



Myrtle Eileen Earland was born in Dunedin on 4 October 1904, the daughter of Susan (Donlan) and Henry Bills a printer's machinist.

In her early working days she used to 'display' or model at Milne & Choyce in Auckland.

About 1927 she became interested in a young amateur radio operator, and decided that the way to attract his attention was to share his hobby. As she said later "I got my ticket – and I got my man."

In 1929 she married Frederick Percy Earland who worked for the railways. There were no children.

In 1930 she became New Zealand's first female amateur radio operator licensed with call-sign ZL3AG.

Early married life was in Greymouth where they were both involved with emergency messages following the Napier earthquake of 1931.

During World War 2 she copied enemy messages and while she could not interpret them they were sent to Wellington for decoding.

With their shift to the Otago region her callsign was changed to ZL4GR and she became affectionately known on the airwaves as 'MyrtZL4Gorgeous Redheads.'

During a period in Omakau she and Fred claimed to have 'the longest aerial in the world' when they connected their radio equipment to the 120-mile (190km) Omakau-Dunedin telegraph line.

One of her most memorable experiences was in May 1969 when she contacted the radio operator on the recovery ship for the first astronauts to the moon. She was proudly telling him of the wonders of New Zealand when unknown to her the operator connected her to the PA system so that her conversation was heard 'by her largest audience ever' – over 3,500 personnel on board the recovery ship. Other notable radio contacts were King Hussein of Jordan, Senator Barry Goldwater. She had friends around the world.

She and Fred operated as a base station for messages during many civil emergencies and many search and rescue operations. For her services to amateur radio she was made a Life Member of the Otago Branch of the New Zealand Association of Radio Transmitters, and in 1980 the NZ Women Amateur Radio Operators presented her with a special certificate in recognition of 50 years of operating.

Myrtle died in Dunedin on 31 January 1986 just six days short of 56 years as a licensed amateur radio operator, and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery with her mother and husband.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from *Southern People a Dictionary of Otago Southland Biography*.