WORLD WAR II

Girls on the Home Front

By Ian Billlingsley

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For You Mum

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PREFACE

Ever since the birth of Mankind, it has always been the older generation, that taught and fascinated the young with their tales of fortitude, failures and frolics. It was from these tales that we learned in depth, the advantages and the pitfalls that their worldly experiences had to offer us. As we grew older, many of us faced the same problems and although we probably didn't deal with them in the same way, at least we had been forewarned of their inevitable approach. This knowledge alone helped us face up to the realities and facts of life as we studied and dealt with them from a safe and wise distance. As we listened, we learned. We not only profited by their mistakes and experiences; so vital to our own survival, but we learned to respect the older generation for this wisdom and the knowledge they so freely shared. Man has always learned in this way. The world turned and the species survived.

But what on earth is happening now? Is there no need to listen anymore? After all these countless generations of knowledge, have we got it so right now there is nothing they can teach us?

READ ON.....

Shirley Clifton with her sister Josephine.
'Jankers Queen'.

CONTENTS

NO HOLDS BARRED
MUM
FLOUR POWER
THE LAST WORD
MY LIVING HELL

INTRODUCTION

How time is flying. Already we are talking years since I first sat down to put together your collective reminiscences of a world at war. I for one never realised just how much time and dedication I would need to actually produce that first manuscript and gain the interest of a reputable publisher in what we knew would be a most interesting book. Thankfully, as we learned together about the difficulties, and the stumbling blocks that I'd almost broke my neck on, 'WAR MEMORIES' finally invaded the shelves of book shops world wide.

.....'Girls on the Home-front'.....

the second book in the series; is for the ladies. It has been an infinitely portentous, yet wonderfully exciting adventure, gathering together this special collection as we all know just what ladies are. Some of these stories, stories that began as casual remarks, once touched upon, rapidly progressed into epics. One tiny splash of ink scribbled on a page that was to flow across five decades, unfazed by time and distance to become a very informative and narrative masterpiece. I learned quickly, that these ladies could write as captivatingly as they could talk and believe me, it wasn't to be long before they procured my fullest attention.

As the photographs began to arrive on my desk, my imagination was far from halted, (only fuelled) as I at last could fill in the missing faces from my adventures. The months alone in my own little attic, reading typing, amending and adding, painstakingly rummaging through each story over and over again began to have the strangest effect on me. I began to experience life alongside these girls as each written moment was relived. I stood and watched whilst many of them were forced to leave their childhood behind as so much of their world became ravaged by war: A most frightening and worrying time.

I watched on nervously through the fun and through the fears as the pain of losing friends and loved ones to this terrible madness became uppermost in my mind. I felt the joy of each snatched moment of happiness, as war became secondary to a dance in the loving arms of a lonely boyfriend. I listened to talk of engagements and weddings as these romances flourished, most destined to survive until forever. Yet here I was alone, alone on the edge of a life that I needed to be part of but couldn't touch. No matter how far or how often I reached out; I was alone and helpless.

I worked the fields from dawn 'till dusk, ankle deep in wartime furrows. I sheltered in smoking buildings as bombs and flames greedily devoured buildings and cities. I scaled the walls of barracks, of hostels, of digs, whilst risking all to snatch a few short hours of youthful excitement. Then, as I struggled through my anxieties and concerns at the state of confusion in the world, I could finally celebrate with them as the old dried out skin of hate was discarded, to reveal the new, young, fresh, gleaming skin of hope for the future. These times – once so strange to me – but now so real.

During my involvement in so many lives, I had become totally unaware of who, and where I was. Many is the time when the sound of a car horn invading the quiet of my office would all but send me scurrying for the safety of the nearest air-raid shelter.
The post script; "*I'm sorry my writing is a little shaky, but my Arthritis is playing up*." disturbed my school of thought and grabbed me by the ear and tugged me straight back into the empty corridor of the present day. These young girls who's sense of fun I was encouraging, who's naivety I was enjoying and whose privacy I was invading, had grown long before I had. All these remarkable stories are unbelievably from many, many years ago, and yet, they are all still so crystalline in the individual minds of their authors: The threat of the fight still so close, the tears of worry still stinging their faces and the sound of laughter still ringing in their ears.
The sheer intense emotion, so deeply embedded into each and every single word of this book, has been so attentively inscribed onto its pages that you will not be able to help yourself as you too, are unwittingly drawn back across the decades with its authors. Each individual story holds out its arms for recognition, and deservedly so. Even now, after all these months of work, I still feel their embracing presence; I still feel their commanding authority and most of all; the sheer insatiable ambience of a closeness that I have never felt before.
What is the reason for such clarity of memory? Is it due to the fact that this war, which had raged across the globe for so many years, had demanded such intense sacrifice and extreme emotions of the World's youth. So much so, that it is impossible for them to forget. Or is it just simply as I said earlier? Time passes by so quickly: five years, fifty years. What's the difference? It was only yesterday?
Prepare yourself now for a journey through life as it really was. You will not come across the glamour of the big screen here, nor its phoney plastic heroes, or for that matter, those strange and compelling characters of the well versed professional writers imagination.

This, I will tell you, is for real.

Ian Billingsley.

THE NIGHT THE BELLS RANG

When you are eighteen, you are young, silly and just the right age to serve in the British Army, and fortunately, the imagination is not very vivid or active at that age.

1939 Found me and my friends approaching eighteen and in the 14th Bucks Company A.T.S. We had joined in 1938. Not for patriotic reasons, but purely because the company we worked for had promised us an extra week's pay and leave to attend the annual Army summer camp.

I don't think the company was quite so happy when I was one of the lucky ones scooped up before the actual outbreak of war. Our job was to help call up the male Territorials who had enrolled in the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry. From then on, we were moved around fairly locally, until the beginning of 1940 found us attached to the R.A.M.C. at Boyce Barracks, Crockham, Hampshire.

During those times we were not supposed to go beyond our nearest town, which was Aldershot. My friend Geraldine, (Gerry) and myself, had other ideas as to where we wanted to go. Particularly on Sundays. We already had our own bicycles with us and had smuggled civilian clothes into our rooms.

It really was a wonderful, long hot summer in 1940 and what a joy it was to cycle away from those dusty, boring old barracks. We were quite adept at disappearing into the little wood close by, stuffing our uniforms into our bicycles' capacious holdalls and emerging clad in flimsy, cotton comfortable dresses; no trace of the army left. We both lived in Windsor; quite a distance from Aldershot, but we thought nothing of cycling home to sample our mother's respective Sunday lunches when we were free to do so.

This particular Sunday, we were rather late in leaving our homes and starting back. In fact, it was dark when we left and I think the air raid warning had gone. This meant we couldn't take our usual route through Windsor Great Park for the guns there could be in action. We had to take a much longer route, which would add considerable time to our journey.

We must have been somewhere near Ascot when we first heard the bells, and daft as two brushes, we hadn't a clue as to why they should be ringing. There was a big German Prisoner Of War Camp on our route and we could only conclude that some of these prisoners had escaped. Never had two cyclists pedalled so fast and furiously. Apart from expecting Germans to jump out on us at some point, we were far more terrified of our Sergeant Major's reaction when we turned up so very late. Onward we went; through Camberley, Frimley, and Farnborough, by now certain that we would be in really big trouble. Still those bells rang. We didn't see a soul.

14th Buck's Company A.T.S. Boyce Barracks 1940.
Ena Brason 3rd top left.

As we pulled into the married quarters that we shared with the married R.A.M.C. Personnel, even the single garrison church bell was tolling dismally. We rushed into our hut. There wasn't a sign of anybody, not even the sergeant in charge. Geraldine and I shared a small room and we did not dare to look and see where the rest of our hut mates were. We couldn't believe our luck and hastily scrambled into bed.

I was just dozing off, when I found myself literally hurled out on to the cold floor. It was our 'Hut Sergeant', an elderly ex W.A.A.C. I thought she had gone crazy. "The Germans have landed! The Germans have landed!" she yelled. "Get down to the dug-out straight away." Her description as to what was going to happen to us when the Germans actually arrived, left us in no doubt that she had a far more active imagination than we had. So that was why the bells were ringing, the penny had dropped at last. *We were being invaded.*

We went down soberly to the air raid shelter. We had not been missed and still could not believe our good luck. Everyone thought that we had gone to bed early and slept through all the noise. Nobody ever did find out any differently. In the end, we spent a most uncomfortable and miserable night, sitting upright in the cold, dark dugout with the regular mens' wives and children.

We watched, as the Regimental Sergeant Major and some of his senior N.C.O's slept peacefully, stretched out on comfortable mattresses laid along the middle of the shelter. How they snored.

It was a man's world in those days. The night the bells rang over Southern England really brought that home to us with vengeance. "It wouldn't happen like that today. Would it?"

Ena Brason. *Long Crendon, 18335 vol' Prentice.*

POOR OLD LADY

During the War I volunteered to join the A.T.S. I was working in an office at the time and coming from a small village in Derbyshire, I was not very experienced in travel. I certainly didn't realise just what was in store for me. My brother was in the Navy. He'd joined as a boy sailor and had visited many countries in peace time. My father had been a corporal in the first war. He and my mother met when he was billeted near to where she worked. Later, my mother trained to become a midwife.

I went for my interview in Nottingham and passed my test. I was to be sent to Guildford in Surrey for six weeks training and I must admit at that time; it seemed such a long way from home. I travelled to London and then on to Guildford, where I was met by a huge truck. Inside were lots of girls all going to Queens Camp.

During training, we were marched up and down for hours and were subjected to endless injections and inspections. Finally we were all posted to our different stations, depending on what jobs we were to do. I was accepted into the Medical Corps' and was then posted to London where I stayed for the next three and a half years.

When I arrived, I decided to have a look around, but after about half an hour in the cold and dark I found myself back where I had started; I gave up. I decided that my wanderings were best left until daylight. Although London was a dangerous place to be during that time, it was also an exciting place to be. During the blackouts, we were only allowed to carry a small torch, plus of course our gas mask and tin hat etc. I was posted to various places, around London. Woolwich Arsenal, Bayswater and Sloan Square to mention a few. I think my longest stay was in Queens Gardens, Bayswater, where I was billeted in a row of six houses. The office was situated in No. 62. These houses were cold and wet and the water used to run down the walls near my bed, which, as you can imagine, was always cold and damp. I suffered with terrible colds and earache. As the weather improved.... so did my health.

Going home on leave was heaven. Being able to go to the local dances in civvies made me wonder why I had joined up at all. Everything seemed so nice and quiet at home, although Sheffield, which wasn't too far away, had been badly bombed. I always returned from leave on the last train. It was always packed with troops; soldiers, sailors, airmen, W.A.A.F. and A.T.S. Everyone stood up as there was no room to sit down. We were packed in shoulder to shoulder and when the train stopped to let anyone disembark, we would all have to get off and then climb back on again. We slept when we could as we made our way back to St. Pancras Station.

I made lots of friends, one of the girls who came from Barbados used to come home with me on leave. I still hear from her at Christmas. She is living in Australia now. My parents made her very welcome as she was a long way from

home. She hated the terrible weather and suffered too from the chilblains and colds.

Just as we were thinking the war was over, along came the ‘V2’ rocket. Poor London. Poor Old Lady. More bombing. ‘The Blitz’ and the rocket bombs; even the church had no roof. When we went on church parade it was always cold, sometimes wet. Morale became low again, but we kept on going. However, as the launching pads of the flying bombs were gradually being taken over by the advancing troops on the continent, so things began to get better here.

At last came 1945 and victory. London was a great place to be on V.E. Night. We were told we could stay out late so the celebrations went on until next day. The crowds kept going to Buckingham Palace and finally the King and Queen came onto the balcony. The war was finally over.

I was de-mobbed in 1947 at Aldershot. We now hold reunions every three years. Of course we are a lot older and wiser now and sadly dwindling in numbers.

Dorothy Elizabeth Beastall.
Ex/Cpl. A.T.S. Lower Pilsley, Derbyshire.

WOMAN DRIVER

My name was Joyce Preece, and I was born in 1921 in Essex. When I was twenty I joined the Women's Auxiliary Army. I was seriously thinking of joining, when the announcement was made that all women over twenty one, would be required to join the services; unless of course they were in a reserved occupation. So, my mind had been made up for me.

I reported to Northampton training camp, which was to be my home for the next six weeks. I then became a number W120296. The training was very tough. Some of the women instructors were bullies. Many were the times when I was ready for heading off home. I was not alone in this thought. Although I never did of course. I did write home stating that I was having a great time, (what a fibber I was).

After the six weeks were completed, we were asked which jobs we wanted to do. When I first joined, I didn't really know what I wanted, but by the time my training had ended, I knew exactly. I was going to be a driver. I had never sat behind a wheel before, but I think that it could have been something to do with my dear old dad being a London bus driver for thirty one years.

I can still remember the feeling of joy I had, on being told that I had been selected for the course. Along with several other girls, I was packed off to a camp near Gresford, North Wales. I can't remember the duration of the course, perhaps it was twelve weeks, but I do remember that we had all men instructors. They were a good bunch and they treated us all well.

I remember our very first driving lesson, and being told to mount up and sit behind the wheel with our instructors at the side of us. I remember the amazement on all our faces, as we climbed into the three ton lorries. We all passed our test first time.

I remember best of all, and still very clearly, when we were allowed to drive solo for the first time. I was to drive a small two seater car, or 'Bug' as we nicknamed them, but I was far from happy in driving it, for the steering kept pulling towards the middle of the road. I was so worried about it I complained three times in all to the corporal in charge, only to be told; "It's OK. It's just nerves". Half way through the journey the car suddenly took off on its own and there was no way I could control it. The poor girl behind me thought that I had gone completely crazy. We veered across the road and turned upside down in a ditch. Crawling out of the car unhurt, I didn't even feel shaken; just mad as hell, as the battery acid had tipped all over my slacks and ruined them. The wheels were still spinning violently as two farm labourers rushed over to help us. I remember quite clearly, one of them saying. "My God. Look at the state of that kingpin. It's sheered right off It's no wonder you crashed. You could never have prevented it." These are the words that I would always remember. Our corporal came running up to me and asked if I wanted a cigarette. He was shaking like a

leaf so I suggested that it would probably do him more good than me as I didn't smoke.

I don't remember the trip back to camp, but I do remember the mechanic saying that the car had better be taken to the workshop for repair as soon as possible. The next thing I knew, I was being told to report to the A.T.S. Officer, as I was being put on a charge for crashing the car. I was terrified. I had never been on a charge before. I began to tremble with worry, but need not have for minutes later as I saluted her, she stood me at ease and then gave me a bar of chocolate. It's strange how I can still remember that bar of chocolate. We stood munching, as we continued the interview.

I was asked, and told truthfully, my account of the accident. I told of how I could not control the car and of the farm labourers remarks on the missing kingpin. Then, as to how the car had been taken to the workshops for immediate repairs. I asked her to check this out as it would confirm my story. I was then dismissed and ordered to report to her the following day. This I did and was cleared of all charges much to my great relief. She had checked out my story and believed it to be true. She then shook my hand and I left.

Along with six other girls I was then posted to Chatham. The base was, 123 Company, R.A.S.C. Southill Barracks. We girls were billeted just five minutes away in a large Victorian house. Some had jobs as staff car drivers, some as lorry drivers and others as ambulance drivers. Chosen, as we were told, for our slow and steady driving.

I enjoyed driving the ambulance. I learned to love the work, even though we were often on a night call rota. It was pretty grim, picking up seriously ill people during the Blackout, especially as air raids often threatened.

Again, all of the men were a good bunch, especially our mechanics who were supposed to supervise us when it came to cleaning and simple repairs on the vehicles. Of course being women, we could wrap them around our little fingers when it came to asking for their help; mechanical or other wise. We got away with blue murder.

A year or so passed very happily, even though it was wartime. One day, a memo appeared on the notice board, asking if anyone was interested in becoming a dispatch rider. I think we all put our names forward, but once again, only six of us were chosen. I was one of the lucky ones. I was thrilled to pieces, more so than my parents. They were worried sick but didn't try to stop me.

Private Joyce Sargeant W/120296 A.T.S.
(Royal Enfield '350 cc.) Early 1945.

We were sent to a camp at Cowdray Park, Midhurst. Sussex. Once again we were billeted around the village. I was to live with a lovely couple. A retired colonel and his wife. They treated me well. The Colonel had recently had a stroke and could only speak with difficulty, but he and I were able to communicate fine. I spent many a happy Sunday afternoon playing card games with him. He was a dear man and it pleased him so much because I tried so hard to understand all he tried to say to me.

As always, we had men instructors to guide us through our motor cycle course and remember how, when we first handled the bikes, we were amazed at just how easy they felt. It didn't take us long to learn how to ride them.

As for our meals, we were spoilt rotten by the cooks. If we were due out for a long run, they would call out and ask, "What would you like for supper tonight girls?" We would all reply: "Steak and chips." We would get just that. The course passed all too quickly and once again we were soon on our way back to Chatham.

Four of us, shared one bedroom at the top of the house in the attic. There was Eileen from Tottenham. Vera from Hull, and Joan came from Cornwall. The fifth girl was Bobbie, but I can't remember where she came from. She was a Lance Corporal. About this time, four of us had serious boyfriends. Vera was courting Ted, a Royal Marine Corporal, Eileen was going out with Ron, one of the very nice soldiers from our barracks, whilst Joan was very sweet on Johnnie who came from the R.E. Barracks. I had by then met my boyfriend Ron who was in the Royal Marines. We all talked of marriage as we all feared that our boyfriends would be drafted far away from us. They soon were.

Nena was the first to marry, and we all fell in love with her wedding dress. A white wedding dress in war time was as rare as gold dust. Believe it or not, all four of us borrowed and wed in the same white dress. Soon after Nena's

wedding, I wed my own Royal Marine, Ron Sargeant. Our name was to cause many a chuckle.

From left to right. Bobby, Vera, Eileen, Joan, Joyce.
Taken outside Southill Barracks Chatham 1944.

Soon after I married, Eileen married her Ron. Then, last of all Joan married Johnnie. Even to this day, I wonder where they all settled down, or even if they are still all with us. We are all surely 'getting on a bit'. My memories are very precious now and still so very clear in my mind.

I said earlier on how my married name 'Sargeant' was to cause some amusement, for I then became 'Private Sargeant'. One of our officers would always have a good chuckle whenever my name was called on Pay Parade. When I met my husband, he was 'Marine Sargeant', when we married he was 'Corporal Sargeant', then he finished his career as 'Sergeant Sargeant' in the Royal Marine Commandos.

My own job as despatch rider caused much amusement as well, for often we were riding around Chatham wearing leather jackets, riding breeches, boots and of cause crash helmets and were all pretty slim in those days, (not so these days). I guess we must have looked like men. I can remember we always liked to use our make up though, as usual.

One time I rode into a barracks and on entering an office, I almost bumped into this gorgeous looking blonde officer. He just scowled at me and went on his way. Then I came to the Regimental Sergeant Major I had to deliver the package to, when to my amazement he bawled at me at the top of his voice.

“What’s the matter with you soldier, don’t you salute an officer when you see one?” I was so shocked, I couldn’t answer him. I just blushed scarlet, dropped the package on his desk and fled. I reached my bike and kicked the engine over to start it up. I was furious to hear roars of laughter coming from the office. Then a Sergeant came out and said he had been sent to apologise. All the others in the office had realised the Regimental Sergeant Major had made a mistake. I was still very angry and told him to go back and tell his R.S.M, “Yes! I did salute officers, but only A.T.S. officers!” and with that, I roared away on my bike.

I was though to see again, my lovely blonde officer. He was to attend one of our dances a week later. He came up to me and said. “I have to speak to you. When I bumped into you at our barracks, I had just been into the office to ask if there was a motor bike available for me to ride and was refused. I went out sulking, and of course when I saw your bike parked there I thought, typical. There's no bike for me to ride, but this slip of a girl is riding around barracks on one. I was livid.” I told him what I thought of his R.S.M and we both finished up having a good laugh. I was to see Blondie often for we became very good friends. He told me quietly one evening that all the barracks were moving on. By morning, they would be gone. We said our goodbyes.

Many months later, several of his men arrived back at our barracks. Sadly, they told me that Blondie had been killed over in France. He had been on his beloved motorcycle and had ridden straight over a land mine. He was killed instantly. My pillow was wet with tears that night. I will always remember him fondly as an Officer and a Gentleman.

Before we were married, we had to be in by 2300 hrs. We all used to have our own little bushes where we’d talk and say good night to our boyfriends. We had heard rumours that the ‘Red Caps’ were waiting to catch our lads with us, and they intended to charge them all with being on A.T.S. property after hours. This happened one evening just as they planned it, taking us all by surprise.

We were asked our names and numbers, but luckily for us, our own A.T.S. Officer was on duty. She quickly came out to see what all the rumpus was about. The ‘Red Caps’ explained why they were there. She simply told them to get lost, as it was only 22.55hrs. They had mis-timed their raid by five minutes.

“Five minutes”, as our officer said, “was time enough for all these girls to sign the book and time enough for the lads to be off our property”. Needless to say, there were no charges. Our officer was great; a lovely lady. I can still remember her name even today. It was Miss Hartigan.

Now I must close my story for I came out of the A.T.S. about six months after I married. By then, the girls were being released back into ‘Civvy Street’. The married girls were allowed to leave first. I had two sons and eight years later, my beloved daughter was born. Sadly, I never did get to sit behind the wheel again, I have been in the passenger seat ever since. I now live alone My husband died fourteen years ago, but I still have my family, including my two grandchildren who are the love of my life. At 73, I know I am happy enough, but will always remember my war years.

Joyce Sargeant. *Cambridge.*

FUN IN THE A.T.S.

During the war, I was in the A.T.S. I was stationed with the Heavy Ack-Ack Battery 614 on the Isle of Grain in Kent. Of course we had to make our own amusements in those days. One evening some of the gunners, wanted one of their mates to play the piano for them; all he wanted to do was lie on his bed. Not to be put off by this lame excuse, they picked him up, bed and all, and carried him over to the N.A.A.F.I.

