surfeit of men. There was no established house in Rockhampton, but a number of private homes operated nearby, including Emu Park. It was these so-called amateur women who caused the authorities so much concern because of the spread of venereal disease. Rockhampton had been a clean city, but in early 1943 there were six cases reported.[36]

Conclusion

Work was an economic necessity for many women in Rockhampton and district during the war years. Opportunities arose that created financial benefits and temporary or new career pathways through extra training, work experience, and the chance to prove that women could handle new roles. However, much of women's paid work and their assumption of men's jobs and role were not acknowledged to the same extent as were voluntary work and enlistment in the auxiliaries. The expectation was that women would fill in — in a temporary capacity. Full-time home-making remained the preferable alternative, if economically possible. However, new responsibilities in the workplace were often viewed as a challenge by women — and their contribution to the war effort. There was a strong feeling by men and women alike that the work had to be done, and it was women's responsibility to fill the gap. This strongly practical response reflects women's perception of their role: a role shaped and limited by the socialisation process, which incorporated the basic family ideology so pervasive in the war years.

Notes

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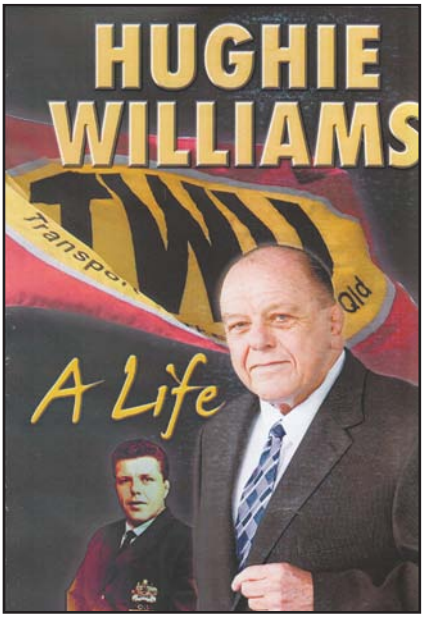

Review of

Hughie Williams — A Life

By Hughie Williams

H Williams, Bardon, Qld, ©2009
$39, paperback,
xi, 343 p., [16] p. of plates.
ISBN 9780646514468 0646514466

I've been to a fair few book launches in my time. The one for Hughie Williams' autobiography, in the Ithaca Room at Brisbane City Hall, outclassed them all for the number of dignitaries (local, state and federal politicians, union heads, academics and captains of industry) who wanted to be part of the action. Their speeches left those present in no doubt that Hughie Williams was a principled man with a remarkable life. They said that *A Life* was a good read, too, but I must confess to feeling a certain apprehension at approaching the story of a man who had endured one struggle after another along the way. Furthermore, it isn't always easy to make a yarn sparkle as brightly on the printed page as it does in the telling.

I needn't have worried. From the first few pages, I could see that reading the book would be no hardship. Hughie Williams knows a bit about not letting the words get in the way of a good story.

Reading *A Life* is like sitting with a mate as he talks you through his photo album. The book does include some photo plates, which illustrate milestones and high points, but the most vivid images are in the writing, as it leads us through the episodes, conversations and key incidents that formed the building blocks of the man's life and character.

The book describes the family's struggles through the Depression and war years and the death of their war-wounded father. We are told how Hughie, aged twelve, woke one morning to discover that his grim exhausted mother had walked out on her children, leaving them with little more than a couple of notes on scraps of paper. It introduces us to boarding-

house life in Fortitude Valley. Later, it takes us to the Police Youth Club where Hughie built some useful friendships and started his athletic training, and to the workplaces where he humped sacks of barley or raw sugar on his young shoulders day in, day out. It then invites us to follow his sporting career and celebrate his achievements as an Olympic wrestler and sports administrator. It allows us to eavesdrop on Hughie and Jim Soorley, then Lord Mayor, when they 'exchanged unpleasantries'. We are able to witness, from a safe distance, the dirty underside of the trucking industry. We get some insight into the endless tussles in the union movement as good men struggled to fight for the workers' cause in the face of union officials' petty rivalries and self-seeking behaviour, and we learn about the attempts on his life. Through it all, we become familiar with a world where a man could never make assumptions about which side anyone, whether family member, teacher, fellow-worker, associate, boss or cop, might be on.

> The crowd of angry truckies surged towards the truck where I was standing, some clambering to get up on the truck and at me. Here I was trying to help, and they were trying to lynch me. Things were getting very nasty, when all of a sudden a very big and rough-looking bloke jumped up on the truck beside me. He towered over me and I thought 'This is it'.

Here and there a few words remind the reader that Hughie has never forgotten the terrible deprivation and cruelties of his boyhood, but this is self-evident from the power of the story telling and from his actions in adult life. Occasionally, I wanted to ask 'What happened in the end?' but it is likely that the majority of his readers will know, since many of his actions and anecdotes are integral to the broader history of Queensland.

