Entry type: Cultural Artefact
Entry ID: AWE0479

Kathleen Best Memorial Gates

Occupation Commemoration

Summary

On 6 November 1959 a memorial gateway to the first director of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) was erected at the entrance to WRAAC School, Georges Heights, Sydney and was opened by His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales, Lieutenant General Sir Eric Woodward KCMG, CB, CBE, DSO.

The design chosen for the gates was submitted by an Australian Regular Army (ARA) Sergeant, Juanita Feltham BEM. The design was symbolic of the life and work of Colonel Kathleen Best. The gates were relocated to the Royal Military College, Duntroon and rededicated on 6 November 1994.

Details

Description of gates

The overall background is composed of a pattern of the Red Cross, which is symbolic of the life and work of Colonel Best's early associations with the medical professions. The main gates bear the lozenge, which is the heraldic women's emblem. The left hand gate symbolises her associations with the medical service during World War II and the right hand gate is symbolic of her service with the WRAAC. The centre of the main gates form a cruciform synonymous with the Red Cross which symbolised her Christianity and humanity.

The spikes above the gates are in the form of gum leaves and represent the 47 years of her life. The gates were wrought at the Army Apprentices School, Balcombe, Victoria and hung from piers made of natural sandstone.

A commemorative panel bearing ceramic tile Command Formation signs is on the right of the gates while to the left of the main gates is a foot gate bearing the Corps badge in bronze. Moneys raised for the gates were donated from serving and ex-service women.

The last parade of the WRAAC was held on 5 December 1984. The following day the WRAAC flag was lowered and handed to the WRAAC School's last Commanding Officer, Lt-Col Robert Hennessy, following which Colonel Best's sister, Gwen Ellis, and Major Dianne McVicker ceremonially closed the Best memorial gates for the last time. Later the gates were dismantled and lay neglected until the WRAAC Association succeeded in having them relocated in the grounds of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, where they were rededicated on 6 November 1994, exactly 35 years after their official opening. [1]

[1] *Soldiers of the Queen* by Janette Bomford p. 120.

Published resources

Book
Soldiers of the Queen : women in the Australian Army, Bomford, Janette, 2001

Colonel Best and her soldiers: The Story of the 33 years of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps, Ollif, Lorna, 1985

A Stroll down memory lane, WRAAC Association, 2001

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, Various Locations
Speech by Colonel Sybil H Irving (honorary Colonel of the Corps) made at the opening of the Kathleen Best Memorial Gates, Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) School, Mosman, NSW, 6 November 1959

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
[Seven slides from the opening of the Kathleen Best Memorial Gates, Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) School, Mosman, NSW, 6 November 1959]

Kathleen Best Memorial (Gates) and portrait

National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office
Kathleen Best Memorial Gates

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