Another evening a fancy dress party was organised. The same gunner shaved his head and with the aid of a sheet, shoe polish and wire glasses, he dressed up as Gandhi. His costume was so good he won the first prize: A pair of hairbrushes.

In 1944 our section battery was sighted on the miniature golf course at Black Rock Brighton. We lived in constant threat of Doodle Bugs. We were in the dark about D.Day, but were aware of the constant flow of traffic and Landing Craft. In the evening, as we slept in tents on the gun site, we could hear the massing troops as they marched by quietly singing.

D-Day itself, was very spooky. There was no sign of ships, soldiers or traffic. It was unusually quiet. Of course we found out the reason why a little later on.

Left to right 'Babs' Barlow, Nancy Cooper and May Lander.
Taken outside the Blackrock Cafe which was used as the canteen.

May Lander. *Northleigh Oxon.*

A MERRY DANCE

Living in Edinburgh at the beginning of the war, I can well remember the plentiful air-raids. I was once on my way home when a very large bomb fell not too far away from me. I was told to get into the air-raid shelter quickly. Whilst I was in there, I was offered a cigarette, but I refused it as I did not smoke. However, I was told to try one and was assured that it would take my mind off the bombing. When I lit up, I swallowed most of the smoke which of course was a silly thing to do and I was choking myself daft. They were right. It did take my mind off the bombing and not just mine, but many other people present in the shelter.

Prior to joining the A.T.S. in September 1941, I offered my services to the A.R.P. and of course I was accepted. I found that I was out almost every night. Whenever the siren sounded we had to meet at our service building and from there, we were dispatched to our respective duties. My worst memory is of the night the Germans flew over Edinburgh to bomb Glasgow. It was a very scary thing to watch the bombers going over. We were warned that on their return, they would probably drop the bombs they had left on the city. These long sleepless nights inevitably took their toll and my work began to suffer a little.

I had already joined the A.T.S. when the order to call up the girls born in 1920 came through. I was glad because the thought of working in a munitions factory didn't appeal to me at all. At least I had been able to make my own choice.

Muriel, Edinburgh 1941.

The first month of training was terrible and my feet were a mass of blisters with all the marching. We had men instructors who were awfully strict. As a qualified shorthand typist, I wasn't given a choice as to which job I was going to do, consequently, I spent the first years in the Scottish Command Headquarters, working as a secretary to a major in the Catering Department of the Army. He was connected in some way to Lyons, a 'well to do' restaurant in London.

After a while, I applied for a posting to the Orkney Islands and got it. I left my home town and travelled to Stromness, where I spent two happy years. Although I still remained in office work and working for a Major, I enjoyed it tremendously. I think all the girls enjoyed it as there were very few women and hundreds of men. Not being able to dance was no excuse for not enjoying yourself, but I soon learned.

I picked up my stripes and was given the enviable job of 'Ration Corporal'. We had rats by the score and I just hated being in the ration store. There was a tough little assistant cook from the Gorbals, who almost always, went in, in front of me. He used to bang on the door to scare them away. We did in fact lose quite a bit of food, and at one time we had to destroy the meat as they had been eating it. Whilst I was on leave, the P.O.W.'s were sent to put poison between the iron walls for them. I was glad I was on leave, as they had to come up several days later to prise the walls apart to get the dead rats out.

I was still in the Orkney Islands when the Japanese surrendered and I can tell you, we had a terrific few days. We had most of our fun down on the docks, as this was the only place where the ground was flat. One old fellow from one of the cottages, brought his bagpipes and as you can imagine, we all danced the highland dances; even those of us who weren't Scots.

Muriel Robertson.
Maryborough, Victoria, Australia.

JANKERS QUEEN

My sister Jo, joined the W.A.A.F. in 1943 and came home full of exciting tales and looking glamorous in her uniform. Once when she went out dressed in civilian clothes, I borrowed her uniform and went out on the town wearing it. She was furious when she found out.

I was so crazy to join the W.A.A.F's, that I upped my age by one year, and was called up together with my good friend Eddie. We wanted to be drivers but there were no vacancies, so we had to be content as 'Batwomen'. We had a lot of fun looking after the officers; shining their shoes, polishing their buttons, pressing their suits. When we ran the bath, we were only allowed to use five inches of water due to the rationing. We were stationed at Chigwell Essex, quite near to our homes in Middlesex.

Eddie and I were always getting into trouble with the N.C.O.'s. I was young and hated the discipline. Hair two inches off the collar, thick knickers (blackouts) and horrible thick Lyle Grey stockings. Many a time I was caught wearing silk stockings, (non issue), my hair hanging below my collar and my cap at an angle. I was always being put on Jankers in the Officers' Mess. It was great. Some of them were even kind enough to help us with peeling potatoes etc. They nicknamed me, *'The Jankers Queen'.*

After a while I was posted north to Lichfield, a good posting with an Aussie Squadron. They were a wild and wonderful group. Eddie was posted to West Malling in Kent, but we arranged our leave together and met up in London. On one hilarious occasion, we were both improperly dressed as usual, when two W.A.A.F. Special Police spotted us at Piccadilly Station Underground. They gave chase. The escalator was packed with servicemen and their kit bags. When they saw what was going on, they made a path for us and completely blocked the S.P.'s. We managed to jump on a train just as the doors closed and we waved to them as it pulled out of the station. When I look back, what a lot of nerve we had, but everybody seemed to be wild in those days.

Shirley.

Then there were the Yanks.....

They sure knew how to treat the girls. They were well mannered and romantic. There was a base near us and the dances they held were marvellous. The food was 'out of this world' to us poor rationed 'Brits'. Whilst on leave one day, I met Leo, an American pilot. He came to our house very often and if I wasn't there, he'd take my sister out instead. If neither of us were there, 'Mom' got the privilege. He always brought plenty of cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, nylons etc.

Leo.

I was also posted to Gravely, with 35 Pathfinder Squadron where I worked in the Pay Office. Life was exciting, yet sad, as many of my friends didn't return from operations.

One day on leave, Eddie and I sewed Corporal stripes on our uniforms, together with an Australian flash on her shoulder and a Canadian one on mine. The following morning at home my mother was aghast when she saw my W.A.A.F. jacket with Canada and stripes on it. I didn't realise just how serious an offence it was. She made me take them off immediately. The local newsagent congratulated her on my promotion.

My sister Jo had met her future husband at Saxmunden in Suffolk. He was a handsome Lieutenant in the Eighth Air Force. They now live by the sea in California. A heavenly place, which we have visited many times. I got posted to Ruislip and Eddie to Uxbridge where she met and married a Flight Sergeant

Later on, we were both posted to Gibraltar. I wouldn't have missed the experience for anything and in spite of the 'Jankers' label, I was asked to stay on but chose to be de-mobbed.

It was 1947 and the war was over. Things were slowly getting back to normal. I was lucky to get a job with British Airways, (then B.O.A.C.), where I met and married my ex-R.A.F. husband. He was transferred to Kenya, where I joined him and we were married. We have been together ever since.

Shirley Clifton.
Orpington, Kent.

THE PARTY

I was conscripted in 1943 and stayed in the W.A.A.F. for three and a half years. I trained in Gloucester, moving on to Morecambe in Lancashire where we were put through our paces in physical exercise. This we did on the beach in our pants and vests in the middle of January.

There was about a dozen of us staying in digs and when we arrived there, we were given two slices of bread for our tea. Luckily, we still had the dry buns that we had been given for the journey, so we hungrily ate those.

There was no shortage of fish and chip shops in Morecambe, but there was a desperate shortage of money. I remember having to write home for ten shillings once. We had to be very careful with the bath water too. We had a shallow bath and had to do our washing in this amount also. If the landlady heard the cistern filling up, she would be up the stairs like grease lightning, complaining that we had run off too much water. I don't think she had much time for us, as she got more money for looking after the airmen.

I was finally stationed in High Wycombe Bomber Command Headquarters as a waitress in the Officers Mess. We worked very hard there. We had some very happy times though.

Group photo before the party.

We; the waitresses, had to take turns to go to another site to supply the Duty Officer's with their meals. Underground passages stretched for miles. They were filled with clanging pipes; I suppose for central heating. It was all a bit eerie late

at night. Then, when we had finished duty we had to walk back through the woods in the dark to the Officers Mess Staff Quarters.

Sir Arthur (Bomber) Harris giving a speech in the Officers' Mess
High Wycombe R.A.F. Bomber Command H.Q.

Sir Arthur, (Bomber), Harris lived near by and he plotted his famous raids over Germany whilst I was there. A wonderful party was held in the mess for him. We had a beautiful three tier cake with a silver vase on top and pink carnations in it. The Tiller Girls from London entertained us with their dancing.

There were Prisoners of War employed in the camp to clean the windows and to do odd jobs. We weren't allowed to fraternise with them. It all seemed silly as none of us could speak their language anyway.

When the war ended, we had another party in the mess. It was very tiring as it was held in the evening. We had been on duty since 07.30hrs with just a couple of hours break. I was so tired, I fell asleep on the floor of the washing-up area. When I awoke, the cleaning had all been done and the kitchen was deserted.

We organised our own celebrations the day war ended. We went by taxi to the neighbouring villages for a drink, only to find that the pubs were all shut because they had run out of beer.

Mrs. V. B. Johnson.
Addlestone, Surrey.

JOURNEY TO IRELAND

Only the older members of the community who were in the Armed Forces during the war, will remember that you are accountable to somebody for all the 24 hours of each day. Two 19 year old W.A.A.F's either forgot, or didn't know in the first place about this ruling.

As budding wireless operators, we were posted to Bally-Kelly Aerodrome in Northern Ireland, to practise our skills in a new situation, not from ground to aircraft, but from aircraft to ground.

Armed with our travel documents, we proceeded from Manchester Victoria Station to Preston, where we were supposed to pick up the night train to Stranraer. Another thing only the older member of the Armed Forces will know, was that during the war, free refreshments were provided at major stations for members of the Forces that were passing through, so when Kathy and I landed on Preston Station, our first thought was the free nosh in the Forces Canteen.

Armed with a fist full of sandwiches and a mug of tea, we watched trains coming and going, laughing gaily as the train lights disappeared into the tunnel. "Wouldn't it be funny," we said, " if that was our train?" As a matter of fact it was, and the boat train to Stranraer only ran once a day. We should at this point have gone to the R.T.O., (Railway Transport Office), to report the fact that we had missed it. It never entered out heads. We headed straight into Preston for the evening, to find the local dance hall where we enjoyed a great night.

The Y.W.C.A. fixed us up with board and lodgings for the night and we spent the next day scrounging around Preston until it was time to catch the boat train to Stranraer again.

Margery the day she received her 'Sparks' badge at Compton Bassett.

We were a bit put out to be met by the Military Police at Stranraer. They wanted to know why we hadn't arrived on the date stated on our travel documents. It sounded a bit thin to say we were too busy eating to get on the train. However, we duly arrived at Bally-Kelly Aerodrome to experience what was for the two of us, our first taste of flying.

Lancaster Bombers were not equipped for passengers, so we were accommodated in the cargo hold. For four hours we flew back and forth over Ireland, not as you might imagine busily employed tapping Morse-Code messages to the ground as intended, but being horribly sick through the bomb-bay doors. At one point the crew allowed us into the pilots cabin to try to take our minds of our stomachs. This procedure went on for three days. Even now when anybody mentions flying, I always remember my first twelve hours flying time in that Lancaster Bomber.

To make matters worse, Kathy and I were both put on a charge when we got back to camp in England for failing to report our whereabouts to the authorities. I could imagine the signals going back and forth from England to Ireland with some irate Sergeant saying, " Where have those bloody W.A.A.F's got to?"

Margery Saunders.
Oldham, Lancashire.

MY TIME IN THE W.A.A.F

At the outbreak of the War I was 14 years old. We didn't realise at that age how serious it was or how long it would last. By 1942 I was 17. I applied to join the W.A.A.F's. Had I not done, I would have been called up at 18 to either to join the services or to work in munitions. My mother was devastated to think that I was going to leave home. Understandable, as I had hardly left before.

I eventually left home, on September 16th, 1942. First I travelled to Gloucester to be fitted with uniforms. Here, I learned how to salute the Officers and how to march. After some hilarity about the clothes we were given, four days later we were marched to the station and put on a train to eventually arrive in Morecambe, Lancashire.

We were put into civilian digs, which were quite comfortable. I can still remember where, it was 19 Heysham Road. The next few days were quite traumatic as we had to have our inoculations. I can't remember what they were for but they were dreadful. I remember standing in the queue and watching the ones in front of me passing out. We were given a few days to recover and then the square bashing started. This took place along the sea front, but first there was the P.T. If you can imagine hundreds of us doing this, no shorts, just our blue shirts and the navy blue 'bloomers'. We must have been a sight for sore eyes for the locals I'm sure.

It took three weeks to get us marching well enough to have our Passing-Out Parade. Then it was off to the 'School of Cookery' at Melksham in Wiltshire. Another march to the station. Here we lived in huts. Beds, about 30 to a hut, a bomb box to keep your clothes in and one big black fire boiler in the middle.

We went through all the stages at the Cookery School, including field kitchens and cooking in a hay box. This lasted until the end of November and we were all given leave before being posted to our respective Stations. It was lovely to get home for a few days, but then it was back to the hard work.

Training at Morecambe 1942.

I was posted to Warboys, Hunts: This was a bomber station. The home of *156 Pathfinder Squadron.* When I arrived at Huntingdon Station, I was met by a truck driver who threw my kit bag in the back of his truck and said, “You'll lose those Rosy cheeks before long.”

We travelled six miles out into the country, I was billeted in a ‘Nissen Hut’ with about 40 girls; not all cooks. The kitchen was not very modern, (coal fires under the boilers). We would be making stew or custard and our wonderful Sergeant, Charles McCartney, would shovel the coal out if it became too hot. He was a great bloke and a help to us all.

In our mens’ mess, we fed about 1500 ground staff. Many of them spending hours on the airfield, awaiting the return of the Lancasters. It was here, that we became familiar with the tragedy of war as sadly, a great many of the bombers didn’t return.

In the Sergeants and Officers Mess, it was very traumatic, but it could also be great fun at times. You were not aloud to dwell too long on the tragedies. The boys certainly knew how to enjoy themselves. If ‘mops’ were cancelled, it was high jinks all the way. One favourite pastime was walking on the ceiling. Of course, this required a little help, and sooty feet.

The pubs in the village did well, and dances in the Village Hall were good. The residents were wonderful people. One man would put a ‘Casualty’ sign on the crossbar of his bike to take some of the drunken lads back to camp. This he did many times. Another local had a pony and trap and he would pile them all in the back and off they'd go. The sad thing is, the following night we would be lining up along the runway waving them off, knowing that half would probably not return. The lucky ones were always welcomed home with a meal of bacon and eggs.

Occasionally, we would hear of the fate of some of the missing airmen. Those not killed would be captured to spend the rest of the war as P.O.W.'s. However, life went on and the boys insisted that it did too. We all lived for the day regardless. I had other postings after the Squadron moved to Upwood, Hunts, but none of them ever left the impression that Warboys did.

We made so many wonderful friends. There were many marriages to Canadians and Australians and the great thing is, after 38 years, in 1983, we had a reunion at Warboys Church. A great genius of a man Taff Jones, who had been a Flight Mechanic, somehow kept records and traced people all over the world and arranged it all. Over 300 people came. Some even from Canada and Australia. We have done this every year since and we also have weekend reunions too.

The church collections have helped the church, by buying Conifer trees for the cemetery and also hymn boards in memory of Air Vice Marshall Don Bennet who always attended. His widow (Ly) still does. We all donated to a marvellous memorial window. This was unveiled by Group Captain Hamish Mahaddie; one time Camp Commander. It was so wonderful to meet them all again.

From Canada there was Alvin and Nell Fast who were married at Warboys in 1943. Our old Sergeant, Charles McCartney and many more. Far too many to mention. My friend Cicely Versey, who was an M.T. Driver, used to drive the tractor and trailer loaded with bombs to the aircraft. She had a lucky escape one day when a Blockbuster Bomb exploded killing four men. She had to rush one man to hospital with shrapnel sticking in his back.

Our last great event was at Wyton, Hunts for the 50th Anniversary of the 'Pathfinders'. Many a tear was shed when they brought the Lancaster of the B.B.M.F. to the runway so that we could all climb in it. Sadly, our dear friend Taff Jones died in January 1994. He will be so greatly missed. About 200 of us, attended his funeral at Warboys Church.

I was demobbed in 1946. My war years were a time that I can look back on with many happy memories as well as the sad times. It was something I am glad I didn't miss.

Dorothy Search.
Bishops Stortford.

BIG DOG

I served four years in the A.T.S. (as it was called then), 1942 until 1946. I must say, they were the happiest days of my life. I was 17 when I joined up and I was stationed in York's Fulford Barracks. I remember one particular funny thing that happened to me.

I was on telephone duty one night. The office I was in, was at least a mile away from the Main Gate. I got a call at 2300hrs to escort three new recruits and take them to their sleeping quarters. Of course, needless to say, I was very nervous to have to walk the mile or so to the gate. Walking across the Barrack Square, I spotted the biggest dog I'd ever seen bounding towards me. I took to my heels and raced to the Guard Room. The guard on duty said to me,

"By golly, you've made good time, I've only just put the phone down." Of course I didn't tell him how I got there so quickly.

Miriam Tong.
Retford, Notts.

JUMP THE GUN

My father was recalled to the Royal Tank Regiment in 1939 and when I wanted to ‘join up’, I was told that he didn’t want me to go into the A.T.S. (as it was then). He did explain why, but I can assure you, what his answer was is not really suitable for publication. I eventually joined the Air Force in late 1940, having been turned down by the Royal Navy on educational grounds, (lack of it that was).

In 1941, whilst on my first leave, my father, who was now a Captain in the R.T.R., was also on leave. He decided to take me out for lunch in a nearby hostelry. We were both in uniform and on the way we were stopped by a couple of Military Policemen. My father was told that it was against regulations to fraternise with a ‘non commission’. i.e. a lowly A.C.W. Unfortunately, one of the said M.P.’s had a button undone and some other now forgotten problem with his uniform. He had also been silly enough not to salute when stopping us. He was told in no uncertain terms by my father, that before stopping an Officer in His Majesty’s Armed Forces - who happened to be out with his eldest daughter – he should first ensure that he made the necessary salute and was properly dressed as required by the same regulations he was alluding too. Poor man. To say his face was as red as his cap, was putting it mildly.

At the time, I found it extremely embarrassing as I understood quite plainly, just what they thought. I felt sorry for the M.P. later though, as he was of course only carrying out his orders.

Captain and Cicely Taylor 1941.

Cicely Versey.
Ex L.A.C.W.
Hythe. Southampton.

LETTERS FROM THE HEART

My sister and I both joined the W.A.A.F. and we were stationed together in a large house called 'Redfields' in a lovely village called Wilslow in Buckinghamshire. I was 17 and cooked for R.A.F. Officers. My sister was 19 and worked as a clerk.

It was a lovely social life. We would not have missed it for anything. Of course, we did not get air-raids, as so many people did in the towns, but we did experience quite a few raids when we were at home. We held lovely dances at Redfields and we met our future husbands there, who were both regular airmen and lovely men.

Before I met my husband, I kept company with some very nice air crew, who were stationed at a base called Horwood. Some of them were shot down and killed on their first raids over Germany. I have enclosed a Photostat copy of a letter from a young man, who seemed to have had a premonition that he might not come back. I had known him about six months and became very fond of him. I was very shocked to receive this letter.

I am also enclosing a Photostat copy of a letter from the mother of another really lovely fellow I kept company with, telling me that her lovely young son had been killed on a raid over Germany. As you will read, his mother says she hopes his death would be worthwhile and help to make the world a better place.

It is quite depressing that it does not seem to have improved. I recollect that we could go out at night and have no fear of being raped or knocked about. We would go to dances in the Village Hall and walk back down the country lanes. Sometimes we used to have to 'Wait on' at parties for the Officers and they wouldn't finish until 0200hrs. I would then cycle back to the farm where I was billeted', (after I married). I was never afraid, even as there were no lights on these country lanes. What happy memories my sister and I have of our days in the W.A.A.F.

Although it was during the war, that we were in the Forces, we feel that we had a much happier time than the young people of today. Here are the two letters.

Dearest Marie,
It has taken me some time to compose this letter, as it is not easy to write in anticipation of not returning from a raid. Don't think I'm in any morbid frame of mind, far from it, but being on 'Ops', there is just that added chance. It is for that time that I'm writing and want to let you know how much you mean to me.

First and foremost I must tell you I love you. Why I never said so before I can't quite tell, but now, when brought face to face with facts I realise it. I think that I must have always loved you and always get a good feeling from the

thought that I believe you love me. May it not be too late for there is always a good chance, in fact a very good chance of escaping.

We would have made a good job of facing life together Marie, I'm confident of that because you are just the girl for me. We always did get along well, right from the start didn't we? How grateful I am for meeting you Marie and spending all too few hours with you.

At night before going to sleep and when all is quiet, that is the time when my thoughts always turn to you. How often I've wished that we could be together and how proud I was to be seen with you. Each night before dropping off to sleep I wish you "Good night." in my thoughts.

Your letters are kept for happy memories - how glad I am that you wanted me to write. Your letters Marie, will be sent to you again for I've marked the envelope they are in, with your home address.

If you write to my home address Marie, you will probably get some later news although no doubt they will be writing to you. You may be sure, if I do get the chance, I shall be seeing you again and may it come true.

Well Marie I hope this is not, " Good bye " but should it be, please do not take it too much to heart, rather think of the amount of pleasure that you've made possible for me - that is the memory I carry with me.

So rather than say " Good bye." I'd like to say. " till we meet again."

All my love. Bill.

Dear Miss Elson,

I hope you will forgive me for writing to you. But I know that you were a friend of my son Bob. I found your address amongst his effects which were sent home to me from the depository.

Bob was sent out on a raid on Monday May 22nd and failed to return and all this time we have been hoping against hope that he might have escaped. But our hopes were dashed to the ground this week when I received a letter from the Air Ministry that Bob is buried at Venlo War Cemetery, grave no.419 Row 33, Provence of Limburg, Holland.

