“For many Australians, World War II provided new experiences and opportunities for change.”

In World War II, Australians were provided new experiences and opportunities for change. One group of Australians who were given new experiences and opportunities was the Australian women. The war presented the women with the option to adopt these new challenges such as working in the army and the workforce to replace the men who had gone to war. This helped forge Australian society to what it is today, encouraged women to continue to challenge their traditional role as the women’s roles changed after the war and for many a new independence.

Australian women were provided with new experiences and opportunities in the army and the workforce during WWII. This came about when Prime Minister Menzies toured Britain and realised how much potential women had as a war resource. In the armed force, women could join multiple different sections, which included: Australian Women’s Army Service; Australian Women’s Land Army; Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force; Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service; Women’s Royal Australian Naval Service; Royal; Australian Navy Nursing Service; Australian Army Nursing Service; and Women’s Agriculture Security Production Service. Women signed up because they had a sense of duty, wanted to do their bit in the war, patriotism, and a spirit of adventure. There was also pressure for women to participate in the war, not just be part of the workforce.

In the workforce, the opportunities to work were granted because of the lack of men as many of them were at war. By 1942 more than 500,000 Australian women were working in the workforce. Some of the things the women did in the workforce were: munitions; ship building; aircraft construction and maintenance; driving trucks, buses and motorcycles; operate machineries; delivered bread, worked as security guards and meter inspectors; and manufactured clothing. ‘Their tasks were not easy. They lived and worked under the same conditions as the men whom they had released for overseas service. Many jobs were menial and monotonous.’ From these challenges Australian society changed, and a new respect for women grew.

New experiences and opportunities in World War II for Australian women changed the Australian society. For the first time ever, women were doing a ‘man’s job’, such as working in the service and industries. They were allowed to take jobs that used to be only available to men, such as working in the army, air craft construction, and operating machinery. This caused the women to have a sense of independence, freedom, and responsibility. Because of this, the role of women has changed in Australian society, as the women gained the respect from all Australians. ‘Soon officers said, “The morale and behaviour of men have lifted since women joined the service”...Every girl who enlisted

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5 Australian Government Department of Veterans’ Affairs, March 2008, Australian Women in War, 1st edn, Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Australia, p. 48, Lorna Byrne.

expected to release a man for active service. The Australian society was forged from what happened during and after the war.

After World War II, these new experiences and opportunities disappeared for the Australian Women. However, the sense of independence and freedom never left. After the war, the service jobs for women were limited, yet the service experience made the women seek independent and liberating jobs. Some women were also happy to return to the normal domestic life, while others had problems giving up their responsibility after the war. ‘It will indeed be a poor thing if, with peace, we revert to our pettinesses and small snobberies. We can decide that we will hold on to friendliness, the comradeship.’ These new experiences and opportunities changed the women of Australia and shaped the role of women for the future.

In summary, Australians were provided with new experiences and opportunities for change during World War II. The Australian women embraced the new experiences and opportunities such as working in the army and the workforce, and taking over jobs traditionally seen as male occupation. As a result of these opportunities women helped change Australian society into what it is today, as women’s expectations and their role in society changed after the war and they continued to take on work outside their tradition roles.

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7 Dorethea Skov, opt.cit, p.47.
8 Darlington, R, Jackson, L and Hawkins, opt.cit.
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