

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 82 TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

‘Gunner’ Curley – a woman with a dream

This week’s Virtual Visit is based on an article by Claire Hunter of the Australian War Memorial. Claire’s work reported on research undertaken by Danusha Cubillo. Part of that research has uncovered a unique story of a “Western Australian in the Army” which exactly fits one of the component halves of the Army Museum of Western Australia’s mission

Warning: this article contains images of deceased persons.

Danusha Cubillo, is a researcher at the Australian War Memorial. A proud Larrakia woman, Cubillo has been working with the Memorial’s Indigenous Liaison Officer Michael Bell to research and identify Indigenous Australians who have served or are still serving. Danusha was seconded to the Memorial from the Department of Defence through Defence Indigenous Affairs in 2020, to work on the Memorial’s Second World War Indigenous Service List. Gunner Curley’s story is one of the many she has uncovered during her research into Indigenous service during the Second World War.



Elizabeth Anzac Lorraine Curley

Elizabeth Anzac Lorraine Curley was born in Subiaco on Anzac Day 1925, the daughter of Horace John Bozal Curley and Margaret Louisa Maher. The significance of the date was not lost on her parents. They gave her the middle name Anzac in memory of those who had served during the First World War and had landed on Gallipoli in April 1915. Elizabeth grew up in Sandstone and in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia. Curley completed her high school years by correspondence because there was no high school in the area. She would study under a tree, collecting her work from the stations that her family stayed on while her father worked.

In September 1943, aged 18, Elizabeth enlisted in the recently authorised Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS), becoming one of the thousands of Indigenous Australians who volunteered during the Second World War, despite laws that often prevented them from doing so.

Women in the AWAS were posted to the army, anti-aircraft batteries, search light batteries, records and finance offices, ordnance units, and training schools in order to gain qualifications in wireless operation and transport driving. Gunner Curley was stationed for a short time in Victoria, doing repair work on radios, and was posted near Fremantle, working on heavy artillery. And that's where she was given the nickname, 'Gunner' Curley."



Curley enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in the early 1950s, hoping to achieve the goal of serving in all three defence services. "She had this idea, this dream of joining the army, navy and air force, but she was discharged from the air force when she met and married Arthur Eden Blanchett,. At the time, married women were not allowed to be in the defence forces, so she didn't get to achieve her dream of joining all three services, but she certainly came close." Curley left the air force on 11 December 1953 and was married on the 19th of December 1953,

In 2013, she returned to Rottnest Island as a special guest to mark the 75th anniversary of the proof firing of the 9.2 inch coast artillery guns on Oliver Hill. Today, her name is one of more than 4,400 names list on the Australian War Memorial's Second World War Indigenous Service List.



Remembrance Memorial, Recreation Hall, Kingstown Barracks, 2013

Elizabeth Curley's last ANZAC Day was on her 95th birthday in 2020. She celebrated her birthday in lockdown. She proudly wore her medals all day and cut a cake with nursing staff. Her family had to video call her, and wave to her from the window. She died a few months later in August 2020,

Cubillo is encouraging anyone with more information about Indigenous servicemen and servicewomen to contact the Memorial and share their stories. "It's about respect and giving that person their due," she said. "They fought for this country, and we want to acknowledge them for who they are, and be able to tell people proudly who this person was."

The narratives at the Australian Army Museum of WA are presented in a chronological sequence. Individual stories are presented within this theme. There are therefore no exhibitions devoted exclusively to individual arms, services or units except as they form part of the team associated with the campaign. Feedback has shown that this approach is perhaps the best way to present a balanced visitor experience for a general audience. To compliment this approach, themed routes have been introduced in the World War 2 Gallery to enable visitors to follow the campaign trails of AIF formations if they want to trace the experience of a relative. Visitors and researchers seeking detailed knowledge on particular aspects of military service can ask guides or access the Archives



An example is the Gallipoli exhibition. Current research shows that 70 Aboriginal men are believed to have served on Gallipoli, Thirteen of these men are known to have enlisted in Western Australia. Including James Dickerson who died of wound suffered in the attack on Hill 60. Their stories are told alongside those of Hugo Throssell who was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery in the same action. Nearby are the medals of Lieutenant Colonel Noel Brazier, the commanding officer of 10 Light Horse, when both Dickerson and Throssell were serving in the unit. Major Pope's diary, and General Hobbs Gallipoli walking stick and other items relating to individual stories at Gallipoli are also part of this presentation.



LINKS FOR FURTHER ENJOYMENT

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

<https://www.avidevents.com.au/portfolio-posts/rotnest-island-75th-artillery->

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/58fc7215d0cf191fe4e06d86anniversary/>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/about/our-work/projects/indigenous-service>

[James Dickerson | Australian War Memorial \(awm.gov.au\)](#)

https://prod.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/docs/default-source/aboriginal-history/tswh---whole-book--lewis-larry-farmer-edit.pdf?sfvrsn=5c3ced2d_6