Some time ago I heard that Sgt. Sindall and Sgt. Turtle were alive and Prisoners of War and about a month ago I heard from Miss Jones, Pilot Grisedale's young lady, that he and Sgt. Punter, Bomb Aimer, had come home to England. I do not know how they escaped, I heard from Pilot Grisedale and he told me that the news he had for me, was the worst, as Bob was killed on that fateful night. They were attacked without warning by a night fighter and got shot up in the petrol tanks. They had no time to bale out before the plane exploded in mid-air and the four that are alive were thrown out and escaped with cuts and bruises, but the other three were killed. I know that you were a great friend of my son, and he wanted you to have his photo. If you would like one I will send you

one. You know he had many friends here, every one liked him and gave him a good name. He was always a good boy to me, never any trouble, it seems such a hard blow when they do their very best and get cut down in a minute but God knows best I suppose and perhaps has other work for them. But I feel so thankful that he ist buried in Germany and perhaps after the war we may be able to go and visit his grave.

One can only hope that the world will be a better place for those that are left (for their great sacrifice, their duty nobly done.)
I hope that you are keeping well and will not mind me writing to you .

Now I must close for tonight.

Believe me. Yours sincerely

Rebecca Gabbedey.

Marie Shelley.
Dagenham, Essex.

STRINGING ALONG

One day whilst off duty in Londonderry, a Petty Officer approached me, asking if I'd do him a favour and run to the N.A.A.F.I. to pick up 56lb of sausages that were needed for tea. Now it was one of those days that the heavens had really opened and as the bus service was lousy, I said I'd go if he could acquire a bike from the stores for me, as the said NAAFI was about three miles from the base. I was issued with one of the old fashioned 'sit up and beg' type, so off I went.

When I arrived at the store, I was the only Wren amongst many sailors. They kindly ushered me to the front of the queue where I was promptly served. Trying to balance the sausages on the bike once outside was another matter. A sailor on sentry duty found some string and then tied the parcel onto the carrier for me.

Slowly making my way past the Guildhall, there was a stationary bus. A sailor was looking out of one of the windows and smiled at me. As I didn't recognise him, which wasn't unusual as there were thousands of them in the

base, I continued on my way. It must have been a sixth sense that made me stop and think, “Was he smiling because he knew me, or was he just making fun of me?”

Turning round I was struck with horror. There they were 56lb of sausages trailing from my bike along the road with a dog going hell for leather as it tried to catch up with his, 'would be meal'. It was no wonder the sailor was smiling. This being war time, the sausages were just washed and served for tea.

Muriel Ross.
Poulton Le Fylde, Lancashire.

FEVER PITCH

I started training as a nurse at a fever, (infectious diseases), Hospital in S.E. London in July 1940. The wards were the 'Florence Nightingale' type; large light and airy. The only concession then to possible air-raids, was that each ward had a reinforced corridor, or 'Cover Point'; as did the nurses home.

Blackout was very poor and had to be replaced once the night raids started. Soon after the heavy day raids, work commenced on building up the lower half of the windows and balconies on the ground floor wards. The recently built isolation wards had been closed for the duration, as they were mainly built of glass.

In August, the hospital was bombed and machine gunned several times. Once, whilst being dive bombed, Matron's house was destroyed. She was very lucky having just left it. The memory of that day still lingers yet.

The hospital had no air-raid shelters for patients or staff. The patients, (being infectious), could not have used them anyway; even those well enough to be moved. During raids, their beds were pulled to the wall space between the windows and cots covered with spare mattresses. Off duty nurses slept in the passage ways beneath the main corridor, where the main pipes carrying the gas, electricity, water and steam pipes were situated. One shudders now to think what could have happened, but then we felt reasonably safe and once used to the situation, we slept well. We could feel the strong reverberation of the Ack-Ack Guns as we were partly below ground level.

Several wards and our class room were destroyed by direct hits, but naturally work went on and luckily casualties were light. With the classroom gone, our lectures took place wherever and whenever possible. Due to blast damage they were rarely in the same room twice. Despite everything, it is on record, that none of our group failed the preliminary exam taken at the end of our first year.

When we were eighteen we were put on the Fire Watching Rota and were thrilled, if a little nervous, to 'don' a tin hat and climb up to the roof for our stint.

Food was good if monotonous. As in all institutions, we knew the menus for the week by heart. Our sugar and butter rations, less a small portion for cooking, were doled out at each Monday mid morning break. We carried our containers to all meals. Those who did not take sugar became exceedingly popular.

Most L.C.C. Hospitals in those days had a high proportion of girls from Southern Ireland, (excellent nurses too), and since they had food parcels and they travelled home on holiday to where they didn't have any rationing, they were very popular. They would have been anyway for they were so gentle and friendly. We also had a number of German/Jewish girls who had reached England before the War.

Dorothea 1943.

We were of course, provided with our uniform, but black shoes and stockings had to come out of our own pay and coupons. Shortage of coupons and low salaries, twenty five pounds a year in the Fever hospitals and fifteen in the General for a first year nurse, meant that 'mufti' clothing was in short supply. It did not matter too much, since we were all in the same boat and friends were happy to lend clothes for a special occasion.

As far as I was concerned, night duty was a joy. I couldn't feel quite as scared in an air raid with the patients to reassure and care for. Not that the children needed much reassurance, they seemed to take the noise of planes, bombs and guns in their stride.

One memory I have, is of standing on the upstairs balcony during a night raid, strictly forbidden of course, and watching London burn in the December raids of 1940.

In January 1943, the callous and cowardly daylight raid on Sandhurst Road School took place. The children were machine gunned and the school bombed. Of course there were heavy casualties. As we were situated only half a mile away, we too had a bomb drop near us, shattering windows, damaging one ward and injuring several patients. Luckily none too seriously. Since there had been no alert and it was 1pm, the beds were not protected in any way. Again, the pilot knew what he was bombing, since the nurses could be seen quite clearly as they made their way along the open corridor to lunch.

When the 'Blitz' ended, our curfew was relaxed and we were allowed to go out after duty until 10pm. Previously we had been confined to barracks from 5pm onwards. Many of us went 'up west,' dancing, despite the black out and the numbers of soldiers both British and foreign. None of us were troubled by unwelcome attention. The worst that happened was that one Irish girl was threatened by a prostitute for standing, whilst waiting for a friend, on her beat.

Because my home was quite near, I went there for my days off. It wasn't always peaceful since we were outside the balloon barrage and quite near to Biggin Hill. Since my mother was also nursing, though not resident, I often queued for her rations and any other un-rationed food that was on sale. I had a

greater awareness of the difficulties of living outside an establishment than some of my colleagues.

We were so lucky, never short of food, warmth or water as happened outside. The hospital had its own Artesian well, and when local mains were bombed, people queued at a standpipe in our grounds with kettles and buckets.

After completing my fever training, I moved in January 1944 to a large voluntary hospital in East London. This had already been badly bombed, but it still continued to deal with all 'normal' hospital admissions as well as casualties. In both hospitals, discipline was strict and standards were not allowed to fall, whatever the circumstances.

After signing my contract at the end of six months, I and others of my 'set' were transferred to a sector hospital. All the teaching hospitals had branches in supposedly safe areas and this one was a converted old peoples home in Middlesex. The rooms were not built for nursing and were most inconvenient. As indeed were the beds which were only intended for use in an emergency. These being lower and narrower than normal beds; murder for nurses backs and not much fun for the patients either. I still have a vivid recollection of an unconscious patient of twenty stone, who had to be 'turned' regularly. All available staff had to stand by to make sure she didn't roll out.

We moved to this hospital on D-Day and were soon in the midst of the V1's. We became, as most did, pretty accurate at guessing when and where they would land. I often laugh at the vision of myself hanging on to a large oxygen cylinder, convinced that the Doodlebug was coming through the window. I remember thinking that, no matter what, the cylinder mustn't be knocked over in case it exploded. Mad now one looks back.

We had a number of 8th Army men in the hospital and they were a great help to us all, as they made and served morning tea and elevenses. We stayed on the ward for our mid-morning break and they saw to it that we had plenty of hot buttered toast also. As you can imagine, we didn't want to leave their ward. On the other hand, it was a little nerve racking when night sister did her first rounds, to have several men missing because they had not yet returned from the 'local' which was two ploughed fields away.

During one spell of night duty, some of us were called upon to open up wards to take in wounded German POW's. We were thrilled to be called 'Schwester', not realizing, that all German nurses were called this and that we had not been promoted.

"Fleischer, bitte Schwester." (Bottle please nurse.) was my first German phrase. Not much use in polite conversation.

After six months, I was transferred to another of our sector hospitals. This was purpose-built for War-time emergencies and much easier to work in. Situated in Essex, we were soon experiencing the victims and damage of the V2's. The noise was horrendous. Some of the casualties were grim. One woman had been cooking and was buried against her hot stove. Her little girl, also injured, was in another ward. We were delighted to learn that her husband was coming home on compassionate leave. We could not tell her when, since she

might have been disappointed by any delay. When he did come, there wasn't a dry eye in the ward. We quickly screened them for privacy's sake.

At the other end of the town, there was a regular Army Barracks and we took in some of their sick for routine operations. Someone in authority had the bright idea of filling half the ward with these 'service sick' and the other half with seriously wounded German POW's. Tarpaulin curtains divided the ward, but of course, each half could hear the other. Peace was not helped by the Germans commenting happily on each rocket explosion and conditions worsened when two Italian POW's, disliked by either side were admitted. As the Allied forces neared Berlin, the Germans became quieter and prayed that the Russians did not get there first.

In another ward, I nursed some of the casualties from one of the last rockets to fall on the East End. The Vallance Road flats. One man's face was peppered with glass fragments which could only be removed as they surfaced. He kept them in a little box. At the last count there were forty pieces and more to come. I never heard him, or any of the air-raid casualties complain or bemoan their lot. How could Hitler expect to beat a people so courageous?

The eve of V.E. Day, found me on night-duty on a Men's Medical ward. Many of the patients were very ill with heart and chest complaints. Some had Diabetes. As aforementioned, discipline in this hospital was rigid so you can imagine our surprise when the Day Sister gave her report apparently oblivious to the fact, that under every bed was a crate of liquid alcoholic refreshment. At her 10pm rounds, Night Sister was equally unaware and after her departure, the party began.

One of the patients was the landlord of a public house in the town and had done his best with the supplies. Despite his valiant efforts, reinforcements had to be collected from the 'local' and we feared for our careers as pyjama clad figures flitted in and out of the French windows. Finally, at about 2am, the revelries ceased and we were able to tidy the ward.

At 3am, we had one of the worst thunderstorms I can ever remember, yet no-one woke up. I wonder why? And better still, no-one was a penny the worse for their liberations. We staggered to the Nurses Home with our share of the drinks, which even with the Sisters' 'blind eye' we had not dared to chance on duty.

My nursing career continued and as one of our wards filled with some of the first Japanese POW's to return to England. We just couldn't believe their stories, any more than we could believe our Senior Medical Students, who had volunteered to help at Belsen. Our War had been awful, but these horrors made us feel we had been lucky.

Dorothea Ellison.
Bishopston, Swansea.

WITH THANKS

I was a nurse during the war. Just before ‘D Day’, I was spending some time with friends in the South of England. Their son was in the Army and he was stationed nearby. The village was situated just over the ten mile limit from the coast, which was out of bounds to civilians.

On our walks, the sight of hundreds of camouflaged trucks and tanks lining the verges, concealed by leafy hedges, made us think that the longed for ‘Second Front’ was soon to materialise. We were so war-weary in 1944 and we all hoped for a quick ending.

In order to prepare myself and my uniform for entry to Pinderfields E.M.S. Hospital, Wakefield. I returned to Yorkshire on June 5th. I awoke the following morning to the momentous news. I passed the day agonizing over the safety of my service friends; especially those of the Church Youth Fellowship.

On ‘D-Day plus one, I joined my colleagues to prepare beds with hot water bottles and packs filled with dressings, in readiness for the wounded who soon began to arrive at Wakefield station. They came in Red Cross marked hospital trains manned by the Queen Alexandra Sisters and Medical Orderlies.

They came. The men, who hours before were superbly trained, physical specimens of humanity, but now they lay on stretchers, bandaged and helpless. Men who risked and gave so much, so that we ourselves and future generations could live freely and democratically.

We worked through the night and most of the following day to help them. After each convoy we would grab what little sleep we could on the hard straw mattresses. Our hearts bursting with thanks and indeed sorrow for the men who fought in the ‘D-Day’ Invasion.

Joan Walker.
Longlee, Yorkshire.

FIRE SERVICE

I joined the National Fire Service, during the war in 1941. We began with some very interesting lectures on the chain of command. From fireman to Commander to Home Office Control. We had lectures on the dangers of chemical gasses, to the most common causes of haystack fires. These could be caused by insects, (thermopiles), creating internal combustion: The definition of this, I remember to this day. *Burning of itself, by itself and without outside assistance.*

We were also taught first aid, how to take messages, (Control Room Procedure) P.T. squad drill and we were taken on the odd march to blow away the cobwebs.

My first posting was to a small station, where I worked as a telephonist. I then moved on to a Sub-Division Control Room at Pudsey. We were in overall charge of eight stations. Whilst I was there, I was promoted to Leading Firewoman, where I took on the duties of Mobilising Officer. We worked watches of twenty four hours about, whilst the firemen worked, forty eight hours on and twenty four off. There were three watches altogether. Red, White and Blue.

I married Albert R. Theaker, in the June of 1943. He was a Telegraphist, (Sparks) in the Royal Navy. We had a small Guard of Honour made up of 'off duty' fire-girls, firemen and the Column Officer. We received a beautiful cut glass reading lamp from my colleagues which even to this day, still remains a much treasured possession. Our few short days on honeymoon, were spent at Scarborough. Of course we were unable to walk on the beach because of all the barbed wire.

Not long after we were married, I was sent on an A.T.S. O.C.T.U. training course in London. I spent the first night at the reinforcing base in Horseferry Road, before moving by camouflaged coach to Hampstead Heath. We stayed in a beautiful convent building. It was a shame it had to be used in this way. In the grounds, were various assault courses. Luckily for us, the A.T.S. Catering Staff were still there, (they made lovely pancakes).

It wasn't long after my short stay in London, that I was promoted to Senior Leading Firewomen and moved to 'C' Divisional H.Q. at Swinnow House in Leeds. Whilst stationed here, we had a rather nasty fire at a mill in Morley. It was lunchtime when the call came through on a beautiful sunny day. Luckily, most of the employees were getting a breath of fresh air and enjoying the sunshine. The fire quickly caught and extra appliances were drafted in; the predetermined attendance already being there. All large or dangerous buildings, had been assessed for essential attendance.

We received a message that a wall had collapsed and there were men trapped. In the meantime, Fireforce H.Q. (responsible for four Divisions or more), had ordered a Mobile Control Room from the next Division. Most of the communications were then made between them, but some did come back to us.

We found out that the trapped men were a Leading Fireman and a Senior Leading Fireman; both of them from my old Sub Division.

Their funerals were held together and we rehearsed the Slow March at Park Street Fire Station in Leeds, (the former Leeds City Fire Brigade H.Q.). There was also two sisters from East Ardsley near Wakefield, killed in the fire. They had stayed in the Mill and had become trapped before they could be rescued from the upper floors.

Muriel and Albert's Wedding, June 1943.

On the many courses I attended at Wyther Park House on the west side of Leeds, we firewomen would share our experiences. It was an old house and it was said to have been haunted by the ghost of a young girl who'd fallen from the iron balcony. There were French Windows which led onto the balcony and nobody enjoyed sleeping by them. There was always a rush to grab the beds furthest away. During my various stays here, I learned about the terrible conditions in Hull.

We had a stand-by pump and crew stationed at Knavesmire, near York, ready to move to Hull if things became too bad, (Knavesmire Reinforcement Base, was to the best of my knowledge, York Racecourse). We didn't suffer as much enemy action as other towns, but we were kept busy dealing with Incendiary Bombs and U.X.B.'s.

In Leeds, we had a good emergency communications network, if the main phone lines went down. Leeds City Transport and Electricity Department, had four switchboards with hundreds of lines leading from a lamp post by the tram tracks. The electricity boxes also had phones connected to them. Lock houses on the canals had phones. They extended into other areas, should their services be required.

Before leaving the Service, I attended a meeting in Leeds, when the preparations were being made for the D-Day Landings. We discussed which of the single girls we could send as back-up for the coast. Quite a few men went too. I remember being part of a 'Guard of Honour' for Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, when he visited the town.

I stayed here, until my release in 1944, when I left under 'Paragraph 4' due to the expected arrival of my daughter in January of 1945. I left before having completed my 'Acting' period and confirmation.'

Muriel Theaker.
Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

THE MASK

On leaving school, I entered in the Civil Service in the Ministry of Labour and in those days we had to go where we were sent. During the war, I was stationed at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire as Senior Woman Officer. The Women's section was 'out-housed' in a church hall with a tin roof. One day, an order arrived asking for fifteen part time Firewomen volunteers. I said to the girls on the staff, "Let's volunteer. I'm sure we'd feel much safer in a Fire Station than in the Church Hall." They chose twelve of us and because I was the Senior Woman Officer, I had to wear a red stripe on my uniform.

We were then stationed in East Anglia where we took our turns at night duties. Of course when we weren't on duty, we were still on call if the siren went. Being situated in this part of the country, you can imagine this happened quite often.

I was getting ready for bed, one night as the siren sounded and due to the fact that I had, had a hectic day in the office, I didn't put on my uniform. I just lifted my helmet and gas mask and made for the Fire Station. There was a Jerry plane captured in the searchlights, but I just kept on running. The Wardens repeatedly shouted for me to stop and take cover. I arrived at the station breathless, and one of the fireman said to me.

"What's wrong Janet? That plane couldn't have possibly dropped anything on you." I was then greeted with howls of laughter as I answered, "Plane? I'm not scared of any plane, I'm scared of the dark."

Janet MacHardy.
Glasgow.

WHY THE LAND ARMY?

Why did I join the Womens' Land Army?
Because I had always loved the countryside and the animals.
When did I join?
That would be July 7th, 1941 when I was twenty years old.
Where did I go?

My first experience has to be credited to a farm near Carlisle; thestart of my years of hard labour. On my first day, I was awakened at 0600hrs and put to work straight away. We didn't even get a drink let alone anything to eat. Then it was off to learn how to milk the cows. How it made my wrists ache and after all that, I had to carry the heavy churns to the feeding calves before I was finally given breakfast at 0830hrs. I, like many of the Land Girls, learned to stay clear of the cow's tail as it swished away at the flies. It would really sting if it hit you in the face.

Marjorie and the CO-OP horse.

More treats were to come. After breakfast I was given the delightful job of crawling up and down the fields with sacking tied around my knees thinning turnips. What a wonderful job. In fact the easiest job I ever had, was taking a horse over to the Smithy to be shod. I rode all the way there on the cart.

The nicest thing that ever happened whilst I was there was finding a newly born calf on the pebble bank of the River Eden. I carried it back up to the farm. I was followed all the way back by it's mother. She was continually 'mooing' as we went. We also had quite a few horses on the farm. One was called 'Old Bones.' The poor thing was twenty years old.

One day, whilst working on the hay turning machine, I had a fright. The reigns on the horse that I had been given were too short. Of course after a while I managed to drop them. I lunged forward grabbing the horses' tail as I fell. I shouted for it to stop. The hay turning machine was going all over the place. She did stop eventually, but I could quite easily have fallen under the machine.

The farmer's daughter and I used to feed the hens with a mixture called 'Croudie. It was made up of water and meal. I could hardly carry a bucket of water let alone the meal as we had to walk quite a distance to the huts. It wasn't a problem for her though, she was a tough girl.

One day I was sent to clean the hen huts out. I was really scrubbing them to ensure that I got every bit of hardened dirt off when one of the farm lads said to me. " You're not polishing a piano you know. I hadn't quite finished them by lunch time and was very upset when the farmer's wife called me a 'lazy bones'.

A representative from the Land Army called to see me whilst I was mowing thistles with a scythe, (not a sickle). I was dressed in my wellies, raincoat and Sou'ester as it was throwing it down. She asked me if everything was alright. I said yes, but I really should have told her what was going on.

We hardly had anything to eat and there was never a kind word spoken to us. The two farm lads and myself had two cheese sandwiches wrapped in newspaper to eat whilst we were working in the fields. That was our morning's food. In the afternoon we were given jam sandwiches and a bottle of cold tea. Our last meal was at 1830hrs. There was nothing else until breakfast the next morning, not even a drink. Supper consisted of a ration of bread and veg. Always the same amount and certainly not enough for the three of us. The lads used to eat very quickly so they could get more. I soon learned to eat just as quick after missing out so many times.

I remember once, after the lads had finished their meal and I was sat at the table finishing my cup of tea, the farmer's wife came in and pushed the bench under the table with me still sat on it. She never even said a word. Thankfully, I was soon to be moved on.

Marjorie (second from right) and friends outside the hostel
Near Wetherby, Yorkshire.

I was sent to an hostel called 'Merrythought' which was situated seven miles from Penrith. The day I arrived it was raining. I couldn't understand why nobody was working. It was explained to me later that they were, 'rained off'. Something I'd never heard of during my time at the other farm. We were sent out to work on the various farms from Merrythought. Sometimes by bike and sometimes by lorry. They were great days and we were always singing.

In Cumbria there is a wind called 'The Helm Wind'. We were still out working in this one day, with sacks fastened around our heads and shoulders. A passing lorry driver remarked that we should all be given a medal for working in such a gale. Even though it was hard, we did manage to have a few laughs. We were sorting potatoes once, the puzzled farmer couldn't understand why the machine wasn't working. It wasn't until he noticed that Doreen was leaning on the button. He soon figured out why. We used to call her 'Doreen never worry' as nothing ever bothered her.

Two very good pals were getting married; Paula Anderman and Leo Wolffe. (They were Austrian refugees). The ceremony took place at Penrith Registry Office. After the ceremony, three of us went off to use the toilet in the main square and when we came back they had all gone. We didn't know where the reception was being held, so we walked around the town asking people if they had seen a couple that looked as if they'd just been married.

