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### **Vera Amelia Etherton**

The following is by Vera Etherton (nee Bridgeman) 1941 – 1945

I am writing this wartime work story, which was shared with my sister Jessie, and sister-in-law Lil. So I will use 'we' and not 'I' as it covers the three of us. Our father D.W. Bridgeman owned two farms several miles apart. We lived on "Eastbrook" 6 miles west of Northampton.

Our father and brother Bert (who was manpowered out of the forces to help run these properties with our help). We walked miles setting rabbit traps, up early next morning to go round the traps, kill the rabbits and skin them. Reset the traps and go home and put the skins on wires to dry, later to sell them.

At times our father mixed poison with oats and we took it out into the paddocks, made a furrow in the earth and lay the poison oats in it for the rabbits to eat. Next morning we'd go and pick up the dead and skin them, this was an awful job as they were cold and stiff and hard to skin and very smelly.

When our younger brother Gordon left school he worked with us too. We helped muster sheep for shearing and crutching. We worked in the shed to pick up the dags and sort them into good pieces and throw out the dirty. We would pick up the fleeces and throw them onto the table for dad to class.

The fleeces would be placed in classes and when there was enough of each, we'd put them into the bale press and get in and press them down with our legs until the bale was full and tight. After shearing it was time to dip the sheep to keep them lice free. The sheep would be yarded and pushed through a run and they would jump into the dip of poison liquid. The dip was a long cement trench.

Our job was to push the sheep's head under the liquid using a long handled tool. As the sheep hit the water we would be splashed too. The sheep needed to be drenched for worms, so were yarded and each one caught and held while an instrument was put down its throat, if we weren't holding the sheep we used the instrument.

After lambing the sheep were mustered into make shift yards in the paddocks and we caught the lambs and held them chest high for our brother to cut their tails off and the male ones castrated. A very dirty and tiring job.

We walked over and ploughed paddocks to pick roots and big stones and put them in a cart, clearing the land so crops could be put in. Wild radish was bad in the crops and we walked through the crops and grubbed them out and if they were in seed we put them in a bag to take to destroy.

The empty super bags we put in the water in a nearby creek to soak and clean and then go back several days later and drag them out to hang on a fence to dry to be used for the seasons wheat, (no bins or trucks then.)

Also, all old bags were sorted and any needing mending were mended. After the hay was cut in sheaves, we'd stook them to dry out and then throw them up onto the truck to be taken and stacked. While harvesting was being done we sewed

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the bags of wheat ready for carting into the bin in Northampton. Chaff was needed for the team horses (we had a tractor too) so the sheaves were fed into a chaff cutter and fed into bags, a dirty and itchy job.

Petrol was rationed so we took it in turns to ride a bike the 6 miles into Northampton (gravel road) and get bread, mail and papers etc, once or twice a week. All this time we took it in turns to report the comings and goings of aircraft (V.A.O.C.) for the Air Force in Geraldton.

There were also home duties. We milked cows and made butter, made jam, grew lettuce and sold them to buy war bonds. Cooking of meals etc. Shearers stayed on farms and so were fed 3 meals a day and two lunch breaks and this would be for several weeks (2 shearers).

The work was shared with mum. I was a Lieutenant in Girl Guides, Tawny Owl in Brownies in Northampton. We worked hard in raising funds for Naval Comforts. Jessie was in a "Queen" competition representing the Navy. We did all kinds of things to raise funds for her, penny trials, lots of street stalls, once we had a live rooster given to us for sale, there were no buyers, so I took it to a ladies house, cut its head off and dressed it. It sold for 2/6.

We organised a big "Ball", several dances and concerts which we both took part in. We collected paper and aluminium to send to the war effort. We collected medicine bottles, cleaned them and sold them to the chemist. We knitted for the Naval comforts and the Red Cross, our brother and friends overseas.