

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0517

Perkins, Jessie May

(1923 - 2010)

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| Born | 19230921, Melbourne Victoria Australia |
| Died | 20100511, Melbourne Victoria Australia |
| Occupation | Servicewoman |

Summary

Major Jessie Perkins MBE, RFD, ED (Retd) was the first Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) Citizen Military Forces (CMF) member to be awarded an MBE. She was appointed a Member (Military) to the Order of the British Empire on 13 June 1970, for her services to the WRAAC.

Details

Before joining the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) on 10 December 1943, Jessie Perkins worked with the Public Service. In the Army she mainly served with the Land Headquarters (LHQ) Australian Army Service Corps School (AASC) until December 1945, she then transferred to the Master General of the Ordnance Branch, Design Division – which was responsible for the experimentation and testing of all army equipment – until her discharge on January 1947 with the rank of Sergeant.

Following her discharge Perkins worked for the Department of Labour and National Service. She then worked as a secretary to a building and plumbing supplies firm, before working part-time with a secretarial agency while she cared for her mother.

During the mid-1960s Perkins commenced a secretarial/bookkeeping position with the St Kilda Football Club. She retired after 16 years with the Club and was appointed an Honorary Life Member. Perkins then established a bookkeeping service and worked for a series of small firms.

On the raising of the WRAAC CMF – later A Reserve, Jessie Perkins enlisted with the first intake on 21 July 1953 as a Private. In February 1955 she was one of the first CMF officers who were appointed from the ranks and she was attached to a CMF signals unit. Following the transfer of Captain Margaret Phillips, the first Officer-in-Charge (OC), and eight other ranks to the Regular Army, Captain Jessie Perkins became OC on 24 October 1957, the first reserve officer to hold the position. She was OC WRAAC Coy for 12 years before serving at Headquarters 3 Division. Perkins served for 25 years rising to the rank of Major (1961) before being discharged on 21 September 1978.

On 13 June 1970 Perkins was appointed MBE (MIL) and later awarded the Reserve Forces Decoration (RFD) and Efficiency Decoration (ED) with 1st Clasp.

Jessie Perkins was the Patron of the WRAAC Reserve Association (Vic.) until her death in 2010. She was president of the Association for 17 years. She was also treasurer and public officer of the Council of Ex-Servicewomen's Associations (Vic.) Inc., treasurer and public officer of the Royal Australian Signals Association and volunteer, with her sister, of Meals on Wheels for MECWA Community Care (retired after 15 years with the Opportunity Shop, where she was also treasurer). Perkins' involvement with the church included being Vicar's Warden – Parish Council, server, sidesperson, reader and a member of the Sanctuary Guild. Since 2001 Perkins was president and treasurer of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) Association (Victoria) Inc.

Published resources

Book

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

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

Anne Heywood

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Digital resources



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