Two girls coming back off leave told us how they had seen their train leaving the station, so they ran like mad and jumped on. Before they had even got their breath back, they were tickled to find out that it was actually pulling in. Also, there were two girls who came home one evening, saying that they had been working as scarecrows all day.

Marjorie (front) in Cumberland. Summer of '42

On one of the farms, the farmer's wife called us in to her front room saying,
"You haven't seen a photo of our Robert have you?" She took us over to a photograph that was hanging on the wall. Apparently it was taken at a show whilst he was leading a horse around a ring. All very well, you might think, but at the time it was taken, he was behind a pillar and all we could see of him was his leg sticking out of one side, and his arm and hand on the other. We could hardly contain our laughter. Even after all these years, I am still in touch with ten of my old mates, which I might add, is very nice.

Edna, Marjorie, Edna & Monica, on leave at Llandudno.

Marjorie Waterhouse.
Harrogate, N.Yorkshire.

MEMOIRS OF A LAND GIRL

I was a shop assistant from Hull when I volunteered for the W.L.A. at the age of 17 years and 9 months. I was sent to Malton in Yorkshire and arrived on the doorstep of Yates and Sons, Farm Machinery Suppliers, on an icy February morning. I was shivering in thin clothes, (my uniform had gone astray in transit). I was to be hired out with a threshing team which consisted of the machine, a steam engine, a driver, a fireman and two other Land Girls. We were given 'War Agriculture' bicycles and instructed to follow the team within a twelve mile radius of our billet, in Westow village. My only experience of the countryside before, was riding through it as a keen cyclist. I loved the outdoors and growing things in city gardens, so I soon tuned in to the country life. Even so, it was very strange and hard at first.

My workmate was to be a girl of twenty one, from Leeds, also a beginner. The first problem was teaching her to ride a heavy bike; she had never ridden before and was very nervous. After a few tumbles and giggles she got the hang of it. Now we were ready to start.

The noise, dust and back breaking 'Chaff' carrying, seemed a bit of a nightmare to me but after a while we did get used to it. I decided, that if I was to be stuck with a winter season of threshing, I had better become more efficient so that I could get away from this dreaded chore. After a short course and test, I received a proficiency badge and was able to work straw stacking, building up the corners as good as a man. I heaved bales about, threaded the baler with wire, I could even perch on top of the machine, feeding the roller drum with sheaves of corn, or band cutting for the feeder. We followed this routine daily until Easter and after a week's holiday back in Hull, we were sent to do field work at a farm in North Grimston. The two of us stayed there until after the Harvest, when the threshing team was once again, loaned out for the winter season.

We were a good working partnership. Edna and I soon learnt to put up with each others idiosyncrasies. She was not used to going out at night too much. Often, I would join forces with other Land Girls in Malton and enjoy dancing at the Malton Rooms and other village venues. I remember the wonderful music from the Coldstream Guards as they played their delightful Military Two Steps and rousing Quicksteps, every Saturday night. Malton became the Guards H.Q. so there was often interesting events going on.

Our living accommodation in Westow was not a happy arrangement. The District Commissioner, Lady Howard-Vyse helped us to find more suitable lodgings. We were delivered by her car to Langton where we stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Bradley in a cottage. She looked after us very well and became my second mum. I have nothing but praise for her. Isaac, her husband, was a Woodsman and Game keeper for the Langton Estate. He helped us enormously. A true countryman like his father before him. The name of Isaac Bradley is still gathering moss on the village Memorial Stone.

Iris 1942.

We cycled many miles to work. I used to envy the Land Girls who passed in lorries as they were driven from their hostel to the farms. They always looked so happy and sang in unison wherever they went. I missed the comradeship they obviously found in groups, but the family life in the cottage had it's own rewards. As we sat on the pricked hearth rug by the log fire, Isaac would tell us yarns about his youth on the farms and lots of folklore. I can still smell the paraffin lamp with the home made Beeswax, the stored apples in boxes, the bacon hanging from the ceiling, the goose grease he used on his chest to help ease his cough, the dubbin from our boots as they dried off near the fire, and of course the dung which lingered on our overalls and breeches.

Our days in the fields were mostly enjoyable, though hard work. I enjoyed haymaking, tossing the loads into the carts and riding the horses home. No one taught us how to ride or even harness a horse, they presumed we knew all these things, because we wore the uniform.

My first experience was memorable. The harness was not fixed properly and off I slid under the horses belly. I was dragged along the rough lane hanging on like grim death. I had to be helped up and 'pinned up' as the foreman said. My rear end was a sight for sore eyes. I was a long time living that down.

No one ever told us about wearing a mask when we mixed the pink chemical powder into the corn. I had been doing the job for eight hours. I had a

breathing problem and much discomfort. We were supposed to know about these things. However, we survived and stayed happy most of the time.

I enjoyed scything thistles as we stood in a row of three or four workers making our way, across the pastures. Being left handed brought its own problems. I developed a powerful swing and a good rhythm. My left handed action caused the unfortunate worker beside me, to jump about to avoid losing a foot as I swung in the opposite direction to everyone else. I was ridiculed as a 'cack-handed townie' and sent to the back. After that, I worked twice as hard to prove myself.

I loved standing at the edge of the field with the long curved blade in the air as I sharpened it with the flint stone and a bit of spit. This is how I was taught by the 'Thirdie lad', a kind but slow witted youth, whom I nicknamed 'Fondie' after a character in a book of that name. I wish I could find that wonderful book again. What marvellous characters I met on the Wolds. The dialect was a delight to me and often I scribbled it in my diary.

Moving on to Driffield Bainton and Mr. Barratt. I joined another threshing team, this time the old steam engine was replaced with a tractor. We lost the soot, smoke and inconvenience, but more than anything, we lost an old friend. A friend who had kept us warm on frosty mornings as he hissed and sang to us as no other engine could.

We were billeted in North Dalton in the cottage of the widowed Mrs Wilson. She looked after us well and instructed her son to keep and eye on us at night. He used to escort us to the village Inn for a shandy and we would sit in the snug. It had a wood fire and wonderful hot bread cakes that would be produced from the oven, dripping with butter. We used to enjoy the village dances, where for sixpence or a shilling, we could dance our legs off in Land Army brogues. A perfect match for the farm boots our partners often wore. I remember the lovely refreshments provided by the village ladies. Even with food rationing, they still produced deep apple pies filled with cloves. We had crusty home made bread with pork dripping if someone had killed a pig.

We had to wash by the light of a candle or oil lamp and if we were lucky, we would have one jug of warm water each. I often arrived at a dance with threshing dust in corners I could hardly see in the dimly lit mirror. How I looked forward to my weekly bath in the zinc tub in the privacy of the garden shed; the warm water passed in buckets from the kitchen boiler. I never felt deprived of conveniences then.

I remember working in the fields with the Italian prisoners of war, that were stationed at Eden Camp in Malton. They used to sing opera as they worked and a few of them fancied themselves as Romeos. They used to write love notes on toilet paper which they threw at us from their lorries. We would giggle, but back away being half afraid of the situation, not wanting to be caught fraternising with the enemy. They were clever craftsmen and often gave the farm workers slippers they had made from the 'Massey Harris Band' which we used for binding the sheaves of corn. The wooden carvings they made were beautiful. It used to sadden me. They should have been sat by their own firesides, carving for their own families. War time, and all the horrors that are associated with it is such a

terrible time for the family. The comradeship we all learn during these trying times, was something that we should all really try to benefit by. I am sure that the Land Girls did just that.

Iris M. Newbold.
Hull, Humberside.

HARD TIMES

In 1943, I was living in Kingston Upon Hull. We had been very badly bombed. I was working in a grocers shop at this time, totally convinced that I would go crazy before I became old whilst counting food coupons. One day, one of my school friends came home on leave from the Women's Land Army looking all healthy and tanned. As I was nineteen years old, totally bored and due for being called up anyway, I decided to volunteer.

I encountered some opposition to my services. This being due to my size. I was under five feet tall. However, I didn't let them put me off. I went ahead and joined, causing much hilarity in my oversized uniform. Then I was sent twenty five miles away to Hawden Hostel.

Of course this changed my life completely, after the noise and dirt of the city. The sheer paradise of the countryside, the never ending skyline, and row upon row of vegetables. It was all a totally new experience for me. I soon made lots of friends, and I might add, lots of blisters. Now fifty years on I'm glad to say only the friends still remain.

Muriel enjoying the harvesting.

I remember the job I had trying to put the collar on a horse. I would have to stand on a box, pull it's head down by it's hair and then throw it on. Even

picking potatoes was a task. Of course it used to make everyone's back ache, but trying to empty the basket was my problem. I used to have to climb onto the wheel of the cart to empty mine. The favourite trick was to get the horse to move sending me flying; basket and all.

We did every job imaginable. Ditching, dyhing, chopping hedges, pulling sugar beet, flax, turnips, wurzels and kale etc. Threshing was a real dirty job; especially if you were working at the side of the machine, spreading out the Hessian chaff sheets which we had to rake all the rubbish onto. Then gathering the four corners together we had to carry it over our shoulders and across to the fold yard with it swinging away and banging on our bottoms as we went.

'Lounces' or lunch was most welcome. Even if it was only tea in a greasy bucket and enamel mug to accompany the sandwiches that we had prepared at 0620 hrs that morning.

We were often sent out to neighbouring farms. Sometimes by lorry and sometimes by bike. Some were quite near to the airfield. Here we used to count the Lancaster Bombers flying out to bomb Germany. This was the obvious sign that the night's dancing would be postponed. (We all enjoyed the dances at the Shire Hall), but more sadly, that someone's sweetheart might not be returning home.

The fun we had, helped us through the dark days of the war. It also helped those who were waiting. My friend Joan was waiting for her 'Burma Bill'. Others were waiting for their boyfriends to come home from the Japanese POW Camps. How we all danced and rejoiced in Hull City Square on V.E. Day. I married a handsome Latvian, who I worked in the fields with. We now have a grown up family and are still happily married after all these years.

Muriel Berzins.
Aldbrough, Humberside.

LANCASHIRE LASS

In 1942 I joined the Women's Land Army. I was very young and naive and had a lot to learn about life. I had never been outside Lancashire and the thought of joining was a great adventure. I think the attractive uniform appealed to me, as I had no previous experience of country life. I applied for a job in horticulture as farming didn't attract me too much. Probably as I had a fear of cows.

I was sent, along with many other Lancashire girls, down to Corsham in Wiltshire, where there was a great deal of activity going on below ground. Very hush hush. We joined many tough Irish labourers in back breaking work, clearing boulders and rocks, spreading soil and sewing grass seed in an effort to camouflage the surfaces above ground. Unfortunately for me with my red hair, I was relentlessly pursued with cries of 'Ginger' from our Irish colleagues wherever I worked.

One by one, the girls fell by the wayside, not literally of course. There was much complaining of aching backs. The heaving of rocks and pushing heavy wheelbarrows was just too much for these ex factory, office and shop girls. I stuck it for one month and then asked to be transferred to real horticulture. The H.O.M., Mrs. Methuen, who was our W.L.A. local organiser, sent me to Rudloe Manor, the headquarters of No.12 R.A.F. Fighter Group. There I worked with the head gardener and three other girls, growing vegetables and fruit for the camp. The more exotic fruits, peaches and nectarines, going to the Officers Mess.

I was billeted at Ivy House in the village, the home of our organiser, along with an assortment of Army and R.A.F. Officers, W.A.A.F.'s and two other Land Girls. We girls were put in the attic bedrooms. Whether this befitted our lowly station in life, or because we were so fit and healthy, we didn't know.

I bought an ancient bicycle for five pounds and rode the two or three miles to the camp every day, after rising at 0600. We had all our meals at the camp and were often watched with amazement and envy, by the R.A.F. Personnel, at the large meals we consumed. We were always hungry. One of my memories of early morning work in winter, was picking frozen sprouts in the dark, listening to the mournful cry of a local owl. I have never liked sprouts since.

We must have appeared to be a motley crew as we dug, hoed, raked and harvested, wearing our dungarees, head scarves, many jumpers, and in my case, a pair of clogs provided by my father for the muddy ground. Our boss, Mr. Sherwood, a local man, had very left wing political views and while we worked, we discussed all kinds of subjects. I would go home on leave and regale my parents with 'all this socialist rubbish'. My father, a 'True Blue Tory' was horrified.

During the summer months we cut down our old dungarees and made shorts. I don't know what effect all those sunburned legs had on our boss, as we paraded up and down the rows of vegetables. He lived a rather lonely life as a widower with a schoolgirl daughter.

The war itself, brought heartache and separation from loved ones, (my own fiance was serving in Africa), shortages, 'Blackouts' each night and of course, the horror of the Blitz. I experienced this when I spent my Christmas

leave in Manchester. My brother in the R.A.F. was killed in 1940 and another brother was in the Merchant Navy on Atlantic and Russian Convoy duties.
I look back on my Land Army days with pleasure. It was a worthwhile job and it instilled in me, a great love of the countryside.

B. J. Hall.
Bolton, Lancashire.

BO PEEP AND BLISTERS

I was a member of the Women's Land Army from March 1942, staying in hostels and farms in the old counties of Westmorland and Cumberland. Although the work was very hard, I enjoyed the camaraderie of the girls that I met. I still correspond with some of them after all these years.

We sometimes worked with the Italian and German P.O.W.'s. I remember one German called Gerhard. Everyone called him Guard as it was easier to say. He was always talking about the Black Forest.

Potato picking.

I 'lived in' on one farm and found it very lonely. Our drinking water was pumped manually from a well, and we used the rain water for washing. It was wonderful for our hair.

Going out for the evening to the village dance was fun, but I struggled by the light of three candles to put my make-up on. On cold winter mornings, it was nice and warm in the cow shed when I went to milk the cows. It was done by hand of course in those days.

A fine collections of rats.

I also worked in a threshing gang, a dirty job, with the old threshing machines belching out black smoke. Before we were allowed back into our billet, we had to take off our green jumpers and shake off all the chaff and barley husks. We had some good meals though. Threshing was a big event with people coming from nearby farms to help. The women used to cook a lot of food for the occasion. We were always hungry. I suppose it was working out in the open air that made us so. That was one good reason for going to Chapel on Sundays: To scoff the tea and buns at the end of the service.

One of my jobs, on one farm I worked at, was to count the sheep first thing in the morning. I used to dread it, and prayed that they would all be there. If they weren't, it was my job to find them.

Myra Gifford.
Bodmin, Cornwall.

THE SWING OF A LANTERN

My earliest memory of the war is trying to sort out my kit. There was an assortment of green jumpers, dungarees, cord jodhpurs, socks, greatcoat and all sorts of other items. They were all spread out on the floor of the dining room. Great excitement. Then came the journey.

The next day, I was heading for London en-route for Herne Bay. I remember how I panicked when the chap who had taken charge of my suitcase during the train journey, refused to hand it back to me unless I agreed to go with him to his flat, (all this in the gloom of Kings Cross Station). In the end he relented I'm glad to say. My pleas must have got to him. This was the first time I had travelled on my own and I must have been greener than my W.L.A. jumpers.

The hostel at Herne Bay was a pretty grim place. Most of us, (all rookies) were assigned to a trainee farm, run by a Miss Smith and a profoundly deaf young girl called Daphne. As we cycled to the farm on that first morning, we were almost overcome by a powerful smell of gas. We later found out, that one of the girls had gassed herself because she was having a baby to a married man. She had been one of the hostel elite; a rat catcher. They always seemed to look glamorous. Maybe it was the Gaberdine breeches they wore?

My dad, sister in law and youngest brother,
outside our shop during the war.

Life at the trainee farm wasn't so bad. Miss Smith and Daphne enjoyed a fairly tempestuous relationship and when Daphne ran away, for reasons unknown, Miss Smith asked me to have tea with her in the big house. Happily Daphne returned and I was spared further attention. It was here, we learnt how to care for the cattle and I learnt to smoke. Oh those first heady breaths amongst the newly lain straw of the cow sheds. It was so wonderful to go home on leave also. Trains were absolutely packed with soldiers and other members of the Armed Forces.

I was then sent to St. Mary's Bay and lived with Mr. and Mrs. Caffyn and their daughter Mary in an isolated cottage, literally in the middle of nowhere. I have memories of the hard snow crunching under my boots and swinging a lantern as I walked from the cottage to the farm on a winter's morning to begin the milking.

Mr. Caffyn was the head cow-man. At home he was the quietest and gentlest of men, but in the sheds he was someone else. Harsh treatment was metered out to the cows for any small misdemeanour. One cow was beaten to her knees for going into the wrong Byre. How she bellowed. I hated him. My crying was to no avail. In spite of forming a friendship with Mary Caffyn, I wasn't happy at this place and left after only two months.

My next place was with the Brightling family in a small village near Ashford. Mr. and Mrs. Brightling were in their early thirties. They had two sons; Richard and Godfrey. Both were destined for Public School. The work on the farm was divided between a farm labourer, myself and several German P.O.W.'s. Mr. Brightling himself, seemed to be here, there and everywhere. It was during this time I became very proficient at milking. It really was gratifying, as at first I found it very difficult

At some point, the family began taking paying guests into their very large attractive home, as a result of the farm not doing so well, (no C.A.P. then). Neither of them, it seemed to me, were suited to farming. In retrospect, I had a lot of fun, mostly with Mr. Brightling who was always teasing me. One night he came into by bedroom, but I pretended to be asleep and he left. Richard and Godfrey were quite upset when Yorkshire C.C. beat Kent that year. I hope I didn't crow. And then there was Reg; a neighbouring farmer with whom I made love to, under the moon of that long hot summer. Mmmm... When I left, he said he would never get over it but I'm sure he did.

Kay.

The last period of my Land Army days, was spent in the South of England in a hostel in New Romney. I shared a bunk with Joyce from Middlesbrough. We both worked at 'Rooklands Farm' which was a seven mile cycle journey. It was a free for all with the bikes and if you had no experience of maintaining the machine you grabbed, you were in trouble. I have biked along with inner tubes hanging out, no rear lights and even remember on one occasion, stripping off both wobbling tyres and throwing them into a dyke. I then cycled on the unclad rims. I remember the time we all got nits in our hair. Lying awake nights stiff with horror at the thought of them patrolling our heads.

Here are some scraps from my diary.

Oct' 24th 1945.
Among other things, helped Syd catch a horse, assisted Bert in sorting sheep, littered the calves, loaded sugar beet tops and drove the tractor for the first time. It's hellishly cold. My hands have started splitting. The Germans joined Joyce and myself round the boiler fire at dinner time. Much laughter.

That Evening.
Joyce, Maureen, Ginger etc., (and me) biked nine miles to a dance at the army camp in Hythe. Enjoyed a good time and had supper. The dance ended at 0100. The bike ride back nearly killed me. I thought I'd never make it.

Nov' 30th. Saturday.
Went over to Newchurch with Pete, Les and Podge, bailing straw. They had me up on the threshing machine, band cutting. I cut my fingers to ribbons with the knife. Cycling back to the hostel, it poured down and I was soaked through.

***Dec' 6th. Friday**.*
Lil, one of the cows broke her neck trying to get to the calf she had been separated from, (it was calling to her). She lay there half frozen in the field. I felt very sad all that morning.

Kay Riddell.
Leeds.Yorkshire.

COME IN LAND GIRLS

I joined the Women's Land Army in 1944. I was 17 years old. One afternoon I left the hospital where I had been working, donned my uniform and caught a train to Lenham. I had never been to the countryside before, having been born and bred in an industrial area just outside London. Perhaps the Land Army was a strange ambition, but I had always pictured myself in the corduroy breeches, bright green jersey, long woollen socks, brown shoes and of course, the obligatory and famous bush hat tied under the chin.

And now, at long last, I was on my way. I arrived at 'Swadelands', a large country house that had been converted to a hostel to accommodate 40 girls; most of us from London and Yorkshire. Miss Parris, the Matron, gave us a strict set of rules. Woe betide any girl entering the hostel wearing outside shoes. Work clothes were to be left in the darkened, nether regions of the building.

At five every morning we were awakened by the banging of a wooden spoon against a frying pan at the foot of the 'palatial' staircase. Breakfast, be it an egg or a rasher of streaky bacon, was usually folded inside a slice of bread and gratefully consumed during our nine o'clock break. At 0630 hrs, 'Harry Boy' arrived with his lorry in the hostel drive and we piled on to the back in heaps to be delivered to our designated farms. I spent my very first day sitting in a barn while it snowed heavily outside.

My first job was land clearing. An aged tree had to be removed so that the young ones could take its place. We perched like birds in the branches hacking them off with saws and bill hooks; the trunk to be grubbed out by a tractor. The larger branches, we stacked for the charcoal burners; the smaller twigs crackled and snapped on huge bonfires.

Our food was packed in individual tins, but liquid refreshment came in the shape of a large black kettle for hot mugs of tea. Turns were taken to collect water from an obliging cottage; sometimes miles away. I remember having to cross a large field on such an errand, three times a day for a week. This was the home of surely, the largest Hereford Bull in the world. He watched me with menacing interest, as I traversed his domain. I certainly kept my eyes on him too.

Sylvia aged 18.

But, Land Army life was proving tolerable. Haymaking, fruit and bit picking and hoeing during the summer, was certainly healthy work. In the spring, planting young lettuces and strawberry plants was pleasant enough, but the winter land clearing and threshing, would freeze our hands and make us quarrelsome.

During the winter of 1947, heavy snow and ice made it impossible for us to carry out our normal outdoor tasks, so we helped in the hostel and then the rest of the day was our own. For eight weeks, when free, we would wait on the main road to hitch a lift to wherever we could. Sometimes Dover, sometimes Folkestone. The return journey was left very much to chance, but was usually made in Army trucks.

Our official social life took place at dances in local Army Camps, where the tanned Land Girls claimed all the dancing partners, while the A.T.S. girls were ‘wallflowers’. I remember well as one Sunday summer morning found Marie, Madge, Ethel and I, on a men’s Coach Outing, which we had ‘gate-crashed’. We shared the rides at Dreamland, their food and crates of beer. We were even dropped outside the hostel gates later that evening.