Much of the story of his adult life is told in the measured tone of a man intent on presenting an honest and balanced account of events, particularly in relation to his life as a unionist. However, when he talks about personal power struggles, crooked cops, the death-threats and costs to his health and family life, his emotions and passion shine through. This is when the language becomes a little less formal and a spark of humour may appear. For me, these were the more satisfying passages of the book.

There are some nice touches of understatement, for instance in the incident at a Queensland Central Executive meeting when a vote was called on the reform of the Queensland Branch of the ALP. Hughie Williams' views were diametrically opposed to those of his union's hierarchy and, to crown it all, the vote went to a division:

> Without looking at my colleagues, I walked to the opposite side to them, over to the wall where I gazed out

the window at the tranquillity of Breakfast Creek. I stood there feeling very lonely, and then felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the hand of Bill Hayden, who gave me some very encouraging words. I said nothing, and soon the vote was counted and the reformists had won.

If that was not tough enough, the next test was to come. It was the trip back to the offices at Trades Hall — a trip back in one car with my three other TWU colleagues. In those days the car wasn't air conditioned, but air conditioned or not, I don't ever remember a car being so cold.

A central dilemma in any memoir lies in ordering the material so that the reader can follow, while keeping the story itself lively and engaging. In *A Life* the story is revealed in layers: the wrestler, the unionist, his political and family life. This technique serves the book well, allowing the tension and drama to rise as the story is fleshed out. Ultimately we come to understand where each of the trials, setbacks and triumphs sit along the way and how they gave strength and depth to the man as he shares some reflections on his life.

It struck me as fitting that this book was launched in the 'Ithaca' Room at the Brisbane City Hall. Not because that was the name of the safe Liberal seat which Hughie Williams unsuccessfully contested in 1972, but because of an apt poem of that name, which begins with the lines

'When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclops,
the angry Poseidon — do not fear them:
You will never find such as these on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
emotion touches your spirit and your body.'[1]

By the end of his book, we know that Hughie Williams did encounter monsters of many kinds along the way, but that he fearlessly wrestled them down, armed with personal integrity and the desire to achieve justice for all. Bringing his mates, his adversaries-turned-friends and his admirers with him, he made it to 'Ithaca' in the end.

Ynes Sanz

1 *Ithaca*, Constantine P. Cavafy, 1911 (Full text, in several translations, can be found at http://www.cavafy.com)

CONTRIBUTORS

Greg Mallory is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Employment Relations at Griffith University. His book, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions*, was published in 2005. He has co-authored *The Coalminers of Queensland, Vol 2: The Pete Thomas Essays* with Pete Thomas, published in December 2007. Greg's book, *Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s*, was published in September this year. He is also working on conference papers and a book on leadership and its relationship with rank and file activism in left-wing trade unions. He is currently researchiing and writing the history of the ETU (Queensland).

Dale Lorna Jacobsen is a freelance writer living in the mountains of Maleny in south-east Queensland, prior to which she was an environmental scientist at Griffith University and a luthier.

Doug Eaton knew Stella Nord through his association with the Communist Party of Australia for twenty years until the Party was wound up. He currently lives in Maleny, Queensland, with his partner Dale Jacobsen, where he continues his craft of lutherie.

Connie Healy worked in trade union offices and at The University of Queensland. Twice married: first husband, an air force navigator, killed in World War II: second was QTLC Secretary 1942–52. Connie was widowed 1988. Awards — 1992:The Denis J. Murphy Memorial Scholarship UofQ: for academic merit to a postgraduate student intending to undertake research into the history of the labour movement in Australia; 1994 MA (History/English) at the UofQ; 2001 the Centenary Medal: 'For distinguished service to industrial relations'. Publications include: *Defiance: Political Theatre in Brisbane 1930–1962* (Based on her research for MA thesis) (2000); five articles for *Radical Brisbane an unruly history* (2004); two entries for supplement to Australian Dictionary of Biography: Jim Crawford (playwright) and George Eaton (teacher, actor, producer) (2005)

Helen Griffin, recently retired, has rekindled her interest in landscape painting. Trained as a lower primary teacher in NSW, she taught in Sydney and London, then re-entered the Education Department in Queensland to work in Human Relationships Education. More recently she has worked as a support teacher with children with learning difficulties and speech language impairment. Helen has also worked in CQU publications and external studies, and in a voluntary capacity as co-ordinator and counsellor for the Rockhampton branch of Children by Choice. Helen's interest in women's issues and history culminated

with a MA in Local History, UQ in 1994.

