

Australian Women's Land Army



BRIDGETOWN GIRLS DRAFTED AS MANPOWER COMBS DISTRICT

The Blackwood Times 15 October 1943

The beginning of the call-up of women for essential industries caused a minor sensation in Bridgetown recently as local lasses of the 18 to 45 years group found themselves caught in the net of a manpower comb-out. Most extensively affected were young shop girls, large numbers of whom will be replaced by women between 30 and 45 in the near future. Questioned as to the position of employers, Mrs. L. Teague, Officer in Charge, said that no employers would be left stranded. Girls would not be taken from their present occupations until replacements were available. "But replacements are not hard to find," she added. The older women are responding marvellously; so far we have had no difficulty in replacing shop girls with women in the older group." Mrs. Teague went on to say that very few actual exemptions were made in the younger group, although many of the girls were "deferred" – their call-up being postponed until replacements can be found. The only women who are definitely and permanently exempt are mothers; women with children, she said, can volunteer if they wish to for service in essential industries, but they must first make satisfactory arrangements for the care of their children.

Alternatives offered to girls drafted are:

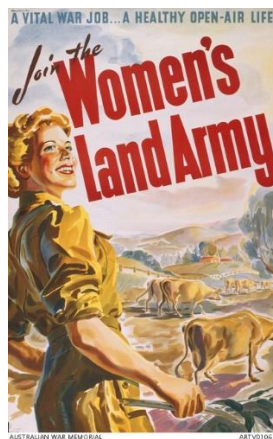
- (1) To join one of the armed services (WAAAF, AWAS, AAMWS, or WRANS); or
- (2) Leave Bridgetown district for a position at a munition factory, in the Land Army at a dehydration plant, or apple picking. (Girls can choose whichever of these positions they fancy; the last two are ideal for married women, as they are seasonal industries).

Emphasising the point that girls cannot be forced to join the Services, Mrs. Teague said that they were first given the opportunity to volunteer for a position in the forces. If they did not wish to do so, they would be drafted to essential civilian occupations, as enumerated above. "A lot of girls think it's all bluff and that we can't force them to do anything," said Mrs. Teague. "We certainly can't force them into the Services—but if they don't obey our instructions if drafted to essential civilian services or occupations, they are liable to a fine, imprisonment or both, under the National Security Act."

"For instance," she explained, "if a girl is non-co-operative and refuses to give any preference as to which branch of essential industry she wishes to be employed in, we make up her mind for her, according to where the shortage of womanpower is most acute. She is told to report to such and such a place within a given time and to begin work, ' If she fails to comply with these instructions a Powers of Direction form is sent to her, which is more or less a legal confirmation of the instruction. If this direction is also ignored, prosecution is instituted, The maximum penalty is £100 and/or six months' imprisonment. And the girl is still liable for service after she is prosecuted.

Women were paid £2/8s per week with 21/5d deducted for board. Other expenses included boot repairs, underwear, laundry, travelling and entertainment.

Source: *Bridgetown Advocate* 17 May 1946



Land Girls Visited.

After a visit of inspection to centres where groups of land girls are working, the superintendent of the Women's Land Army (Mrs S. Carlton) returned to Perth yesterday. During her trip Mrs Carlton visited Bridgetown, where the fruit season is in full swing; Manjimup, where girls are working on tobacco plantations and orchards, and Pemberton, where hops are being grown for yeast. At Pemberton also 2 girls are actively engaged in the cultivation of herbs – sage, marjoram and thyme – which are needed for defence orders. They are the only girls employed on that work.

Mrs Carlton was favourably impressed with what she saw. "The girls are happy," she said. "The matrons in charge at the tobacco plantations have done wonders for their groups and the girls are enthusiastic in their praise." On the plantations the girls sleep in cabins, 2 girls being accommodated in each. Every cabin has a window and its own fireplace. In addition there is a common dining-room, a recreation room with a large fireplace, bath and shower rooms.

"On the fruit orchards girls now do all stages of the work," Mrs Carlton said. "They learn to pick the right way and do the packing, at which they are quickly becoming experts. One girl has become particularly proficient and is now earning about £7 a week."

At Bridgetown and Manjimup the opportunity was taken to meet members of the war agricultural committees, growers and farmers. In these two districts 80 more land girls could be placed immediately. The ones already on the job are contented and happy, Mrs Carlton found, and their

working conditions and accommodation is good. All the girls in these 2 districts except those on tobacco will live in comfortable private homes. The next group work will be for flax where 50 girls will be needed at the outset, and for apple and pear picking and packing. Girls may enrol for this work immediately.

The West Australian 18 February 1943

Beatie Alexander A GREAT TIME

I joined the Australian Women's Land Army in March 1943. The Women's Land Army members worked for farmers and orchardists while their sons and daughters were away fighting for Australia. I was sent to work on an orchard down at Bridgetown, the property of Mr and Mrs Frank Hewett. I used to rise at 5am to feed the chickens and then go to the paddock to bring the horse up and put it in the stables to be fed before going to the house for breakfast. We picked red apples and put them in dump cases which held 40 pounds. You could not pick the Grannies or Cleos whilst the dew was on them. I was also shown how to make dump cases and I helped to feed some of the calves. I enjoyed working in the orchard. When I left they packed one of my cases with apples. I was scared because in those days the Apple and Pear Board was very strict, and people were searching all the cars leaving Bridgetown – and there I was in the old steam train with all those apples! But they did not search that train. My life in the Land Army was great.

Reference: https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2020-01/Alexander_Beatie.pdf