Although our working life was hard, we loved every minute of it. The ears of barley would stick to our green jerseys and our backs would itch with the dust. Sometimes we would work alongside German Prisoners of War and, as light failed, we would all sit round the fire heating our tea and singing into the twilight while waiting for our separate transport home.

These happy and companionable days came to an end in 1950 when the Women's Land Army was disbanded, but almost fifty years later, I can still hear Matron banging the wooden spoon on the frying pan at 2200hrs and calling out to the darkness, "Come in Land Girls, go home soldiers!". and the sound of rustling trees and bushes could be heard all along the drive.

Sylvia Harper.
Shorne, Kent.

N.A.A.F.I. GIRLS

In 1942, I was working in a factory making surgical corsets. I didn't like it there very much, but in the war years you could not leave your place of employment without special permission. So I was more than pleased when I was 18 years old, and had to go and register for War Work. While I was being interviewed, I had said, that before working in the factory I had served teas in my mothers small tea shop, which had since closed. My fate was sealed. I was given the relevant forms and literature to join the N.A.A.F.I. Having passed my medical, I then had to get a passport photograph for a special identity card, that would allow me to gain entrance to military camps.

My first posting was to a Royal Air Force camp about eight miles from home. I arrived on my bicycle at about ten o'clock and was then issued with a cap, overalls, sheets and blankets and told to make my bed. I was rather dubious when I found that it had lost a leg. It was propped up with a biscuit tin, but tins were tins in those days and it did the job.

I reported to the kitchen, a small Nissen hut, on the side of a larger one, which turned out to be the W.A.A.F. canteen. Morning break had just finished and it was now the staff coffee break. It was a very large kitchen with four large sinks, two on each side. In the centre was the biggest kitchen range I had ever seen. There were also, two large scrubbed top tables and a smaller one with an aluminium top. This was called the beverage table. It was used for making tea and coffee etc. It was one of my many jobs to keep that table top highly polished with whitening. I was just finishing my coffee and getting to know Nellie, the other assistant and the cook, when this voice seemed to come from nowhere saying,
"All R.A.F. personnel will assemble in the W.A.A.F. canteen, at 1930hrs. The bar will remain closed." This was my first experience of the Tannoy. It was something I would soon to get used too, as in all military camps, we were never too far away from a speaker. They were even installed in the bathrooms. Our manageress laughed. "You will have an easy night tonight." she said. Nellie looked up and answered. "Yes.We'll have to keep the kettle boiling, just in case we have any bodies." I kept quiet, not liking to ask what was going on. I soon found out what they were talking about. A couple of young airmen were brought into the kitchen. They had passed out during what I thought in my innocence, was a first aid lecture. I was then informed that it had been a men only lecture on Venereal Disease.

At the lunch-time break, I was shown how to weigh the tea and coffee into white cloth bags, ready for putting into the tea urn and coffee pans. I began to adapt and was soon out on the bar serving. In the mornings, I had to be up at 0700hrs to rake out the flu's, clear the ashes and get the fire lit. The kettle had to be boiling on the big old range, so the girls could have a morning cuppa at 0730hrs. The cook would have breakfast ready for 0800hrs. Then there was the bar and our billet to clean. The cook had to get about 200 cakes ready for

morning break. Everything was done on those ranges. There was always a constant supply of hot water for the tea urns and large pans of coffee. The only electricity we used, was for the lights.

After morning break, there would be more cleaning to do in readiness, for the lunch break. During this time, the cook would be making pies and puddings for the evening suppers. One of my jobs, was to make sure that the big yellow boiler was kept stoked up with coke. “Watch the dial.” I was often warned. “Watch the dial.” Nobody told me why, until one night I found out for myself. It began rumbling like thunder and spat all the hot water out onto the roof. It didn’t stop until it had completely emptied and filled with cold water again. As you can imagine, I wasn’t very popular that night. It was nearly closing time and we still had all the washing up to do.

We used to serve about 200 suppers a night. Each one having to be carried from the kitchen through to the bar. We also sold beer. It came in quart bottles and there was a special way to tip the glasses so that each one held a full pint. You could soon hear the loud complaints if someone had a short measure.

Sweets, soap and cigarettes were all rationed. We had to collect special coupons. We were sent an assortment of brands which were quite unheard of: Robins, Walters and Sunripe are three that I remember. I think that the ration may have been 40 each, twenty of the more popular brands like Players, Craven A, or Senior Service and twenty of whatever else we had. Most of the girls would just take the well known brands, so we used to keep the rest in a box for the lads. We got into trouble one day when the supervisor was paying us a visit, as she’d heard one of the airmen asking for cigs off ration. I told her, that we had already collected the coupons. She knew what was going on, and told us to make sure that we sold them to the W.A.A.F.’s. first. Then the lads could have them. Occasionally we got a consignment of cosmetics. The girls always had first choice, but after a week, they would be available to the airmen, to buy for their wives.

It was always very hard work. Some of the larger N.A.A.F.I.’s had more staff, but the girls often got posted or left. We really needed our three hours off in the afternoon, although we had to take turns in starting back half an hour early to get tea. We had one day off a week and one weekend a month. There were no modern aids or washing up liquid. We just used to use soda or dry powders like ‘Freedom’, ‘Vim soap’ and scrubbing brushes, but as the saying was then; “There’s a ruddy war on”, so we just had to get on with it. Most of us hadn’t got mod cons at home anyway, so we really appreciated having the luxury of a bathroom and hot water; at least most of the time. We did have some hard winters though, when the pipes froze and burst during the thaw. We really were flooded out.

Of course we got to know quite a few of the W.A.A.F.’s and airmen, as they spent their evenings in the canteen. A couple of the camps I was stationed at had a piano and one or two good pianists. Once a week we would have a camp dance, when we’d serve refreshments until 2130hrs. We were convinced, that we would be too tired to go to the dance afterwards, but we went just the same. The manageress would usually let our dancing partner’s come and help

with the last of the washing up, while we got ourselves dressed and ready. We were lucky, we were allowed to wear Civvies. Our hair had to be kept above our collars on duty. We used to make a head band out of the top of an old stocking and roll our hair round the band. This style was known as the 'Victory Roll'. Afterwards, when brushed out, our hair turned under into a pageboy style quite easily. These evenings, were very romantic affairs, with aircraft lights in the corners of the room, that shone onto a large mirrored ball in the centre of the ceiling. The coloured reflection used to flicker amongst, us as we danced to the R.A.F. Band.

Although we were not in an area suffering the air raids, we watched a lot of the devastation they were causing on the Pathe News at the local pictures house. We heard of boys we had grown up with being wounded, killed or taken prisoner.

At one camp, there was a lot of Polish personal. Often, the new arrivals, had come straight from the Concentration Camps where they had suffered terrible injuries from the torture. Many of them didn't have any hair. It was surprising though, how after a few weeks they looked years younger and were wanting all the best makes of shampoo and even hair nets. Their one burning ambition was to train as air crew in order to return to the fighting. Some were just boys when they were taken prisoner from their school. Probably because of their parents politics.

Rhoda.

We hardly saw the air crews, it was mainly at the dances. It was a strange feeling seeing these young lads enjoying themselves, knowing that maybe they would soon be flying off and getting killed within a short time. We used to lay awake in bed listening to the planes taking off or going over from other bases. I can still see so clearly in my mind, how I sat up one night with the manageress, listening to them flying overhead for the D-Day landings.

During those times there were laughter and tears. We seemed to live for the post as we waited for letters from home, bringing news of brothers,

boyfriends and husbands. I can also remember how we all felt one morning, when one of our staff received the sad news that her brother had been killed.

At last, it all ended. We all gathered on the airfield, Officers, Airmen and W.A.A.F.'s for an open air service and as the camps closed, we all went back to a very much changed, 'Civvie Street'. Things would never be quite the same again.

Rhoda Woodward.
Banbury, Oxen.

LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

July 1939. Harry, (my husband), myself and our ten months old baby, Barbara, all went to Morecambe for our annual holiday. The unrest in Europe wasn't good and war was declared with Germany that September.

Harry was a chauffeur/gardener at a private school and we had to go with them when they evacuated everyone to an old castle in Kirkby Lonsdale. Everyone thought it would be all over in a couple of months. We were wrong. We gave up our home in Blackburn, stored some of our furniture and took the rest with us to our place, in our new town. We new straight away that we had made the wrong decision. After two months, I returned with Barbara, staying with my parents. Harry served his month's notice and then rejoined us.

The next few months were most anxious. I found I was pregnant again, and here we were without a home of our own. Harry got work as a chauffeur/gardener at a country mansion in the small village of York, six miles from Blackburn. We were fortunate to get and old worldly cottage in York village and moved there in the February of 1940. The beginning of a very happy life in a very happy home.

In the May, I gave birth to our second daughter, Doreen. Harry was one of the most thoughtful of men. It was always nice to have him around. He wasn't a very strong man and we never thought that he would be called up to fight, as the results of the medical he had, weren't very good. However, in the September of that year, he was ordered to report to the R.A. South Lanc's Regiment. Heavy Ack-Ack guns. We didn't see him for four months that time and then he was drafted to Walney Island. The coldest, most bleakest place to spend months living in a tent on the beach. Nobody undressed for ten or more weeks as they were all on the guns every minute of the day. Unfortunately, this started spinal troubles for Harry, which eventually caused his release from the army. How we enjoyed having him home on leave.

I was kept very busy with the two young children. Our cottage was three quarters of a mile up a very steep hill. Going down into Langho village, wasn't bad. Coming back home, pushing the two children in a pram wasn't so good. I was a confectioner by trade and most of the people in York village, would save up their rations of butter and sugar etc., bring them to me and I would hold baking sessions for them. We were lucky being in the countryside as most people dug up their gardens and grew vegetables. We could have a potato pie with onions in. We rarely had meat as well.

We could get plenty of milk. We used to pour it into bowls, and leave it overnight in the freezing cold pantry, (we didn't have fridges). Then we skimmed all the cream off the top and put it into a wide topped bottle, corked it and took turns shaking it. When it had separated, we would take out the small piece of butter and just add a little salt. The buttermilk we used for baking. We must have shaken hundreds of gallons this way.

We'd go to the butcher for bones and then these were stewed for hours. This was then strained and left to stand all night. In the morning the layer of dripping on the top was used on our bread. Once again with a pinch of salt. The stock was then made into soup. A large tin of minced pork would be opened and the surrounding fat would be used to make pastry. The meat was then mashed up with a thick slice of bread that had been soaked in water and squeezed. This was then mixed up with the meat to make about six, saucer meat pies. They were lovely. I often used liquid paraffin to make pastry with and no one was ever ill afterwards.

Harry had now been moved. He was at Grimsby on the Coastal Defences. It was a very tough time for all concerned and we were so relieved when he was posted to Derby and put in charge of a cookhouse. Harry was a good cook and I knew he would make the most of the food he was given. He was then made 'batman' to a Captain Hanway. He was a doctor and Harry was under his care. The doctor's wife and children came to live with them in Derby. Harry made a good baby-sitter whenever he was off duty.

Back in the village one Easter, I had made some hot cross buns after saving up all the ingredients for weeks. I had also made some candied peel by simmering orange and lemon peel in what sugar we could spare. We didn't throw anything away in those days. I had made at least 200 buns that Easter. As I finished, my two daughters came rushing in from the front garden and shouted. "Mummy. The Germans are coming down the lane." Of course, it was a group of our soldiers in tanks, but what a noise they were making. As they came to our cottage and saw the sign, hot cross buns, they all stopped and bought some. They sat in their tanks and ate them. My girls can still remember that incident.

That summer, the two girls, myself and a friend, went to stay with her brother in Derby. We had a marvellous time. The couple were very kind. They had no children of their own as they had wished, so they fussed over, and spoilt my two terribly. Later that year I was to hear that they were at last, to expect a baby. They have always said that it was because of our two girls visit to their house.

We had made some kind friends during this time, and also formed a group to keep the heavy Ack-Ack stationed in Derby. That Christmas, myself and the children were invited to a huge party in the town. Off I set on the train with my two children, the luggage and a pram. There were no taxis in Manchester at that time, so we all had to walk over a mile to the next station. When we arrived in Derby, my friend was waiting for us. What a happy time we all had. The following summer, we stayed for, four days in Blackpool at the Palatine Hotel. It was luxury. This once again made possible by our friends in Derby.

During the autumn, my neighbour Hannah and myself picked lots of blackberries. We made jars of jam and bottles of wine. The wine was to be for the new year celebrations as both our husbands were due home. Unfortunately all leave was cancelled. The prospect of celebrating the new year alone didn't do too much for our morale. To cheer ourselves up, we decided to sample the wine. Hannah came over to my house and we sampled all seven bottles. The effects you can imagine. As Hannah tried to leave, she couldn't even get off her chair.

We laughed till we cried. There was no doubt about it, the wine had certainly lifted our spirits. When she managed to pick herself up, Hannah left for home, down the garden path to the lane at the bottom. After only a few minutes there was a loud banging at the door. It was Hannah again. Would you believe it, she couldn't find her way home. Of course this started all the laughing and giggling again. I offered to escort her. It took us ages to get there, with all the giggling and carrying on but we did eventually make it, (even though she only lived next door). My goodness, was that wine potent. I somehow managed to make it back home later.

I had also made some Christmas cakes that year. Thirty in all. Everybody had deprived themselves for weeks to save up enough ingredients. My pen-friend in Canada helped tremendously. She used to send me parcels with the most wonderful things in. Tea, rich fruitcakes, dried fruit and tins of every description. She also sent crates of apples. We corresponded for over 65 years before she died.

My brother in law gave me an old amplifier. Did we have some laughs with that. I connected it up to the wireless by a long flex, and run it through the scullery. I left it in there. When you spoke through it, providing that the wireless wasn't tuned into any station, your voice could be heard very clearly through the speaker. Just as if you were broadcasting yourself. Unknown to my friends, I invited another friend Nancy, (she was only a teenager, but so very clever,) and she used to talk in many different voices. She pretended to be many different people and talked on many different subjects: Even Lord Haw Haw. Nancy was never stuck for any thing to talk about. She used to mention the village and the people who lived here. Our friends were awestruck. It was great just to watch their faces as they heard the familiar names mentioned. Many a time, I would have to leave the room before I gave the game away as I tried to hold back the laughter. Of course I told them all about it before they left the house, but they were sworn to secrecy. They couldn't tell anyone. The fun we used to have doing this had to last as long as possible. It gave us so much entertainment. It certainly brightened up our lives.

In late 1943 I received a message from the Red Cross to say that Harry was in Derby Infirmary and that he was asking for me. I packed my bags quickly and sent a telegram to my friends in Derby and off I went on the train. He was in terrible pain and after a few days he was transferred to Bretby Orthopedic Military Hospital. There was nothing they could do for him. He was sent back to his unit and he resumed his duties. He was eventually discharged. Although he was ill, at least he was at home and safe with his family. During the latter stages of the war, he made pegged rugs to keep himself occupied and to help with the finances.

The war news was listened to intently, and when it started to go our way, we all looked forward to the end. At last it was very much in sight.

V.E. Day was celebrated in our village, much the same as everywhere, with the trestle tables in the best spot and the children free to enjoy themselves again. All, that is apart from my Doreen. She was unfortunately ill in hospital at the time. We had to go every day to take her tea.

It wasn’t long before Harry got a part time job as the local postman. Things, then slowly began to get back together again.

Bertha Warren.
Langho, Blackburn.

WAR IS LOOMING

The year was 1940. Hitler was sending his bombers over England most nights, Churchill was broadcasting his moral-boosting speeches regularly and the whole country was geared to defeating Germany and winning this dreadful war. Young men either volunteered or were conscripted as soon as they were of age. Young women joined the Women's Army, Navy or Air Force units. Others joined the Womens' Land Army or were directed to work on munitions and had to go where they were sent. School children were evacuated to safe areas, some to relatives, others to complete strangers.

We had a girl from Scarborough living with us who worked in the aircraft factory in Trafford Park alongside my married sister Josie. My other married sister, Flo, was a crane driver at the steel works and my sister Eileen had joined the Womens Army unit known as the A.T.S.

My friend Celia and I were fifteen, to old to be evacuated and to young to be redirected anywhere. At first when we left school, we went to work in a shirt factory, but after three months there, we found it boring. The shirt factory had started making Khaki shirts. Even in the carpet factory where we now worked some of the looms had changed to making khaki material. We were employed as Crealers. It was our job to ensure that the wool bobbins behind the looms, were kept full at all times. The foreman, (Ted Bromley), designated us both to a particular Weaver, who's job it was to keep the loom running. Weavers were on piecework and got paid according to the work they did. If we let any bobbins run empty, a fault would develop on the carpet in front of the loom. Then they would have to stop it. The weavers would get very annoyed then, so it was up to us to do our job properly. Sometimes the last bit of wool would get knotted. The foreman told us to break this off and throw it under the loom, but not to let the big boss, Mr. Odernall see us or we'd be in trouble.

One particular day, we had just finished our dinner and still had half an hour to spare before starting work again. "Let's get our bobbins filled." suggested Celia. "Then we can have an easy afternoon." I agreed and we ran down to the factory floor. It was nice and peaceful with all the machinery stopped. Celia worked a short distance away from me. I surveyed my bobbins. About ten needed changing. They were each about eight inches long, but more bulky than heavy. We could carry ten in a pyramid style on our left arm, keeping them steady with the right hand.

After selecting the colours I needed I took them back to the loom and set about replacing the emptying bobbins. When I had finished I had a handful of wool left which had been knotted on the bobbins. As I threw it under the loom, a big voice boomed behind me. "Get that out of there!" I jumped at the sound and when I saw the big boss, I scrambled under the loom, retrieved the wool and I got covered in fluff as well. "Now go for your cards!" he bellowed angrily.

Kathleen.

The office was overlooking the factory floor. I ran up the stairs, but nobody was there. All the staff were still at dinner. Undecided what to do, I remembered that my brother Allen's girlfriend Phyllis, worked in the winding shed. She would know what to do, so I made my way there. She was just returning from dinner with her friends. After telling her what happened, she said,
"That's not fair. Let's go with her to see Odernall." So the group of them went to him. I had started to cry with all the sympathy I was getting. Mr. Odernall could see he had trouble on his hands, so he decided to compromise. "You did a very wicked thing." he said. "You know there is a war on and the country can't afford any wastage. Everything is in short supply. You are suspended for a week. Go home now."

I had dried my tears as soon as I left the factory gate and was actually pleased to have a week off. My mother was amused when I told her just what had happened. A few weeks later, the factory disappeared during a heavy bombing raid. I was delighted. I would never have to go back there again.

Kathleen Sharkey.
Carrington, Manchester.

PLEASE SEND THE CURLERS

I was thirteen years old when the first alarm bells rang in my head. Mr. Chamberlain had returned from Munich with Hitler's promises and Beverley Nichols had written in the Sunday Express that; "We would not, now have to put ugly gas masks on our childrens' faces."

My family was living in Liverpool, near my maternal grandparents in temporary exile from Yorkshire. Soon the Barrage Balloons were going up on practice sessions, shelters were dug in the parks and the talk was of the evacuation of the children. Some, were to be sent as far away as Canada. Grandad said, They will get here." (Meaning the German bombers). So, I clung more tightly to mother's arm when we were out and watched closely, the preparations for war.

Mother and Grandma.

The teachers and pupils of my school departed to Wales, but I was to go as ‘mother’ to a ‘Just William’ type of brother aged nine and a younger sister, who was not quite six years old. I was obliged to join their school evacuation scheme.

On Sunday morning 3rd September 1939, we marched in ‘crocodile’ to Central Station Liverpool, between rows of weeping mothers. The newspaper placards announced: ‘WAR DECLARED’. The train took hours to cover the few miles to our secret destination, which turned out to be a rural village near Southport. It was not until the next day, that our Liverpool families knew where we had been taken.

When we arrived, we stood in small groups in the church hall whilst the good people of the village looked us over. I wondered if we would we be the last chosen? Or perhaps, (horror of horrors), driven round the village to unwilling foster parents. Or even sent back home. The last thought was becoming more attractive by the minute, but no, a man who introduced himself as Mr. Brown, had spotted Pat as a suitable ‘little sister’ for his son James, who was seven years old and stepped forward to claim her. However, he had not considered my role as mother and fortified by the instructions given before I left home; I said. “Sorry no. Not without me.” To his credit, he quickly decided to take both of us and also transported my brother David and his friend to stay with his neighbour who was a widow. She must have asked for boys and she certainly got two characters.

Our upbringing had been, what today would be called laid back, but was then probably called relaxed and easy, based on love and kindness. It was a hard act to follow for anyone. Mrs. Brown was an ex-teacher and a strong disciplinarian. My letters home, (five and six pages long), were written in pencil and illustrated this.

David.

Please send the curlers to curl my hair under, or Mrs. Brown says she will have it cut off.
Mrs. Brown says: When school starts I must be in bed for 8.30pm. (That's the worst of being with a school teacher, isn't it?)
Pat is eating well, dinners and puddings. She is not allowed to eat many sweets.
I had to stop washing our white socks in the bathroom basin, as this was a waste of soap. They must wait for the weekly wash. Now I wonder how many pairs of socks we had.

The letters also contain examples of how far money went in those days.

Bought a 2d tin of Zinc Ointment for David's grazed knees.
Gave David 6d to get his hair cut.

Pat.

Special problems arose because we were so close to Liverpool. It was tempting for parents and grandparents to visit at weekends. Mother wrote to me asking whether Grandad should come and see us at the weekend, but in my fourteen year old wisdom, I reply saying: *"No, nice as all this is, if the young ones saw him, they would want to come home."*

I was painting the clouds with sunshine for the benefit of my family, for in truth I wasn't all that happy myself. My brother David and his pal seemed content enough and spent time on a local farm. However, David did tell me that when he saw Lewis's Liverpool van parked outside a house in the village, he was tempted to stow-away amongst the parcels. He was confident that he could find his way home once back at the big city store.

Everyone in the village tried to be kind to the evacuees. One of my letters reads:

A lady across the road beckoned to me last night to go intoher house. She gave us a doll, a lovely tea-set for Pat to play with, comics, a few novelties and three nice books for me to read. This kind soul had one daughter and one girl evacuee, but was worried about us not having girls things to play with in a house with just one small boy.

