

BOWN Maud Cecelia nee WILLIAMS

WF92919 Signals – Australian Special Wireless Group and Discrimination Unit

*The official Service records from the DVA Nominal Roll and the National Archives of Australia record Maud's last name as **BOWEN**, however the spelling should have been **BOWN**.*

This is Maud's Story.



Maud Cecelia WILLIAMS, WF92919, was born in Northampton, Western Australia on 6 November 1923. She was one of eight girls and one brother in the family. Her family roots with Northampton go back to 1841 when her Great Great Grandfather emigrated to Australia from Northern Ireland and went to Northampton soon after.

On leaving school Maud was employed as a Waitress in Northampton. Maud said “I moved to Geraldton and then Perth prior to war being declared. I signed up for service and was enlisted on 27 November 1942 in the Australian Women's Army Service.”

“My initial training was undertaken at the WACA, where we were sleeping on straw mattresses on iron bedsteads in the open grandstand. It involved marching around the WACA ground and the hilly streets of East Perth. On 31 December 1942 I was posted to 2 Signals Training Battalion at Ivanhoe, Victoria.”

Following that she was transferred to the Special Australian Wireless Group at Bonegilla, a top secret group. Maud always remembered how cold it was there. “We would dress in layers of clothes at night to keep warm. The washing hung out overnight was usually as stiff as board in the morning because of the cold.” Maud's postings included Perth, based in Queens Park, Queensland, Victoria and finally Canberra. By June 1943, Maud was posted to the 52 Australian Wireless Section. “All my travel around Australia was by train in tough conditions, but I did see a lot of the country.”

“By August 1943, I was based at the Headquarters of the Australian Special Wireless Group at Kalinga in Queensland and served with the 64 Australian Special Wireless Section” Maud said that from feedback received she was “highly regarded” at what she did. Maud said, “The work was so intense we were on revolving shifts of 4 hours due to the concentration required”.

“It was not until February 1944 that I was entitled to Adult Rate of Pay”, Maud said. In June she was with HQ of the 1 Australian Sig Group and graded Sp 1 Operator.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT MAUD

The Australian Special Wireless Group was part of MacArthur's and Blamey's top secret intelligence unit called Central Bureau which comprised the Australian Army, RAAF and US Army personnel.

AWAS personnel were the core of the groups and intercepted and logged Japanese Army, Navy and Air Force Kana (morse code) messages, recording and forwarding them to the Central Bureau where the code that was in them was deciphered.

The opinion of the Wireless personnel at the time was that they were doing an important job that was really making a difference in the war. And they certainly did.

The Australian Special Wireless Group, AIF, was a secret group. One batch of recruits for ASWG was told:-

"Not only do you not exist, you never will have existed. You will remain for always unknown and unacknowledged. There will be no awards, no glory. There will be no medals for this unit."

They were trained in Morse Code and Japanese operating methods, and their role was to:

- intercept enemy transmissions
- check for possible clandestine stations
- monitor Allied operators to ensure there were no security breaches which could allow an enemy interceptor to identify a unit or its location

The Australian Army intercept portion of the Australian Special Wireless Section moved to Bonegilla in Victoria and on 18 May 1942, was renamed the Australian Special Wireless Group with a War Establishment of 1,000 personnel. Most of the new personnel were recruited from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, and increasingly from the AWAS.

Some operators were involved in what was known as high speed work. Morse signals were transmitted at high speed and were recorded on Edison wax cylinders and replayed later at a slower speed.

ASWG Sections were widespread and based in: Bonegilla, Brisbane, Broome, Darwin, Exmouth, Ferny Creek, Finschhafen, Groote Eylandt, Hollandia, Milne Bay, Mornington, Morotai, Nadzab, Park Orchards, Perth, Port Morseby, Townsville, Wau and Yanrey.



Maud recalls that, "While waiting to be called up for enlistment I returned to Northampton to see my family. During this time I met Reg Bown, who was on Army training around Northampton.

We kept in touch and whilst based in Victoria we decided to get married while Reg was in Sydney". Maud arranged leave and Reg obtained a 24 hour leave pass. "We married on 9 January 1945 and had two of Reg's mates in attendance, and his sister Fay as bridesmaid.". Fay was in Sydney as a 16 year old US War Bride on her way to the USA with her Air Force serviceman Jimmy.

Maud said, "We had such a good time that we exceeded our leave passes. Consequently Reg was classified as AWOL, was caught after three days 'on the run' and finished up with a very tough Field Punishment in Queensland prior to shipping out to Borneo with the 2nd / 9th Battalion. I didn't get into any trouble."

In 1945 Maud was with the top secret Discrimination Unit at Balcombe, and by November was transferred to Western Command for Discharge on 9 November 1945.



“Like a lot of families at that time, my brother Kevin and sister Joan were in the Services. We are all together in this photo with our Mother.

Kevin enlisted on 16 August 1940 and served with the 2nd 16th and was discharged as a Corporal on 23 November 1945.

My sister Rita Joan (Joan) Williams enlisted in the AWAS 27 December 1942, just after me, and was discharged as a Sergeant in the District Accounts Office in Perth on 21 August 1946.



Maud is rightly proud of her service and remains a member of the RSLWA North Beach Sub-Branch. Although no longer attending meetings, Maud remains very much interested in the RSLWA and North Beach Sub-Branch.

Maud and all of her fellow Australian Wireless Operators played a significant part in Australia's War effort and it is for their service that we salute them.