

LEWIS, Gwenneth (WR 2399 Women's Royal Australian Naval)



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| Name | LEWIS, Gwenneth Driver |
| Service Number | WR 2399 WRAN |
| Date of Birth | 13th July 1909 |
| Died | 5th November 1994 |
| Place of Birth | Brighton SA |
| Resident | Inman Valley SA |
| Cemetery | Victor Harbor Cemetery |

Image 1 © Anne Basham family collection
2010
Studio portrait circa 1946.

Gwenneth (Gwen) Lewis was born at Brighton, SA, on 13 July 1909, the youngest of three children of Harris Morgan Lewis and Evelyn Annie Lewis (nee Riddle). Her parents owned land adjoining Sturt Road at Marion where they grazed sheep and established a vineyard. She was educated at Brighton Primary School and Methodist Ladies College.

The Lewis family moved to Inman Valley in March 1925 and purchased the Illoura property and began mixed farming. On leaving school she worked at a number of jobs including employment by the Hawker pastoral family at Quorn, and the Young Women's' Christian Association.

Gwen enlisted in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service at HMAS Torrens, Port Adelaide, on 10 October 1944, age 35. She undertook her basic training at HMAS Cerberus at Crib Point on the Mornington Peninsula and HMAS Lonsdale in Port Melbourne where she did her driver training.

The WRANS was a non-combat branch of the Royal Australian Navy that recruited women, and like many of its sister services created during World War Two, it alleviated manpower shortages resulting from men being assigned to combat roles. The WRANS was established in April 1941 when the Royal Australian Navy enrolled 14 women at HMAS Harman, the wireless telegraphy station near Canberra. Two women were stewards, and 12 trained as telegraphists. At the time, the formation of this civilian unit was not publicised, but this changed when the war in the Pacific was perceived as a growing threat to Australia.

On 1 October 1942, the WRANS were sworn in as enlisted personnel in the Royal Australian Navy. In December 1942, newspaper coverage was used to promote the existence of the WRANS and encourage applications. The first 16 WRANS officers were trained at the Flinders Naval Depot in Melbourne, and by February 1943 their numbers had increased to 1,000. By the end of the war, their numbers had increased to over 2,500. WRANS performed a variety of duties, including working as telegraphists, coders, clerks and also as drivers. Women in the WRAN also responsible to be education officers, mechanics, harbour messengers, cooks and sick berth attendants. Some

WRANS worked for the Allied Intelligence Bureau, in the Censorship Office, and in the Allied Translation Section of General Douglas MacArthur's U.S. Order of Battle unit.

After Gwen completed her driver training she remained at Port Melbourne and was assigned to drive senior naval officers around Melbourne. She recalled one instance in Melbourne on Christmas Day 1944 just after she delivered a senior officer to naval headquarters. Whilst waiting for the officer, she was asked if she had lunch and on replying "no", she was blindfolded and whisked away to a dining room where she enjoyed a sumptuous lunch. On finishing, she was again blindfolded and returned to her vehicle.

In early May 1945, she was posted to HMAS Leeuwin in Fremantle and continued her driving duties. HMAS Leeuwin was a busy naval base and she was assigned to drive top-ranking naval officers to and from the port. Gwen's older brother, Harris Vivian (Viv) Lewis served in the army and had enlisted on 24 July 1941. He served with the 2/9th cavalry regiment. He was demobilized on 9 January 1946. On 26 March 1946, Gwen was posted back to HMAS Torrens, where she was demobilised on 16 April 1946.

Returning to civilian life, Gwen looked after her father. She married Phillip Lancelot Basham and they had a daughter called Anne.

Gwenneth Basham died on 5 November 1994 and was buried in the Victor Harbor Cemetery.

References:

Old news, My Heritage., 2025., “*The Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot 26 November 1926.* ”., Oldnews.com. [accessed 01/09/2025]

<https://www.oldnews.com/en/search?qplace=Victor+Harbor%2C+South+Australia%2C+Australia&qkeyword=Gwen+Lewis+%2BmatchExactly%3Dtrue&qpublication-name=Victor+Harbour+Times>

Old news, My Heritage., 2025., “*The Victor Harbor Times 14 May 1937*”., Oldnews.com. [accessed 01/09/2025]

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Old News, My Heritage., 2025., “*The Victor Harbor Times 12th January 1945.* ”, OldNews.com. [accessed 01/09/2025]

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Terrace, V., 2025., *Gwenneth Lewis.*, View digital copy. naa.gov.au. [accessed 01/09/2025]

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Virtual War Memorial., 2025., *Gwenneth Lewis.*, vwma.org.au [accessed 01/09/2025]

<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/505852>

Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (*WRANS*) - Australian War Memorial., 2025. [accessed 01/09/2025]

<https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-structure/ran/wrans>

Appendix



Image 2 © Anne Basham family collection 2010
Informal portrait of Gwen checking under the bonnet of the service vehicle.

RELIGIOUS

St. Augustine's
CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Second Sunday in Advent.

Services as usual.

Newland Memorial

Services as usual.

11 a.m.—Rev. J. D. Norbury, B.A.

2 p.m.—Rev. J. D. Norbury.

TELEGRAMS

2 p.m.—Mrs. Norbury, Victor Harbour.

NEWCASTLE.

2 p.m.—Mr. J. D. Norbury.

LOWER IRWIN.

2 p.m.—Rev. J. D. Norbury.

SALVATION ARMY

VICTOR HARBOUR

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26.

10 a.m.—Worship.

11 a.m.—Worship.

12 p.m.—Walking in the Spirit.

1 p.m.—The Sinner's Savour.

Evening Services.

AUCTIONS

NORMANVILLE

MARKE

Has been postponed from Friday, November 26 until

FRIDAY, DEC. 10th.

1000, at 1:30 p.m.

GOLDSBOROUGH,

MORT & CO. LTD.

(with which is engaged in business of

Banking, and a like kind,

will be sold—

SHIP

CATTLE, PIGS

AND SUNDRY

TERMS AS USUAL.

Any client requiring terms must make arrangements with the auctioneers prior to sale.

Estates are now being received at

gallaries as Victor Harbour branch.

GENUINE

CLEARING SALE

At Encounter Bay

Friday, Dec. 3.

At 2 p.m.

GOLDSBOROUGH,

MORT & CO. LTD.

With which is engaged in business of

Banking, and a like kind,

will be sold—

BAGOT, SHAKES & LEWIS LTD.

Have received instructions from Mr.

J. Shanes (who has sold his property

by auction).

1 Cow in Milk.

2 Cows and Calves

12 Fowls 12

IMPLEMENTs, etc., included. Spring

dryer, hens and roosters, chairs,

machines, household utensils, etc.,