The sun shone day after day in a clear blue sky, which was just as well. Children were told at school, not to take their visitors to the foster homes, but to arrange to meet them somewhere outside. Now I can appreciate that the villagers could not be expected to open their houses to strange adults, having plenty of extra work with their 'strange children'.

In the end it was sister Pat and young James Brown together, catching a childhood illness that precipitated our return to Liverpool. I made the decision to go home. Mr. Brown managed somehow to find petrol for his car for the evening journey. He took us to our door where we arrived to a joyous reception - shortly before the telegram announcing our return - which I had sent earlier in the day.

Life, (and death), then went on in spite of the war. Sadly, Grandad died in May 1940, and as it was still during the time of the 'phoney war'. He died before we had to endure the nightly air raids which he had forecast. My school was still in Wales of course, so I wrote to the Education Office for permission to leave school and start work. The younger children were taught in the living room of our house by teachers not involved in Evacuation Schemes.

I started work in the office of a high-class baker and confectioner, situated near the lovely Anglian Cathedral. It was here that I first learnt to use the telephone. Today this may seem surprising, but I hadn't grown up with a house telephone, (unlike my four year old niece, who was taking messages at her father's driving school before she could write). Orders came through on the telephone from the branch shops for wedding and birthday cakes and I was taught that messages must be correctly taken and written down, then read back to the shop manageress. It wouldn't have done at all, if the icing on the cake had been the wrong colour or held the wrong number of candles or the caption read: "Happy 6th Birthday." instead of 60th.

In the bakehouse, wearing a tall white hat and making chocolate eclairs was Frederick Ferrari, later to become famous on the 'wireless' as a singer with Charlie Chester. We had the pleasure of his singing voice as he worked and indeed sometimes he would sing our favourite songs on request.

April 1940 saw my confirmation at Christ Church, Liverpool, by the Bishop of Warrington. I bought a bicycle through a mail order catalogue, for 2/- per week and spent many happy hours in the lovely Princes and Sefton Parks. On one or two memorable occasions, we spent Sundays in Wales, having first taken the ferry across the Mersey. I paid £5 altogether, for the bike, and this was the price I received when I decided to sell it after the war. And this, after my young brother

and sister had both learnt to ride it. The condition must have been decidedly second-hand.

After Grandad died, my uncles wanted all of us to move house and live near them in the comparative safety of Yorkshire, but Grandma dug her heels in and said: "I can't possibly leave my little home." One could see her point, as she had come to it as a bride and brought up her three children. They all married Yorkshire people and up and left for Keighley and Bradford. In the end, as you will see, only our lives counted when the 'crunch' came. We were soon spending our nights, either in Grandma's air raid shelter or she came and shared ours.

Later, when we grew weary of sitting upright for half the night, every night. We took beds into the cellar, and rested on those. Grandma always sat upright and knitted, only dropping stitches if a bomb fell close by. We were in this cellar when a stick of oil bombs, intended no doubt for the nearby docks, left a trail of blazing houses: One immediately in front of us and one behind. When the 'All clear' sounded, we crawled into our upstairs beds amongst the broken glass of the windows, and then Grandma said: "If I am alive in the morning, I will go to Bradford to my son and take the two youngest children with me." This is exactly what she did.

Within a few weeks, relatives found a house in Keighley large enough to hold us all, plus the furniture from two homes. Later, it was large enough to take a great aunt, aged eighty years, who came out of the London Blitz to our haven, bringing yet more furniture! With great difficulty, mother and I were able to book a removal van, empty two houses and follow the others to safety. I remember we were allowed to travel through from Liverpool to Keighley in the cab with the driver, (this surely must have been a wartime concession). Now, we were all together and I was back in the town of my birth. A new job would have to be found, probably war work, as the end of the war was still a long way off, but in the meantime, I was full of the joy of things to come. It was bliss to have a full night's sleep again.

Nesta Hoyle.
Longlee, Yorkshire.

MAKE-DO AND MEND

I was three plus, when war was declared. You would be forgiven for thinking, that it must have been a strange and exciting time as a child. Strange maybe. Exciting? No! It was very frightening and awful, awful, awful.

My mother was a dressmaker. During the war, she used to make coats from the wartime blankets and then dye them. Almost every woman and girl in the village wore one. Mum's was dyed maroon, (how I hated that colour), and mine was navy blue for school. My sister, who was six years younger, had a green one. I also remember a lady who owned a suit, having it unpicked completely. It was then made up inside out.

Every lad in the village would have had trousers made by my mum, from the lower legs of his father's trousers. The legs then being much fuller, they could be cut off below the knee and each leg made one side of the trousers. Mum would then finish them off with paper buttoned flies, (there were no zippers during the war). Knitteds would also be unpicked and the yarn re-knitted. The sleeves of cardigans and jumpers would be taken out and changed over, thus placing the worn elbows in the front of the arms to prolong their life. Of course, there were lots of smaller 'make-do's, but I think that these are the major ones.

Life was very basic and crude. We lived nine miles from Southampton, which along with Portsmouth, was all but flattened. We could see the glow of Southampton burning in the sky. We lived in a three bedroom semi' at the outbreak of war, when two cousins, who were two and four years older than myself, came to live with us as evacuees. Much has been written about evacuees and there has been many programmes on behalf of those who had a terrible time, as many of them were not made welcome. It was completely the opposite in our home. My cousins came first as the poor little girls were away from their mum.

We also had another cousin who lived in Fareham who had won a scholarship to Gregg's School in Southampton. It was deemed safer for her to travel from our home, rather than from Fareham to Southampton. She became sixteen and started work at Barclays Bank. Others will confirm that it was only during the war that women began working in the banks, which of course was only due to the fact, that the men were away fighting.

As things quietened down, my cousins went home and two huge Irish men moved into our back bedroom. My mum used to cook for them, what was virtually a dinner, each morning for their breakfast. She was always a soft touch and would never refuse. The two men were helping to build an additional railway line behind the station, in order to transport ammunition and men down to Southampton Docks as quickly as possible.

A large house on 'The Downs' became an hotel for children victims of the London Blitz. They were always short of helpers so mum used to help with the laundry. She always asked them to have hot water ready but often they didn't. This meant her lighting the solid fuel boiler and waiting for the water to heat up.

Of course, she did not sit around, she carried on with other work. Then after all this, she would come home and do the same for us.

When the Doodle Bugs arrived, not only did my two older cousins return to us, but also their younger brother and sister. By this time my younger sister had been born, so you can see just how hard my mum had to work. There were some stone hot water bottles I remember, but most of us used bricks. We brought them downstairs in the morning and put them in the bottom of the oven, where they stayed all day until we took them out and wrapped them in blankets at bed time. All so crude.

Then there was the food. It was awful. Just occasionally, we'd have some real eggs which mum boiled for us and all she used to have was the top that was cut off ours. It broke my heart. Once, a ship got through with oranges on board and we queued for ages, inside and outside Marks and Spencer's for one orange per ration book. We eat them for tea. I sat by my mum eating mine and crying because she didn't have one. "If I want to give my orange to a little boy who has just had his tonsils out", she said. "That's my business. Now sit and eat yours."
There was that awful marzipan at Christmas which was made of Soya and flour, flavoured with almonds. It would have been better not to pretend. Also, there was the terrible soap we used to use. Far more appreciation should have been shown to people like my mum, looking after others almost around the clock. It was all so awful, that I try to avoid as far as possible all the celebrations of war.

One very distressing incident was of a teacher who lived in our Parish and taught art in a Southampton school. On hearing the siren, he led his pupils to the air raid shelter and saw them safely into it and then left to see what was happening. Why do men do that? A bomb landed on the shelter, burying his pupils and the poor man could do nothing. This was to haunt him for the rest of his life.

An uncle, my mother's brother, had perished at Woolwich Arsenal before war was declared, in the futile effort to prepare as much ammunition as possible. Another uncle, my father's brother, was 'sent to Coventry' by his workmates and bosses. He worked on the blueprints for the fighter planes our boys were to fly. He was too conscientious and too particular for them. I suppose they wanted the work churned out more quickly, even at the risk of our boys' lives.

At the end of the war, our homes and contents were completely worn out and broken due to over use. Of course, it was years before things could be replaced. I know this might sound a miserable story, but it was a truly awful time. Even when the fighting had ceased, life was still very, very hard for years. The make do and mend continued.

Joy Packham.
Thatcham, Berkshire.

CROSSED LINES

When I registered for War work, I didn't fancy the idea of working in a factory. I was asked if I would like to learn how to be a telephone engineer. I jumped at the chance. Living in Central London, I was then put to work in Holborn. It was not a matter of installing single lines into houses, but switch boards and extensions into offices.

The Air Ministry had been bombed. Myself and another girl were sent in to replace most of the equipment, before any of the building damage could be repaired. We worked with part of the roof missing and it was freezing. Stripping cables in those conditions, was not easy. Our Foreman informed us that, no matter how difficult the job was, we had only a certain amount of time in which to finish it. We worked long hours and many a night to ensure the work was completed properly and on schedule. A letter of appreciation was sent to our office, for the speedy replacement and quality of the work undertaken. "Please pass on our thanks to the 'men' involved." was the message. They were never informed any different.

After the men returned from the war, we women were given a week's notice and never really received the recognition we deserved. At least I had learned how to use tools properly, which has proved to be very useful over the years.

Catherine Byrne.
Queensland, Australia.

WOMEN IN WAR TIME

I was only 11 years of age at the start of the war in 1939. I had heard discussions between my parents and grandparents, about the likelihood of the coming war, so it was no surprise to me that we were issued with gas masks and information on their use.

The day war broke out, we heard our first Air Raid Siren and mother quickly despatched us to a cupboard under the stairs, whilst she and my father listened carefully to the radio. The 'All clear' came quickly and mother's first task was to get the old Singer sewing machine out and make us covers for our gas masks and identity cards. They were originally contained in cardboard boxes which would soon have worn out. She also made 'Black-out' curtains. We were the first children in the street to have these covers, and my father was one of the first Air Raid Wardens. He was too old to enlist, being some 14 years older than my mother.

We attended school during the Battle of Britain and many hours were spent in the shelters. During one air raid, we heard the bombs fly overhead, but it wasn't until the 'all clear' sounded, we realised just how lucky we had been. A land mine had exploded and it had made a crater just beyond the school. The village parents streamed into school, fearing the worst.

Although I was only 11 years old, I helped my mother knitting for the forces. The Womens Voluntary Services issued us with wool and we made socks, scarfs and jumpers, mainly for the Army and Navy. The wool for the Navy was particularly difficult to handle as it was oiled and was tough on the skin. Every scrap of it had to be accounted for and we mainly knitted on wooden needles.

When I was a little older, I managed to buy the entire stock of a Haberdasher and painstakingly joined the darning wool together, to make myself a jumper and socklets for the boots which we wore in the shelters. Mother cut up an old fur stole to make gloves. Old coats were turned into dressing gowns for the cold nights in communal shelters. People would shelter under the stairs or sometimes even in a bath with a wooden top over it. We unravelled knitted jumpers, washed the wool and made other garments from it.

At one time, my sister and I, were enrolled in a quite elite convent school and the uniforms were a problem. We bought one summer dress, second hand and the other mother made out of curtain material. Boy, how we hated the times we had to wear the 'curtain' uniform, for the material made us perspire profusely. At the school, we were given a treat for doing well in our work. It was a ride on Mother Superior's pony and trap.

We often passed an internment camp for German Prisoners Of War. We were admonished not to stare at the prisoners, but it was tempting as there were German Shepherds guarding them and the German uniforms were quite unique.

On a bus returning from visiting friends in the seaside town of Whitstable, there was a ‘dog fight’ overhead, and some Shrapnel hit the top of the bus. We all had to lie in a field at the side of the road. Two Germans parachuted from their plane, one landing in a tree and the other nearby. People don’t ever believe, that the series ‘Dad’s Army’ was so near to the truth, but believe me it was. One chap with a pitchfork and the other with a rifle, collected their prisoners and took them away in the back of a farmer’s van. We continued on our journey, but were fearful that our house had been hit by an enormous bomb. Fortunately, we were O.K. It had exploded harmlessly in open country.

The Battle of Britain was becoming more intense, so with my mother, grandmother and sister, I was evacuated into Devon. We had the opportunity of becoming Government evacuees and moving to Canada or the U.S.A., but the family decided to stay together. Grandpa handed over his precious binoculars. Also, the iron railings at the school were given up for the war effort.

We later moved to the Midlands. Food was always a problem, but particularly when anyone was sick and needed anything special. Mother queued for ages to get me some fish when I had gastroenteritis only to be told there was none left. This was particularly galling for her, when she knew that hotels and ‘Black Market’ profiteers were always being supplied. People were kind and a lady offered half of what she had bought. The vicar of the church I attended, brought me a tiny drop of brandy and port which cured my stomach bug.

Some of mother’s food turned out well and some not so well. She added beetroot to apples to make them go further but they tasted awful. My father couldn’t stomach it, so we girls were excused also. However, she did make a wondrous cake one time and we were all quite puzzled as to where the fat had come from. We only learned in later years, that the cake was mixed with medicinal paraffin oil.

We had one or two parcels sent to us from an uncle in India and they were a Godsend. They contained large packets of tea and sugary sweets. One parcel which was thought to be just rancid butter, was ordered to be thrown away by my father. Mother knew that Indians ate this butter - I believe it’s called ‘Ghee’. She made cakes with it and we all lived to tell the tale.

We lived in a flat over a shop and were dismayed when the cat downstairs had kittens. They could not be fed, so my father had the terrible job of drowning them. We did save enough food from our rations though to feed the mother cat.
We had adequate food but always lacked anything really tasty. Fortunately, we always managed to buy chips and carbonated drinks from the local shop. At the chemist, we could sometimes get a tin of black currant puree which was heavenly and really nourishing.

Although young, I was a terrific film fan from the age of five, after being taken so much by my grandmother. It was a blow to me, that because I did not have a regular order of the magazine ‘Picturegoer’ I could not get a copy delivered. I made do with second hand copies which could be exchanged at the shop for other precious looks at life in Hollywood. The pages were so thin, they had to be handled with extreme care.

Envelopes were slit open and used to write on. Then labels would be stuck on them so that they were used as often as possible. In offices, pencils had to be used down to the stumps and handed in before a new one could be issued. Silver paper was carefully smoothed out and then handed in to the voluntary services.

As a Girl Guide, I spent many hours carrying messages to the local hospital on an old Raleigh bicycle. It was an uphill ride in all weather's, but everyone felt that even the children could help in this time of crisis.

The material side of the war was hard, but the effect of the buff coloured telegrams that arrived so frequently were traumatic. Our neighbour had a husband serving on a minesweeper. It was Mrs Small who called with 'the envelope'. As my father was away, mother was delegated to read the message. It was to say that her husband had been killed. We also received our own telegram when my twenty one year old, pilot cousin was killed on his last mission before his leave was due to start. It was the first time that I had seen my father cry.

My school days ended when I was fourteen. As I had been to so many schools, I was a poor student. I learnt shorthand typing and became a secretary at a local building society. I badly wanted to go into the factory as the pay was £3 a week against my poor £1. 5. 0d. However, it was not considered ladylike so I toiled for this meagre sum. To save money, I cycled to work. I often landed up behind a truck carrying Italian prisoners of war. They were a happy bunch, but I found it embarrassing when they whistled. The good hearted British Corporal, always reassured me they meant no harm. I went to the cinema many times in a week, collecting sandwiches and a flask of coffee after work. It was a form of escapism and very affordable, although there were often long queues for the favourite pictures.

Anne, her mother Dorothy and sister Gillian at the outbreak of War.

We had many American soldiers where we lived in Leicester and I had been warned to have nothing to do with them at any time. I was approached once by a 'Yank' as we called them and he offered me 'forbidden fruit', (a Hershey Bar). I had just had a most disagreeable meal at a British canteen and was feeling particularly aggressive towards the luxury the Americans had and I told him so. He turned out to be a delightful young man and when he assured me his that his intentions were honest, I took the chocolate bar, but refused the gum. I could hardly believe my luck. I shared it with my fellow office workers and saved a square for my sister. Sweets had never tasted so good.

My uncle suffered the humiliation of being in a 'reserved occupation' and as he had no uniform, was considered to be a 'Conscientious Objector'. However, he did have a responsible and dangerous job. He was in charge of the Esso plant at Fawley. If the Germans had bombed that, the country would have been ablaze.

Anne's father, taken at home in Blean, near Coventry, at the height of the Battle Of Britain.

Mother did her bit for the War Effort, she worked part time for the Womens Voluntary Services darning clothes. She taught me how to do this. She grew fresh vegetables in the garden, saved every scrap of paper and string and even looked after evacuees from the London Blitz, as well as teach my sister and I how to be survivors. Due to the shortage of staff at hospitals, visiting hours were also curtailed and her dear mother was dying of cancer. Her poor brother did not arrive in time to see his mother before she died.

Clothing coupons were very carefully used. Mine were traded for clothes from a friend. She had money and I had little. When there were sweets on offer, my sister sold me hers. I had a sweet tooth and she wanted to buy books.

My own dear mother has now died. She deserved a medal for her quiet courage. We often asked her in those early days, if we were going to die. She would laugh and answer.

"Only when you are quite old and your time has come."

She worried about my father, who because of his claustrophobia, would not go into a shelter. He would 'don' his Air Raid Warden's helmet and stay out, in the open even at the height of the bombing.

Anne Downs.
Caringbah, N.S.W. Australia.

THANKS FOR THE WOMEN

I was only a teenager when the war broke out, but later I worked full time on my parents' farm. Male help was not available so women and children helped with every chore they could. Good pieces of our old clothes were turned into something useful and new clothes were made from discarded ones. Sheets, pillowcases, table cloths, tea towels, shirts blouses and underclothing, were all made from bleached cotton flour bags. As we baked our own bread, we used a lot of these 50lb bags. When we had enough coupons for a bag of sugar, we then used these bags to make hand towels, aprons and oven cloths. How precious they were. The heavier corn, (stock feed), bags had many uses too. The few clothing and food coupons we were allowed, were used to their best advantage.

Meat was bought from the butcher, which was supplemented at times with the ageing hens and cockerels as new chicks hatched. The number of foul were limited, thus limiting the number of eggs available too. We would also have the occasional rabbit. Mother baked cakes and biscuits and as most farms had orchards, the fruit we had was preserved in bottles and made into jams. We had plenty of milk from our dairy, but never a drop of cream as that was used for butter for the soldiers. We grew our own potatoes and pumpkins which we could store with other vegetables that were in season. Meals would be varied and we felt well fed, even if a meal was little more that fresh bread and home-made jam. This was typical of dairy farming life in most areas.

My brother and I would often be called on to help on neighbouring farms in cases of illness or when a mother was in hospital with a new baby. Some of the older women cared for their grandchildren so that the mothers could do essential war work. Of course, it was also much safer for the children away from the cities. One grandmother I used to help, could only watch as one of her grandchildren died in an horrific accident. These are women that I feel have been sadly forgotten when womens' efforts have been recognised and praised in recent times.

At school, we were part of The Junior Red Cross and we helped to knit jumpers for children in need, and we also raised money for other things. Women knitted socks etc. for the soldiers, taking their knitting everywhere; even to church. One marvellous effort I clearly recall, is when the women of the village met at the town hall armed with large Caissons and strong arms and the ingredients to make hundreds of Christmas cakes for the boys in the services. Two wives of the POW's, baked the ingredients in the bakery ovens overnight and then it took another day to pack and sew the cakes into Calico and dispatch them. All these women gave so much time and effort and suffered so much sadness when loved ones did not return. They had hearts of gold.

Doreen E. Longworth.
Maitland, Australia.

THE SHELTER

I was twenty years old at the outbreak of the second world war and one of my earliest memories, is of sheltering during an air raid. A bomb exploded and blew all the tiles off a nearby garage roof trapping me inside. I lay on my back pushing the door with both feet to try and dislodge the obstruction. My feelings of panic soon disappeared, when the rescuers turned up within five minutes.

I was married in March 1941 and we had our first child in 1943. My husband John was an engineer and working on the radar system at Beckenham in Kent. He would have liked to have joined one of the services, but he was not allowed to do so being in a reserved occupation. He did work long hours and also worked as an A.R.P. Warden when needed. There was an incident near the factory one day that shook him a great deal. A bomb had landed on the local cafe during lunch time and forty people were trapped or killed. Another incident he recalled, was when the bus station was bombed. He turned a body over and the man's head fell off. He saw more active service than any of our three brothers, who were all in the services. Fortunately, they weren't posted to any of the combat zones.

During these years, I learned how to make Rock Cakes and Scotch Shortbread with liquid paraffin because the fats were rationed. We made scrambled egg from dried powder, which wasn't too bad. My family had to save up sugar, fat and dried fruit for almost a year before we were married, just to make one standard wedding cake. Because there was no shortage or rationing of fish, we had lots, but we were only allowed one shilling's worth of meat per person per week. Many meals consisted of three or four baked potatoes with vegetable toppings. It's no wonder we were all healthy.

I made a pinafore dress from John's plus fours and a grey flannel skirt from his wide bottomed trousers. Singlets and panties were made for my daughter from his cotton underwear.

Gladys and John. March 1941.

One of the more frightening episodes, was the first night the Germans sent over the V1's. It was the night of 15/16 June 1944, when about sixty of these missiles were making their way to the London area. Bromley and Beckenham were along the route. My brother Peter was staying with us when the raid started and he had already gone to bed. He wouldn't come into the shelter, which we had erected in the dining room, so I pulled the covers off him. He begrudgingly joined us.

At the time, we didn't realise just what the missiles were. With the sound of the engines cutting out and the explosions, we thought that it was our guns scoring direct hits. But we were soon to learn. As one cut out overhead, I held my body over the baby and braced myself. The explosion lifted up the house and blew the roof off. The Morrison Shelter jumped across the room and landed a couple of feet away from it's original position, crushing the wheels of the baby's pram.

The room filled with dust. The V1 had landed on a block of four terraced houses one hundred yards away, killing six of our neighbours. We spent the night commiserating with four other families, then at dawn, we returned to the house to rescue some of our clothes. The house could not be lived in, so I had to go with the baby to a friend's home in Lincolnshire for three months. John could not leave his work and had to go back and live with his mum and dad.

