

Your Shortcut to... Australian Women War Heroes

Are you ready to be inspired and amazed by some extraordinary acts of bravery? Hang onto your hats... This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Australian Women War Heroes—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Every September 2, we mark the anniversary of the end of World War II, way back in 1945. Almost one MILLION Australians served in that terrible war, including around 50,000 women.

Today, we'll take you through WHO is Australia's most decorated woman; WHY Nancy Wake was the most wanted woman in Germany; and WHERE Ruby Boye-Jones fought off crocodiles to serve her country.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

WHO

Now Bryce, the name Joice Nankivell Loch is unknown to many Australians. But she was one of the great humanitarians of the 20th century.

A humanitarian is someone who spends much of their time helping OTHER people; whose priority in life is to make other people's lives better.

Joice and her husband Sydney started doing that in the 1920s, when they left Australia and worked in Ireland, Greece, and Poland to help people who were fleeing violence, or war, or whose lives were somehow troubled. When World War II started, they leaped into action, and were part of a plan to get more than 2000 people out of Poland—which the German army had occupied.

Two thousand! That's a lot of lives to save.

And Joice was personally responsible for 1,000 of them. Picture this, Bryce... a train, rumbling from Poland through Romania, with women and children dotted among the carriages. They have beach bags, and it looks like a perfectly normal trip to the seaside. But in actual fact, the women have jewellery sewn inside their dresses, and everyone has fake passports and papers. These 1,000 people are fleeing, or running away from, the German army... and the woman organising it all is Joice. She's also on the train, pretending to be a nanny for some of the children.

What happened once they got to the seaside?

They took a ferry to Turkey; and then Joice, whose code name was Pied Piper, called the British Navy and insisted that a ship come in the dead of night to pick up all the refugees

and take them to safety in Greece, where Joice and her husband were living. Refugees, as a reminder, are people who have had to escape their homes because their lives were in danger. Once they got to Greece, Joice helped the refugees get food, and shelter, and work... and when the Germans invaded Greece, she helped them to all escape once more, this time to Israel. For her lifesaving bravery, Joice was awarded 11 medals from the governments of Australia, Greece, Poland, Romania and Britain—making her Australia's most decorated woman.

What an incredible story. Now, it was the British military who gave Joice her code name of Pied Piper. But it was the Germans - the enemy of the Australians back in World War II - who gave Nancy Wake her nickname. WHY was she called the White Mouse?

WHY

Bryce, you know how it's really hard to catch a mouse? You think you've cornered it, and then it somehow dodges and twists and sneaks away? Well, the German secret police, called the Gestapo, knew that there was a woman in France, helping people escape. Every time they thought they were going to capture her, she seemed to somehow disappear. So they called her die weiße Maus, or the white mouse. She was the most wanted woman in the war.

What did Nancy Wake do to make the Germans so angry?

What didn't she do??!! This New Zealand-born, Australian-raised woman was living in France, working as a journalist. She'd seen Adolf Hitler's Nazis first hand in Vienna and Berlin, and had sworn to fight against them if she could. As soon as war broke out, she immediately joined the French resistance.

The resistance were people who secretly organised themselves to fight back against the Germans.

Nancy helped to run an escape route through France for Jewish refugees and soldiers fighting the Germans. It was incredibly dangerous - if she was caught, the Germans would surely have killed her. So when they began to close in, she had to use her own escape route to get to safety in England. It didn't take long for the English to realise how valuable she was, though, and she agreed to go back to France - parachuting out of a plane into enemy territory.

Goodness! That's an extremely brave thing to do.

Nancy was one tough customer. She was trained to blow up bridges, break German communication lines, shoot, and fight with her bare hands. Although Nancy won medals for her bravery from other countries, it took until she was 98 years old for the Australian government to recognise her as a hero. One of her friends said that if her name had been Neil Wake—meaning, if she were a man—then she would probably be a household name.

Even today, less than 20 per cent of Australian soldiers are women... and back in the 1940s and 50s, many people thought it was inappropriate for women to fight in wars.

Nancy, on the other hand, said:

"I don't see why we women should just wave our men a proud goodbye and then knit them balaclavas."

She didn't want to stay home and knit warm hats... Nancy wanted to be part of the action. Apparently, some men fighters were initially against the idea of Nancy being in charge, but once they saw how tough and brave she was, they respected her, and her orders.

Speaking of brave, Amanda, you mentioned that another Aussie war hero, Ruby Boye-Jones, had to fight off crocodiles to serve her country? Where was that happening?

WHERE

Ruby was Australia's only woman Coastwatcher. The coastwatchers were a network of radio operators in the Pacific Islands during World War II. Their job was to use a radio to send through reports to the military about the weather, and movement of the enemy. Ruby was our coastwatcher on Vanikoro, in the Solomon Islands, north of Australia.

How did Ruby get the coastwatcher job?

Well, her husband was working on Vanikoro, and the original coastwatcher - a man - was leaving to join the Australian air force. He trained Ruby to do the job temporarily. When his replacement never arrived, she stayed on. In fact, Ruby was so loyal to her job, that when the Japanese began to occupy surrounding islands, and the other Australians and New Zealanders were evacuated, Ruby and her husband decided to stay. At one point, they went without any supplies arriving for ten months, living just off fish, coconuts, and some vegetables they were growing.

Did the Japanese know that she was there?

Oh, yes. They actually sent a message over the radio saying "Calling Mrs Boye, Japanese commander say you get out!" Ruby and her husband decided to move the radio out of their house and into the jungle, because the Japanese had bombed them once, and their boats were trying to find a way through the treacherous reef surrounding Vanikoro.

How scary!

Ruby was tough, though. There was a bridge over a river from her house to the radio, and when it collapsed, she pushed a flat bottomed boat over the croc-infested waters four times a day to file her reports. The information she sent through was vital for two separate battles... but because her position was considered voluntary, unlike the men Coastwatchers, she never got paid for her wartime service.

Ruby Boye-Jones, Nancy Wake, and Joice NanKivell Loch all lived long lives after the war, but are no longer alive today.

There's no doubt, though, that they will never be forgotten - for their tough spirits, their determination to help others, and the lives they saved. They're true Australian heroes.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening..."

1. Joice NanKivell Loch pretended to be travelling to where, when she helped women and children escape Poland? (The beach)"

2. What nickname did the German secret police give Nancy Wake? (The White Mouse, or die weiÙe Maus)

3. What was the name of the job that Ruby Boye-Jones had on the island of Vanikoro? (Coastwatcher)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of Australian Women War Heroes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.