

ALL ABOUT FLORENCE VIOLET MCKENZIE

She was Australia's first female engineer. She founded the WESC and trained over thousands of women for war.

In 1921 Wallace bought a radio sales and repair shop in Royal Arcade, Sydney, which she ran while studying. She also worked as an electrical engineer and contractor and experimented with television. In 1924 Wallace became Australia's first female certificated radio telegraphist, the first female member of the Wireless Institute of Australia, and the first woman in Australia to hold an amateur wireless licence.



Her own hobbies included scientific study, reading, gardening and jam-making.



In July 1938 McKenzie joined the Australian Women's Flying Club she was elected treasurer and became responsible for training women pilots in Morse code. With war approaching, she found a need for trained female wireless telegraphists, initially to replace men in civilian roles but eventually to serve in the forces.

McKenzie was the only female electrical engineer in New South Wales at the time, and early in 1939, aided by her husband, she formed the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps, which ran free courses.

Florence was a hero to all and is now still shaping the lives of many young women serving in the military. Her courageous behavior helped keep Australia safe in world war 2.

McKenzie hoped that the Royal Australian Air Force would recruit her telegraphists but even when the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force was formed in March 1941, the Advisory War Council resisted. Growing impatient and still battling authorized participants, in April she persuaded the Naval Board in Melbourne to accept fourteen of her operators for the navy. These women formed the core of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service. Meanwhile, the role of the WESC expanded to include pre-enlistment signals training for prepared Australian servicemen and continuing instruction for American force. Her former students were highly considered in the services and many became instructors. In appreciation of her work, McKenzie was arranged an honorary flight officer in the WAAAF in April 1941. By August 1945 her school had trained some twelve thousand men in Morse code, visual signalling and international code.

After the war, with the increase in worldwide commercial travel, McKenzie's school continued voluntarily teaching signalling courses, training 2450 civil airline crewmen and 1050 merchant navy seamen by 1952.

Florence was respected throughout her life. She enjoyed many happy years with her husband but never had children.

After a stroke in 1976, she relied on a wheelchair. In 1980, she was recognised with a plaque at Mariner's Church. She died on 23 May 1982 in Greenwich and was cremated.