Our furniture was bought new, in 1941, but now it was all embedded with glass splinters. It was everywhere, especially in the wardrobes and dining

furniture. Even the heavy curtains that were lined with Blackout material were ruined. By October, it had been repaired and we returned home to find that the Land Mines had become the latest weapons from Germany. One landed at the top of the road, but it only rocked the house. Again, we knew we were safe because we had heard it.

Being bombed out of house and home at the age of twenty five, certainly helped me grow up quickly and I consider myself very lucky to have been a survivor when so many of my friends had died.

Gladys Wade.
Seacliffe, South Australia.

A WAR - TIME MEMORY

On September 3rd, 1939 Prime Minister Menzies spoke over the radio. "It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially, that Australia is at war."
The following year the war brought some relief to those dreary Sundays when Church Elders encouraged members to invite lonely servicemen into their homes.

I was fifteen when I began lessons at Gwen Mackay's School of Ballet and the Ballet joined George Elliot's Concert Party to entertain at Army camps, hospitals and the 'Cheer Up Hut'. (A venue for servicemen on leave). At one of the many concerts, I was the solo vocalist for the ballet where Lady Mountbatten was the Guest of Honour. The song I sang on that occasion was, 'Dream When You're Feeling Blue'. The other songs were, 'Alexander's Ragtime Band', 'Darktown Strutters Ball', 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' and 'Lovely Hula Hands'. Ingenuity was needed to design the costumes using materials that were available without coupons, another work detail my mother slotted into her already busy schedule.

The Concert Party visited army camps in country towns, where we were billeted in huts and had to share the soldiers ablution block. I still needed my privacy and waited until the others were in bed before using the shower.

'Loveday' was an internment camp where non Australian citizens were detained for the duration of the war. Those we saw behind the barbed wire fence, were of Japanese, German and Italian origin. It was disconcerting to have these people in our country when hearing and reading of the atrocities our soldiers were subjected to in the P.O.W. camps of our enemies. After the performances, we were entertained in grand style. A supper dance was held in the Officers' Mess and it was here, at the tender age of fifteen, I was introduced to a drink of Gin and Tonic. I will always remember its dreadful affects, weepy depression and nausea. I then acquired a taste for Advocaat and Cherry Brandy. Mother's weak heart would have stopped pumping had she been aware of my errant ways on these weekend camps. However, she and the family were pleased with the supply of chocolate, canned fruit and other rationed goods, that I brought home after becoming friendly with the Sergeant in charge of supplies. By today's standards, my behaviour was not extreme. I was merely beginning my adult education with personal experience.

We gave a concert at an army hospital, being warned beforehand, the soldiers there were being treated for Syphilis. I was led to believe it was contacted through sinful sexual behaviour and being ignorant of many of the 'facts of life' I was aggrieved to see so many young soldiers being looked upon as 'untouchable'.

Australia was mainly untouched by the war. Scant information filtered through the media about the air raids on Darwin by the Japanese. Yet there were more details released about the submarine attacks on Sydney and Newcastle Harbours. It wasn't until recent years we realised the impact and danger of those

raids and especially the knowledge of how many lives were actually lost in the Darwin raids.

Mother agreed my sister Joyce and I could invite servicemen home for Sunday tea. The first such visit was arranged over the phone through a Church organisation called 'The Helping Hand'. We arranged to meet two servicemen at our local bus stop. As Joyce an I were walking towards them, I noticed one was much older that the other. I mentioned to Joyce, "You take the older one."
However, I had no choice, the younger of the two attached himself to her. This was the beginning of many of these evenings and even my staid grandparents, with whom we were living, began to look forward to the visitors.

Some of the servicemen we would only see for the one occasion, but with others who revisited, we formed firm friendships. When they were posted interstate or overseas, I corresponded with many of them. The 'old' soldier befriended me and we exchanged letters for the duration of the war. I still have them now dated 1942/43/44. When he was demobbed after the war, he came to Adelaide to say goodbye before returning to his home in Victoria. I never heard from him again.

American servicemen stationed in Adelaide, were very unpopular with the Australian men. Their uniforms were tailored, they had plenty of money and the girls were smitten with these brash young 'Yanks'. Joyce an her friend Audrey became friendly with two Marines and on one occasion I was invited to go out with them. We went to the pictures where not long after the start of the film, a fellow sitting behind us, heckled repeatedly with taunts of, "Bloody women going out with bloody Yanks." We agreed it was wiser to leave before the situation worsened and we spent the remainder of the day at the beach.

Another American, Tony Romajko, who visited our home, would arrive in a U.S. Army Jeep causing gossip around the neighbourhood. He was not the typical boastful American and the entire family became very fond of him. He in return was grateful to be with a family as he was homesick. Tony visited often until the time he was posted overseas when he and I arranged to exchange letters. The last of the letters arrived, (censored), advising me he was going into active service and didn't know when he would be able to write again. I never did hear from him again and still regret never making enquiries through the Red Cross. Of the many letters I received from Tony, I only kept one, dated August 1942.

In August of 1943 Joyce's fiance was granted compassionate leave from the army in New Guinea when his father was critically ill. While on leave, John was to celebrate his twenty first birthday. He also urged Joyce to marry him before he returned to the war zone. Mother encouraged the wedding as Joyce's popularity with other boys, was a concern. She was convinced that when Joyce had a gold band on her finger, she would remain faithful to John. Mother had three days in which to make a Wedding Gown, two bridesmaids dresses and arrange and cater for the reception. On the day of the wedding, she also made the three floral bouquets. The cake which had been ordered for John's twenty first, was then decorated as a wedding cake. Regardless of such short notice, it was a happy celebration and typical of the many such wartime weddings.

Peace came to Europe on May 7th 1945 and it became known as V.E. day. Joyce and I went into the city and joined the wild celebrations that continued into the early hours of the morning. The war was still being fought in the Pacific, but the movie houses were now showing graphic film of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. No-one could have guessed the extent of the horror that was to unfold.

My Grandmother died the day the Atom Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and on August 15th, Japan's total surrender was announced. Australian and New Zealanders forgot the wartime restraints and turned the cities and towns into places of spontaneous carnival. My cousin and I were asked to dance with the ballet on the balcony of a city hotel. We were in mourning for our Grandmother but our parents insisted we go. They couldn't deny us the opportunity of joining this historical event. It was a memorable day, a social eruption that may never be witnessed again. The following month we both received a letter from the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, expressing appreciation for our assistance in connection with the V.P., (Victory in the Pacific), day celebrations.

I joined the Red Cross visiting military hospitals to comfort 'shell shocked' victims. I paid regular visits to one soldier in particular and as I came to know him well, I took him home on weekend visits. He didn't know anybody in Adelaide. Mother befriended him and when he woke from a hellish nightmare, she would sit with him, not leaving his bedside until she was assured he was sleeping soundly.

April 27th 1946, I danced in the ballet for the last time. It was for the official closing of the 'Cheer Up Hut'. It was attended by His Excellency the Governor Sir Willoughby and Lady Norrie and Lady Louis Mountbatten. The organisers and hostel workers formed a Guard of Honour for the V.I.P. guests who came to share an emotional evening. We ended by singing 'We'll Meet Again', The Maori Farewell' and 'Auld Lang Syne'.

Many of the servicemen who had visited our home, looked up to mother as their second mum. She received many letters and Christmas cards for several years after the war. One Airman from Victoria remains a family friend to this day.

Nancy Angove.
Highbury, South Australia.

SIGNALS

Approximately 70,000 women served in the various forces, relieving men who were themselves, sent to defend Australia from the Japanese Invasion. I was 19 years of age when I enlisted in the Australian Women's Army Service for full time duty. I received three shillings and sixpence a day until I was 21, whereupon I received an increase of one shilling and sixpence to five shillings a day.

Tasmania is an island south of the mainland of Australia and as we were to be trained in Victoria at a Signals Training School, we had to cross the Bass Strait by ship. It was a treacherous voyage as it was often mined and patrolled by enemy ships and submarines. Later on, we were often lucky enough to fly across in Hercules transport planes. They could be very uncomfortable though as they contained no seating. We had to sit on our kitbags.

I completed my training in Victoria and was then posted to an Army unit in New South Wales. Being in the Australian Corps of Signals, we do not say what our work entailed, but it was very exacting. We worked three days of eight hour shifts, from midnight until eight a.m. Three days from eight a.m until five p.m. and finally, three days from five p.m. until midnight. This was followed by a three day break. Being so far away from home, I only had home leave every six months and later when I moved to Queensland, it was every twelve months.

Whilst in the training camp, we had an unpleasant experience. An American serviceman was found in the area of our camp. Fortunately he was apprehended by our guards. He was then removed from the camp and later murdered a woman in a shop doorway. He was captured and hanged.

Malva 1943.

In some units we worked with, and on the same basis, as men, but with less pay. However, in Queensland our camp was completely staffed by five hundred women. Administration staff, cooks, mess orderlies, hairdresser, Q-store personnel and pay clerks as well as the four shifts of Signals personnel. It was a very efficient unit.

I also served on the Atherton Tablelands in the very north of Queensland. A.W.A.S. were not permitted to serve outside Australia because we were not protected by the Red Cross, as were the hospital personnel. However, in May 1945 when the Japanese had been driven out of New Guinea, four hundred A.W.A.S. did go to the L.A.E. to do some vital work with them.

After peace had been declared, they were also utilised for secretarial duties in relation to the War Crime Trials. I was sent home on compassionate leave in August 1945 and as the war ended, I was then discharged.

Malva Langford.
Launceston, Tasmania.

MARION

JUMP THE JACKS

Skip the ropes
Jump the jacks
Roll the alleys
Miss the cracks.

Susso kids are playing
Neath the pale lamp glow
Ring a ring a rosy
Around they go.

Mother's in the kitchen
Baby's fast asleep
Daddy's gone a busking
Out upon the streets.

He's singing for our dinner
And our supper too
So if you can spare a penny
God Bless you.

I was seven years of age when war was declared and lived with my three brothers, and of course my parents. We lived in a tiny rented house in Carlton, an inner suburb of Melbourne. A narrow fronted dwelling its weather boards drab, grey and splintered for need of paint. The four rooms inside were sparsely furnished and the light was weak, as it tried to filter in through tattered Holland blinds. We had no bathroom. The only running water, came from the tap over the gully trap in the small back yard.

My father, part Negro, born in England and educated at Saint Martins In The Field, tried to earn his living busking. A deep voice likened to Paul Robson's and the Penny Organ he played, he would carry strapped to his back. He was a well known figure in and around Carlton. Unfortunately, he was shouted many drinks as he played outside the hotels and of course, as a child, I did not know drink was his weakness. Some times my brothers and I would be dressed up in clown costumes and dance around the streets with him. We'd take the bowler hat around bowing and laughing. Sometimes we would finish up late at night, in a wine saloon along Lygon Street Carlton. We'd feast on thin capstan biscuits and chunks of cheese that were spread along the bar; the gauze tents keeping them

safe from the haze of smoke that drifted up to the brown ceiling. Jimmy Watson's Wine Saloon. It's still there today.

At the local picture theatre, where we kids gathered on Saturday afternoons, my father would entertain during the interval. We would clap and bang down the old wooden seats. I was proud of my dad. A flamboyant man; a performer. I did not know the extent of his alcohol abuse, or for that matter, the degree of our neglect.

He had been to Gallipoli, an Anzac. He entertained the troops at war and between the wars. He rejoined again in 1939, but after a few weeks he was discharged medically unfit. He tried to redeem himself and care for us children, but it was not to be. One day, mother packed our belongings, and when it was dark, we moved to another rented house just a few streets away. This time it was an old two story shop dwelling. From our bedroom atop the old wooden staircase, we would huddle together as the lights would cast ghostly shadows across the walls. Music played until the rise of the wartime sun, and there was drinking and singing. It was almost as if we children were forgotten. My father was nicknamed 'Choc' and they would shout. "Play it again Choc." How they loved his music and always they would call for more.

My introduction to school, was at the Faraday Street Primary in Carlton. Here we were given a pair of shoes, a book and a pencil. It was the depression. Later, we moved on to Saint George's in Rathdown Street. A Catholic school run by the Nuns, their angelic appearance and quiet serenity fascinated me and their kindness I will always remember. They would fill me up on soup and cocoa dark and brown. My hair was thick and curly and was always becoming infested. The angel-like ladies would shave it and give me a coloured cap to wear. A drastic cure but it worked. How proud I was the day I made my first Holy Communion. The nuns found me a pretty white frock and I took my place before the altar with my friends.

I returned home one day to find that Francis, our baby was gone. "Why?" my heart cried out. "Why?" He had been taken by the welfare. Brother Fred was taken next and then after my mother ran away and Noel and I were left in my father's care, we too became grossly neglected. We were whisked away in a police car from St. George's to become wards of the state at the Royal Park Welfare Home.

My memories of The Royal Park Welfare Home, are very hazy and only the kindness shown to me by teachers appears to remain. Mr. O'Neal was a young man with a shock of red hair. Each day he would hand me his lunch tin. It was a ritual. I knew the treat that was left inside was mine and I would sit alone and enjoy it. How well I got to know the tin with the coloured bird on the lid.

MOTHER

Mother where are you?
I silently call your name
I don't know why you have not come
To take me home again.

I have been dragged off
to the Welfare Home
I pray it's not too long before
I see your face again

Mother where are you?
I'm confused as to what I've done
Why am I locked up in this place?
I truly want to run.

But my feet in tight new shoes, just stay
Here inside the wall
I don't know why you haven't been
Not once, no not at all.

Mother where are you?
Please take me if you can
Or come and spend time with me
Please help me understand.

Then maybe I can wait for you
And my soul can find some peace
And the wondering of what went wrong, will rest
And crying I shall cease.

Mum I know I'm but a little girl
My mind is not full blown
But come on mum, speak to me
Please come to the Welfare Home.

It was 1941. We were never to see our father again. He died in 1943 aged fifty four.

After some months in the Home, Noel and I were fostered out to the tiny barren township of Burren Junction in New South Wales. He was six and I was nine. This stranger, our 'new father' left us to get our own food. Noel and I would hold each other closely as we secretly planned our getaway. We disliked this

man intensely and we were soon to find out why. He was cruel and his abuses I shall always remember.

The school nestled amid big Peppercorn trees. A cyclone fence surrounded it, and no matter where you stood - and as far as the eye could see - there were barren plains void of any plant life: Just hot dusty red soil. The school itself, had only one class room with a tin roof. You can imagine how the sun would blaze down upon it and in the winter how the rain would fall so hard it was impossible to hear yourself speak. It also had a Verandah. Mr. Williams, the only teacher had a son called David, a nasty pale looking boy who would delight in calling us names and encourage the other children to join in. Being such a small town it was easy for the news to get around that we were from a home. Many a 'belting' I would receive whilst protecting my brother. Some days we would have lessons under the trees and drink rain water from the tanks that shared the shade of the peppercorns.

From my position in class, I could see my Victory Garden, surrounded by a picket fence. It was about the size of a child's cot. Each pupil had one and I tendered mine with loving care. Strange although our time in Burren Junction were far from happy and I never really felt accepted at the school, there are happy memories attached to it. Getting caught in a dust storm, chasing birds, I was free. At least at school.

THE VICTORY GARDEN

I had a Victory Garden,
Down the bottom of the old school yard
'saw turnips and cabbages grow so tall
In soil that was red and hard.

Warm eggs I gathered each evening
Baby calves I herded too
The cows I milked, I did my chores
A city girl who's chores were new.

An iron kettle always singing
It's face I blackened every day
A wood stove it's oven smiling, with
The brown dampers I learnt to bake.

Every morning, we saluted the flag and once a week each child bought a war stamp and placed it on the uniform of a Red Cross Nurse that had been drawn on the blackboard. But still, my greatest pleasure was my 'Victory Garden'. I was so proud of what my caring for had yielded. The hard soil bore me great rewards.

Once a month, the Ladies of the C.W.A. would meet. They made Flannel pyjamas which were stitched together on an old treadle machine. The pearl buttons were sewn on by hand. I would thread the sewing needle for weary eyes. Rich moist fruit cakes we sewn up in thick hessian bags. Needles deftly worked through the course material. 'Good Luck Boys' I would include in my stitching. How happy we all were by the results of our War effort. Hot scones, clotted cream, and home made berry jams set out on fine China, finished off our day.

These were hard times for all, sons, brothers and fathers had left the land to fight for their country. My father had died, my hopes of being rescued seemed to have vanished, as did the nuns, my brothers and my Carlton. I used to wonder. Had my mother returned to find her children taken away? Gone like Fred and Francis. These times were not to last, as I was soon to find that another journey lay ahead of me.

After a very formal introduction to Sister Veronica, I was installed as a boarder at Saint Mary's College, Gunadah. Miles away from my Victory Garden. How I hated it with it's high brick walls. The Nuns dealt out the discipline harshly. I soon realised they were not all 'angels', but the serenity prevailed. I would feign illness and sleep walking in the hope they would send me home, but to no avail. I found solace in God and joined in all the religious activities with my whole heart. I'd spend hours in the Chapel or walking around the gardens, my little black veil on my head. I talked to the statues that were dotted around in fern covered grottos. I would daydream about becoming a Nun, but that was not to be. One day, I was summoned to Sister Veronica's office. She told me I was leaving. Tears welled in my eyes. Where had I failed? I daren't ask her. Slowly, I packed the black stockings I'd removed for the last time and clutching the Rosary Beads Sister Veronica gave me, I headed once more for Burren Junction.

On my arrival, I was told that we were to return to Melbourne. A court case had determined our 'Foster Father' morally unfit to care for us and we were bundled on to a train. The nightmare of abuse was over. I found out that the convent was just a wayside, a Sanctuary. My schooling had finished. I was thirteen.

Marion Minty.
Newport, Victoria. Australia.

MAKE IT STRETCH

As I was still in High School when the war ended, my memories are probably more of a shallow level. Like the Black-out every night at six o clock, my Stepmother always forgetting to have the Kerosene lamp filled and ready and the air raid siren being tested every Sunday at one o' clock. Goodness knows what would have happened if we'd ever had an air raid at that time.

We dug air raid shelters in the back yard, which immediately filled with water and so were useless anyway. There was the food and clothing coupons. My Stepmother used to pay three pence for a butter coupon if she could find someone to sell her one. And, as a child had to be five feet two inches in order to get extra clothing coupons, she told me to make sure, that I tried to stretch that extra little bit when we were measured at school. I did. I still have a few coupons left, they are in my photo album.

I remember the Yanks coming to town. It was great gossip if someone saw one of the teachers out with a Yank. tch, tch! I think my father brought a few home for a meal and I seem to remember them being very polite and with beautiful teeth.

Mary in 1942 aged 11. (Unstretched).

I think my greatest memory is of the food parcels we used to send to England. My father's sister lived in York and we sent many parcels to her and her family. My Stepmother used to pack these awkward shaped items together and wrap them in Hessian. They were sewn carefully together, with the name and address written on a square of calico in indelible pencil. This was also neatly stitched onto it. She would then take it to the Post Office only to find that it was half and ounce overweight. She would then have to bring it home, rip it apart with much muttering and grumbling, take something out and start all over again. I still have an original letter written by my Aunt in 1949, so we were apparently still sending parcels four years after the war had ended. In it, she lists the contents.

Tinned Meat,
dripping,
custard powder,
fruit pudding mixture,
a tweed suit and a blue dress.

She says, that she couldn't have wished for anything better, than what had been sent, especially the dripping. It was the most precious item. With plenty of dripping on hand, there was so much she could make with it.

Then came the day when the Japanese shelled Newcastle harbour from their miniature submarines, (I was born and raised in Newcastle, New South Wales), after doing the same to Sydney the previous night. We felt that the war was really on our doorstep now. Not much damage was done but it was frightening all the same, as we felt they were getting closer.

Nowadays, the Americans are sometimes reviled because of some of their policies, but I have never forgotten that if they had not come to our rescue under the direction of General McArthur, and fought the Battle of the Coral Sea, this country would have been overrun by the Japanese. It was only the great distances to the main cities from the Islands and the lack of long distance air power, that saved us from more attacks. Nowadays, the Japanese have bought up many resorts and businesses here and their tourists seem to find us interesting, which is as it should be. The younger generations shouldn't be taught to hate but there are still many ex Prisoners of War still alive, who will never forgive, or forget. How ridiculous war is.

I realise that we did not have the utter devastation and misery suffered by England during those years, but we did suffer the anxiety of knowing what our relatives in England were going through. There was also the worry of what was happening to our boys 'over there'. It was a very trying time. We could have been invaded during the latter years of the war, (an ever present fear at the time). I still think of my life in terms of before and after the war.

My father was born in Newcastle upon Tyne and came to Australia before the first war. He settled in Newcastle and joined the Australian Army. He went back to Europe where he was wounded and had a leg amputated. I have dim memories of him saying that he was wounded in France, but my son in law

recently suggested that it may have been at Gallipoli - which I'm sure you know - looms large in Australian war history. I have had his medals framed and have written a brief note on the back, so future generations will know what they are about.

I have recently returned from a three week visit to Newcastle. I need to visit there every three years of so, to recharge my batteries and catch up with old friends and my few remaining relatives. Whilst I was there, the 50th anniversary of V.J. Day or V.P. day, as we know it, was being celebrated. My friend and I spent all day glued to the tv. We watched the various ceremonies then later we attended, an 'Australia Remembers' concert which was very, very, nostalgic. I may forget what I did yesterday, but I can still sing along - word for word - to all the songs of the war years.

Mary Everett.
Adelaide, South Australia.

NO HOLDS BARRED

I was only fifteen when war broke out. My family were very patriotic. My dad, an ex Gallipoli veteran from W.W.1. rejoined the army and was sent to the Pacific Isles. My older brother lied about his age and also joined up. I was devastated when the Women's Army wouldn't take me until I was 18.

In Australia, we had no facilities for making lenses for binoculars etc., (I believe we used to import them from Germany.) So a factory was set up near Central Station in Sydney and I applied for a job. They taught me how to use the machines and use jeweller's rouge to polish the lenses. It was dirty work, but it was helping the war effort. We worked a six day week 7.30am until 5.30pm with half an hour for lunch. I don't remember what the wage was but it wasn't much.

