

Jessie May Lowrie (nee Bridgeman)

The following is by Jessie LOWRIE (nee Bridgeman)

I am writing this war time work story which was shared with my sister Vera and sister-in-law Lil. So will use "we" not "I" as it covered the 3 of us. Our father D.W. Bridgeman owned 2 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 layed the poison oats in it for the rabbits to eat. Next morning we'd go and pick up the dead rabbits 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 also worked in the shed, picked up the dags and sorted them into good pieces and threw out the dirty ones, picked up the fleeces and threw them onto the table for Dad to class. The fleeces would be placed in classes and when 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 it's 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 were castrated. A very dirty and tiring job.

We walked over the ploughed paddocks to pick roots and big stones and put them in a cart, clearing the land so crops could be put in. Wild Raddish was bad in the crops and we walked through the crops and grubbed them out and if in seed we put them in a bag to take to destroy. The empty super bags we put into the water in a nearby creek to soak and clean and 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 big 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 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) to 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. And 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 (for 2 Shearers). Work shared with Mum. Vera was a Lieutenant in Girl Guides, Tawney Owl in Brownies in Northampton and I was Captain of the Girl Guides. We worked hard in raising funds for Naval Comforts, I was in a "Queen" Competition representing the Navy. We did all kinds of things to raise funds for me, penny trials, lots of Street Stalls, once we had a live rooster given us for sale, no buyers, so Vera took it to a ladies house, cut it's head off, and dressed it. Sold it for 2/6d. 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. Collected medicine bottles, cleaned them and sold to the chemist. We knitted for the Naval comforts and Red Cross, our brother and friends overseas.

Born 21. February 1924
Geraldton West Australia

J. M. Lowrie

February 2005