Ynes Sanz won the 2005 Val Vallis poetry prize for *Quandamooka Suite*. She has published *Lady with Weasel*, *Talking Poetry Blues* and most recently, *Fanny the Flying Housewife & other stories: poems for mad and magnificent women*. She is writing a tongue-in-cheek whodunit set in 1960s Brisbane and recently edited the memoirs of her mate 'Tahiti Jim'.

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Noticeboard

The Flames of Discontent Returns to Woodford Folk Festival

Last year, when the Brisbane Labour History Association brought its Flames of Discontent concerts to the Woodford Folk Festival, Festival Director, Bill Hauritz promised it would be a permanent feature. He was true to his word. To continue the celebration of the rich tradition of workers bringing songs to the people, the Brisbane Labour History Association will host events to honour two of the Folk Movement's most influential songwriters: Pete Seeger and Don Henderson.

Pete Seeger, one of the world's most progressive and influential musicians of the 20th century, turned 90 this year. To celebrate, Maurie Mulheron's musical biography of Pete — *One Word...WE!* — will be staged at the Green House 9pm–11pm for three nights — 29, 30, 31 December.

In the 70s, during the Utah Dispute, Don Henderson produced the *Flames of Discontent* album for the Seamen's Union of Australia. Then, in 1990, he brought the *Flames of Discontent* workshop to Maleny Folk Festival. Now "The Flames" comes full circle in a tribute concert to "Hendo", including the launch of a CD of his songs — a project undertaken by Don's widow, Sally Henderson, and Mark Gregory. And what a lineup! Bernard Carney, Jeannie Lewis, Liz Frencham, Martin Pearson, John Thompson, Tommy Leonard and Noel Gardner. It will be at the Concert Stage, 9pm Monday 28 December.

Don Henderson. Photo Sally Henderson.

The Brisbane Labour History Association

in association with

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

and

The Department of Employment Relations, Griffith University

presents the conference

Red, Green and In-between:

Reviewing Labour and the Environment in Historical Context

Interpreting Labour and the Environment in the 21st Century

6 February 2010,

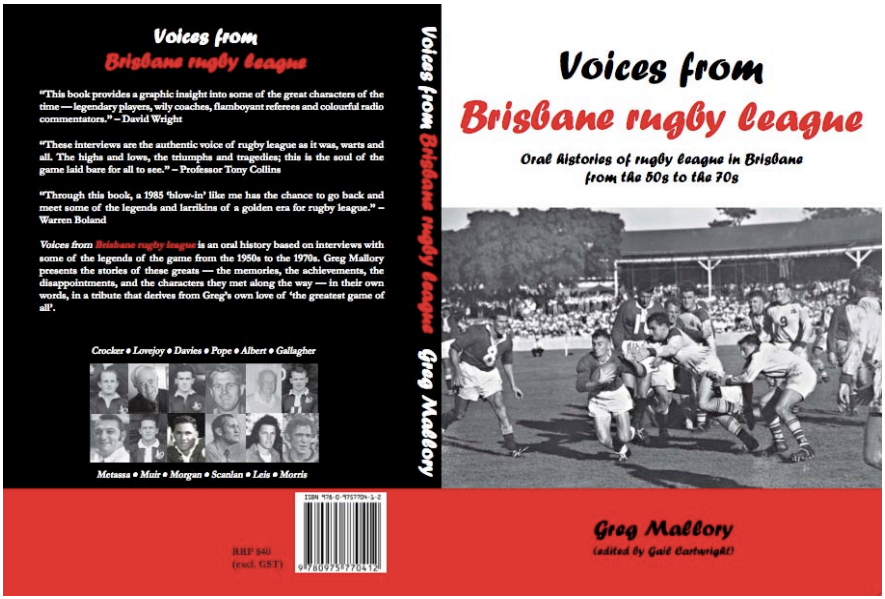
Griffith University (South Bank campus), Brisbane, Australia

Keynote speakers (to date) Jack Mundey & Tony Maher

This conference will address productive alliances (and possible tensions) between traditional movements of working class people and new social movements, such as the environmental movement.

Convenors/Guest Editors: Janis Bailey, Dale Jacobsen, Greg Mallory, Ross Gwyther

Further details and registration forms will be available at: http://www.asslh.org.au/



Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s

By Dr. Greg Mallory

The most recent book by BLHA President, Greg Mallory, was launched on 10 September at Carina Leagues Club by Steve Ricketts and Bernie Pramberg. Greg, who has followed rugby league in Brisbane since the late 1950s, was awarded the Tom Brock Scholarship in 2001 for his studies on Brisbane rugby league. The book features interviews of rugby league identities: George Lovejoy, referee Henry Albert, and players Mick Crocker, Brian Davies, Barry Muir, Norm Pope, Peter Gallagher, Fonda Metassa, Lionel Morgan, Marty Scanlan, Peter Leis and Des Morris.

Further enquiries: gmallory@vtown.com.au

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