Then the local church called for V.A.D. nurses to work voluntarily at Lewisham Hospital on Sundays, so along I went all togged out in my green uniform with a little veil and my C.U.S.A. badges. Occasionally, we worked Saturday night at the C.U.S.A. canteen near Circular Quay, serving tea and sandwiches and dancing with the servicemen. This was our entertainment really as we were too tired to do anything else. I kept working seven days a week until I was almost 18. Then a terrible thing happened to me which I will never forget.

I started work at a munitions factory, with a dear school friend who was also in C.U.S.A. However, nearly two and a half years of working seven days a week, I must have been over tired. I was certainly worried about my brother who had been sent to Malaya with the 2/15th field Regiment. Singapore had fallen and they were all taken prisoner. My supposed friend must have been listening to her brothers' gossip, (they were not in the services), and as I walked into the lunch room that day, I heard her say to the other girls. "Well, I heard that the A.I.F. in Malaya just laid down their arms and surrendered to the Japs."
I went absolutely berserk. I rushed at her screaming and lashing out and, I'm ashamed to say, with my hands around her throat I tried to push her out of the window into the street below, (we were two or three storeys up). I was a gentle, shy girl I can assure you and not given to tantrums. Of course, the other girls pulled us apart. The Manager took us to his office by which time, I was in a state of shock and floods of tears.

He was very sympathetic when I told him I was only waiting for my 18th Birthday to join the Army. He broke it to me gently that I was in a 'protected' industry and could not leave. More tears, (and I would think, very real concern for my mental stability), finally convinced him that it was better to let me go; bless him. I could never have worked with that girl again or even spoken to her.

My fears for my beautiful big strapping brother, the Regimental Sergeant Major, were well founded. He was put to work on the Burma Railway, had a leg amputated, then sadly died of Cerebral Malaria before he'd turned 21.

I did join the Army and spent three years working in a searchlight battery on the coast of New South Wales.

Claire Robinson.
Hazelbrook, N.S.W. Australia.

MUM

The Letter.

I felt I would like to write something about my wartime experiences, but as I was only a child then, I have decided to write this on behalf of my mother. On reading it back, it sounds so sad, which it was, especially for her, but for us kids, there were good times, and funny times as well. I don't know if this is the kind of thing you are looking for but I do know that for women in war, it is never easy.

In our case, my mother had no family of her own. She was English, born in the south coast town of Weymouth, Dorset. She came to live in Australia as a child. My father's family gave her no support at all, so she lived a 'go it alone' lifestyle. This turned out to be much harder than she had ever imagined. When she left our lives, she left a gaping hole in our hearts that has never really healed. I have tried over the years to trace her, through the Salvation Army, Red Cross and Social Security all to no avail.

War brings out the best and worst in people; And in the case of wives and widows, there are no medals for bravery, no recognition for the sacrifice, and no Last Post played for dead dreams. Only the day to day living and the fear that life will never be as it was before.

We don't have headstones for either of our parents. We never gave our father, a Father's Day present after 1940, and Mother's Day is always remembered with great sadness. But, I mustn't complain. My life has been full and happy. I have a large, loving family and I can look back at my sixty three years and know that the war years and the years after, taught me tolerance, self reliance, self respect and pride in everything I did. Someone up there likes me. What more could I want?

Betty's Mum Lillian, 1933.

The Story.

I was a naive child of eight when World War Two began and by the time it ended in 1945, I was a mature fourteen year old. Our world then was a happy place, we lived in a small weatherboard house in an inner suburb of Sydney. Our father went to work each day and our mother stayed home caring for five children and the house. She was a quiet, shy person and in 1939, she was thirty two years old. She was a very attractive woman with blonde hair and brown eyes and despite having borne five children, she still had a slim figure. She had a graceful, ladylike way about her and was soft spoken. I'd never known her to raise her voice in anger.

In this safe, happy world of ours, we couldn't possibly know that some maniac on the other side of the world, and in a country we'd never even heard of, was getting ready to disrupt the life we loved so much. He was to plunge us into a dark and sad place, that would leave us with memories, that even now fifty years on, come back to haunt us.

I would like my mother to tell you her story of the war years, of how she struggled to pay rent, buy food and clothing for five growing children whilst in the midst of all the rationing. Of how my father's army pay was never enough to make ends meet. Of how towards the end of each pay day, the best she could manage was fresh bread and dripping with lots of pepper and salt. Perhaps she would tell you of the awful jobs she was forced to take, like the one in the steam laundry where she carried heavy lined baskets from one place to another. She

was on her feet all day long, perspiring in the hot steamy atmosphere. Like the job in the shabby hamburger cafe, where she washed dishes for hours on end.
She might tell you of the lonely nights she spent after we'd all gone to bed. Perhaps she'd tell you how she felt when the letter came from the War Department. 'Missing in action' it read. 'Presumed P.O.W.' But she never knew for sure, not then. She was never sure if she was still a wife, or whether she was a widow. I'm not sure if she would tell you about the smooth talking, smartly dressed salesman she met one day, who flattered her and made her feel young, attractive and desirable again. A man who took her dancing and brought her gifts. A man who moved into our cosy little world and ruined our lives forever.

She wouldn't tell you that after a while he came home drunk, bashed her up and broke her nose and ribs. She wouldn't tell you that her first drink made her forget her troubles and she wouldn't tell you that she drank every night to drown her sorrows; or that alcohol became for her, a crutch which eventually caused her to neglect the children. And when the rent became too hard to find, we moved into a dismal two roomed flat riddled with Cockroaches.

Probably, she'd tell you how ashamed and sad she felt when she left us in a childrens' home while she went into hospital to have major surgery. If she could, she'd tell you how she wanted to start a new life away from the city. We moved to a small town on the Central Coast of N.S.W. Here she took a job cooking in a pub.

In 1944, another letter arrived from the War Department. It began, "We regret to inform you…." So, after years of hell on the Burma Railway and other places as a P.O.W. of the Japanese, my father was dead. He was torpedoed by the Americans. The 'Hell Ship' he was being transported to Japan on, gave no indication that there were P.O.W.'s on-board.

She'd tell you just what a wonderful swimmer and life-saver he used to be at Bondi Beach before the war. Then she'd probably give a strange laugh and say how ironic life really can be. She'd tell you how she married again, disastrously to an alcoholic. She would tell you how much she loved her children but how hard her life had become. So much so, that she reached a point where it just became too much and she left.

The two youngest children were placed in a Masonic Boarding School as my father had been a member of the Masonic Lodge. The middle child was made a 'Ward of the State'. A neglected, uncontrollable child they called her. The two eldest aged fifteen and sixteen, were given 'live-in' jobs in Sydney. That was over forty years ago.

She now has grandchildren and great grandchildren. Yes, she would probably tell you her story, but then again, perhaps her pain is too great. Maybe she has pushed it to the back of her mind, then again, perhaps she is dead. I have told you her story because her photo still sits upon my desk. I see it every day and I miss her still.

Betty Carter.
Lake Cathie, Australia.

FLOUR POWER

When war broke out in 1939, I was 18 years old and engaged to be married. My Fiance was almost 20 and was an apprentice polisher in Anthony Hordern's Furniture factory. I was a packer and assembler in a large builder's hardware, metal and electrical fittings warehouse.

We married in 1941 after my husband had completed his apprenticeship and had finished his military training which was compulsory. We rented a flat near Canterbury and had one whole year together before Darwin was bombed. That day was enlistment day for thousands of young New South Wales men; my husband one of them. He became NX 28515, 2/35th Battalion, 'B' Company 10th Platoon. New Guinea Forces. (Patrol Leader).

I was advised to report to the Government Manpower Office in Sydney because I had no children. I was in a position to replace one of the young men now enlisting, from the food factories or warehouses. I was then employed by Mathews and Thompson's Food Factory, in Newtown Sydney, which was a 35 minute tram ride away.

I used to read teacups for the different girls at morning teatime. The tea was supplied by the management so that we didn't have to use our own tea coupons. I worked on the second floor - Packaging - which wasn't too bad, or so I thought at the time. Then came the day when the automatic filling machine went haywire.

The usual two pound weight of flour came through the machine and dropped into my held out paper bag, that was O.K. Then came the second and I managed to save that one. Then, all of a sudden down came at least fifty pounds of flour and it just wouldn't stop coming. We were in a right mess as you can imagine and of course at that time we weren't issued with any protective clothing or caps.

Just engaged. 1939.

At first we tried to bag the flow amidst the sound of raucous laughter from the 'Sealers' working on the long bench tops, but as it kept flowing out of the Hopper upstairs, the laughter soon turned to shrieks as it began to flow everywhere. The floor was completely covered. We two packers were white all over, as well as becoming red with anger. The next time it went wrong was even worse.

We were filling Strawberry Dessert mix for the American forces stationed in Australia. It was terrible. We were showered in it. We ate it, wore it, sneezed it. It was in our hair, it soaked through our clothes, it squelched in our open cut sandals, it was inside our bra's, in fact just about everywhere you could imagine. We were just one all over pink sticky mess. And to make things worse, there were no showers. We all vowed there and then, that we'd never, ever eat Strawberry Mix again. We told the manager that unless we were allowed some sort of shower facilities, that we'd all go on strike. The answer was prompt. A resounding, "No." We were then, all accused of being communists who were trying to sabotage the war effort.

When I got on the tram at night, (5-20pm), to go back to Canterbury, you should have seen the reaction of the passengers after I had been filling bottles of vinegar and Worcester Sauce in the Bottling Room. The noses began sniffing, the hankies came out and the sneezing started. My friend Lorna and I just hated that job when it was our turn. We did not have paper tissues then and handkerchiefs were half a coupon each. We thought this was outrageous! Fabric

was three coupons per yard. Shoes were six coupons per pair. Nothing was in short supply.

After a while, I joined in a night technical dressmaking school, two nights weekly at Canterbury High School. We had good English and Yankee pictures at our local theatres. Saturday nights were reserved for dancing or the picture show.

I had a shared bank account with my husband and banked all his Army Allotment religiously. We had a plan drawn up by an Architect for the home of our dreams. I bought the land out of my savings, (£85). He was very happy with my choice, it was 66 feet by 132 feet. We still live there today.

On Leave 1944.

My parents lived in an inner city suburb close to a station, close to my childhood school. A very small garden by comparison to what my plans were for our future home, hence the size of the block of land I settled on.

My Dad was a wonderful gardener, he had ten green fingers. 'Vegies' and flowers, (chooks too). Really, we were never without food or meat or fish. Rabbits were only sixpence, (6d) each, and two rabbits was a good meat meal. Bread was fivepence per loaf, milk was threepence per pint, fivepence per Quart.

I have English, Scottish and Irish ancestry. My mother's grandfather was Asprey of Bond Street, London, jeweller to the King. Is their shop still there? My dad's father came from County Armargh in Ireland. My dad's cousin was Sir John Lavery, Ireland's famous portrait and landscape painter. He designed their, (Ireland's), first banknote.

What else can I tell you? That I am Psychic, a Clairvoyant and a Healer? That I am very passionately in love with Siamese Cats and Blue Roan Cocker Spaniel dogs? I am just one very ordinary lady whose soul loves to see the green fields of England and the Hills of Scotland and Ireland. Unfortunately it's always in films though and it moves me to tears.

G. McDonald.
Sydney, Australia.

THE LAST WORD

As I began collecting the stories for the original title: WAR MEMORIES' Aurora Publishing ISBN 1 85926 064 0, I knew that I would undoubtedly attract a certain amount of heartbreaking stories from these ‘Old Soldiers’ on which I would have to - sooner or later - make a decision as to whether they should or should not be published. I was right. The stories began to arrive and sure enough, some of these young men had suffered appalling injuries, both physical and mental. They had lived through the most horrendous experiences at the hands of their 'fellow (men)? experiences so callous, degrading and depraved, you just would not believe.

Then I found myself trying to strike the right balance between curiosity and attention to detail, in order to attract those of us who've never lived through these terrible times; whilst aiming to honour, respect and interest those of you who have. This proved to be such a difficult job that in the end, I just had to step back, take another look and start again. I then realised that there was only one possible way of achieving the result I was searching for: To let the stories do it for me. Then it became easy.

My aim, was to make aware to all, the individual sacrifices so freely given by a generation of youth not too long ago, sacrifices mentioned only in passing, to a curious relative of the ‘bouncing on the knee’ brigade, or openly with an old pal who was only too willing to reminisce. These heartbreaking, wonderful, curious, funny and sensual stories, had only before commanded the minimum of interest when really, they deserved our fullest attention.

“So, what were the women doing whilst the fighting raged?” I asked. Well, I have more than an idea now. I sincerely hope you have enjoyed the stories in this tribute to the ladies; and indeed the children of that time. I’m sure you will have had a couple of giggles and maybe the odd tear too along the way. I personally think it is a wonderfully interesting book, but there again I'm biassed aren’t I? Now I look forward to beginning the third book, which is due for release early December 1999,

I find it highly unlikely, that anybody could possibly compile a series of books like these, without being drawn into the atmosphere of nostalgia that each story quietly generates. Likewise, it became absolutely impossible for me not to feel an emotional attachment to all these ladies, as the correspondence continued and my involvement in their past deepened. However, there is one lady I haven't had any contact with whatsoever. Yet, since reading her article in the evening paper, (thank you Mr. Editor), she has never been far from my thoughts, as I’m sure she won’t yours, as you read on.

'My Living Hell' is a story that had to be placed where it is: The final story. It fetches home the ‘truths’ of war within a theatre of life that is so often ignored due to undeserved feelings of guilt, hatred and/or shame. I cannot for one instant, ever imagine having to live through such an ordeal, so much so, that I personally,

find it far too difficult to find words for so please excuse me. What I have learned though is; it wasn't just the brave young men who'd suffered its anger. War has an anger that knows of no boundaries between the sexes nor does it show any respect or compassion or age. I'd also like to add; I do not have the author's permission to publish this story, only her wishes as stated in her own words:

"This story must be told, so that others do not forget."

I'm sure she won't mind. I have tried to contact her many times, but my letters and enquiries amounted to nothing. I will therefore honour and respect her privacy and wish her and her family a very warm and peaceful future.

Ian Billingsley.

MY LIVING HELL

My mother, now a very old and very sick lady of 82, made me promise her at the age of six, that I would never speak of what happened to us at the hands of the Japanese Army. The war was over, my father had not yet been located by the Red Cross and as we huddled together under a 'scratchy' Red Cross blanket, she told me that if we were ever to be able to all live happily as a family again, I must never speak of the terrible things I had seen happen to her. An oath, she said, was to the death and I had sworn an oath. She cannot bear to remember or speak of the war now and the only way she can cope with it is by pretending it never happened.

Out of respect for her feelings, I have never spoken of those things either, but feel most strongly that they must be told. People, particularly young people, should know what really happened before history is conveniently rewritten to suit today's one sided apologists.

My father worked for the British Government in Burma. He and my mother loved the country and considered settling there. My grandparents and an uncle were visiting us at that time. My very first memory is of a bomb hitting our house directly, all of us being buried in the shelter and then being rescued by Australian soldiers. All the local Europeans, were herded together, crammed into open-topped army lorries and driven for several days through terrifying heat to Mandalay aerodrome. Here, planes were waiting to take us across to India and then hopefully, home. There was no food, no water and we had nothing except for what we had on at the time of the raid.

As the planes, which were already loaded with people, began to take to the air and people piled into the ones still on the ground, the Japanese bombers arrived. Aircraft exploded in mid-air as well as on the ground. Then they began to strafe those of us still on the ground with machine guns. There was absolute carnage. No one knew how many were killed, no-one knew their identities, there were no graves for them, there were no memorials. I wonder if anyone mourned? How or why we survived I will never know.

My grandparents and uncle, decided to try to reach India overland. That was madness but, there was so much madness, fear, and utter despair at that time. Not only was there danger of starvation, disease, insects, snakes, tigers, but there were the marauding bands of 'Dacoits', who would happily slit a throat for a few meagre possessions. And of course, the Japanese themselves who were hellbent on slaughter. We learned after the war, that the whole band of almost one hundred people, after several deaths from snake bites, starvation and thirst, were killed by Jap' patrols. No graves, no memorials, no mourners.

Meantime, my family were with the main group of survivors, many of them with gunshot wounds from the attack at the airport. Any thing of any value, was forcibly taken with a great deal of beating and bayonet stabbing. Then we were force marched under armed guard across the country to a place called Myitkyina, for mile upon mile, day after day, in broiling heat.

When we arrived, there was nowhere for us, so we were told to go back to Mandalay. The guards, angry at having to march with us, became even more vicious. Anyone who became ill or too tired to continue, was simply left with well-aimed blows from the butts of rifles, and several kicks for good measure. My brother who was just one year old, died from malnutrition and dysentery. He was buried under a tree in a small box with no memorial. I was not yet four.

There was nowhere for us we were told again on our arrival and were sent on to another place - blessedly in the cooler hills - called Maymyo, where we spent the rest of the war in what had once been the British Army barracks. One particular memory I have, is of everyone being delighted when we came to a river. We were all so hot and thirsty, we rushed to the water's edge, where we had to shove aside decomposing bodies before we could reach the water. The stench was unforgettable.

My father was put to work on the roads. When he died ten long, suffering years later, a broken sick man who was severely depressed as a result of the ill-treatment he had suffered. The undertaker, a middle aged woman, wept at the sight of the bayonet scars on his body.

My mother and the other healthy young women, were marched several miles every morning in all weathers, to stand waist-deep in a river to wash stinking, blood soaked uniforms and bandages. During the monsoon season, several of them were washed away by the swollen torrent. Some were not saved. There were no graves, or memorials for them either. I saw many atrocious sights. People were executed and their heads were impaled on bamboo poles. I saw people beaten to death or dying slowly of various tropical illnesses. We were riddled with lice, scabies, ringworm. We suffered from dysentery, malnutrition malaria and typhus fever. I regularly saw my mother and other women raped, then brutally beaten by the rapists. This was what my mother had not wanted me to speak of before my father.

I found the body of my mother's close friend, hanging from the crossbar in the latrine. She and other pretty, young, and single women and girls from the age of puberty, were sent off to brothels where they had to 'entertain' officers. Georgina was returned to the camp because she had become pregnant. She had hanged herself because she couldn't bear the shame. I watched as she was cut down, carried out and buried. No memorial, no headstone for Georgina either.

The other day, I received a telephone call from one of those groups that do random opinion surveys. The pleasant young lady asked me what my views were on the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"At last." I thought, "Someone is going to listen. At last, I can tell someone the truth." I wept as I told her that I owe my life to the bomb, for it is a documented fact that the Japanese intended to kill us all, to exterminate us, to obliterate us as if we had never existed. There were no lists bearing the names of Japanese prisoners of war, it was only the sudden end brought about by the dropping of the bomb, which prevented this mass genocide. I told her some of what I am telling you. She listened, then said apologetically,

"I'm sorry, but your view is not the one we are looking for. Maybe we'll get in touch some other time."

People don't know, because they have not been told about the thousands of P.O.W.'s suffering disease and starvation as they were packed into boats and shipped to Japan as slave labour. The very sick, callously tossed over the side. No service, no memorial, just shark fodder. They don't know about the appalling conditions under which they were forced to work for companies such as Toyota, Mitsubishi, and Nissan.

They may have heard of the notorious Burma Railway, but have they heard about the unbelievably cruel conditions under which the men were forced to survive? Have they heard about the cages in which they were put as punishment for some 'petty crime' to literally cook to death in the hot sun? Do they know that 130.000 died out there and that 15.000 of those were British? Have they heard of the bestial forms of torture to which prisoners were subjected. The kind that would take a very sick mind to devise and an equally sick one to carry out? Believe me, the Japanese carried them out with the greatest relish.

In these enlightened days when counselling is available if you so much as stub your toe, can people appreciate the fifty years of tortured, corrosive memories, of racking nightmares, of black depression, of festering hatred, of 'desolating' loneliness because there is no-one who understands and can share your pain? Apart from the family, no one knows of my past, for I cannot bear to speak of it. It is shut firmly in the past, except in my heart and my head. Then suddenly, with the advent of V.J.-Day plus 50, it was unlocked like Pandora's Box, and the agony of the escaping demons is almost to much to bear.

My mother, at 82, still wakes at night weeping with her nightmares. Last week, she said very sadly:

"Somewhere out there my baby is buried. I would like just once, to find the spot and lay some flowers there for him and tell him that I have never forgotten him."

I will never forget either. How could I? Why should I for God's sake. Compared with other survivors, I am still young. For their sakes, I must not allow these things to be forgotten. Most of them have passed on. While I remain, I must ensure that the truth is told.

I'd like my story to be told as a memorial to those who didn't have one. To my grandparents, my brother, my uncle, to Georgina. To all those others, whose deaths were unrecorded, whose graves were unmarked, and as a thank you to those who fought and gave their lives for my freedom.

THE GIRLS

Anne Downs
B.J. Hall
Bertha Warren
Betty Carter
Catherine Byrne
Cicely Versey
Claire Robinson
Doreen E. Longworth
Dorothea Ellison
Dorothy E. Beastall
Dorothy Search
Ena Brason
G. McDonald
Gladys Wade
Iris Newbold
Janet MacHardy
Joan Walker
Joy Packham
Joyce Sargeant
Kathleen Sharkey
Kay Riddell
Myra Gifford
M. Livingstone
Malva Langford
Margery Saunders
Marie Shelley
Marion Minty
Marjorie Waterhouse
Mary Everett
May Lander
Miriam Tong
Muriel Berzins
Muriel Robertson
Muriel Ross
Muriel Theaker
Nesta Hoyle
Nancy Angove
Rhoda Woodward
Shirley Clifton
Sylvia Harper
V.B. Johnson
Unknown

Thank You All.

Girls on the Home Front is the second in this series, published in celebration and thanks to a generation that sacrificed their youth for us all. A generation who gave freely and asked for nothing in return; except just maybe a thank you.
The third book in the series,

‘Salute The Silent Hero’

is now available on Kindle and other ebook sites.