

WWII from a WAAF's Point of View

by Barbara Saks

I joined up as Barbara Brown on 4/22/1940 (a story there). 2 weeks basic training at West Drayton (a story there), then posting to Kirton (another story, but there's one attached to everything, so I won't keep repeating that). Passed OSB summer of '40, but didn't want any of the jobs offered, I only wanted Intelligence, which had just been closed to WAAF for an interesting reason.

To begin with, I have always remembered Kirton as Kirton "Lindsay", the "say" meaning something in Anglo-Saxon, and obviously I have been wrong for years. Kirton was built at the edge of the Lincoln Wolds. A few yards beyond the high, strong chain-link, barbed-wire topped fence which surrounded the perimeter, the ground dropped steeply down about 400 feet, to go south, completely flat, to Boston and Lincoln. The railway station was on the flat coastal strip, which stretched east about 30 miles to the North Sea. Across the street from the station, the long climb began to RAF Kirton, and a pub, "The First and Last", was situated on the left corner. It was the first going up the hill, and the last coming down.

When we arrived in early March '40, the station was still in the process of being built, and the KOYLI's (the King's Own Light Infantry) were in charge of ditch digging and foundations. They were a bunch of burly navvies in Army uniform, trouser legs tucked into the tops of high, strong, black leather Army boots. The mess was on the ground floor of an unfinished barrack block, the food prepared outside in a field kitchen, then hauled up by the servers in large, black, oval aluminium-lined Dixie cans thru' 2 raised, wide-sashed windows. The serving tables were to the right, just inside the door, the eating tables and benches lined up along each wall, with a middle aisle covered in Hessian, which often rucked up with all the foot traffic. Every now and again, a KOYLI's boot would catch in a ruck, and tea and food would go flying in all directions --- not particularly appetising. Eventually, the Airmen's Mess was permanently set on the top floor of a barrack block. Coming off night duty after everybody else had eaten, was not particularly appetising, either. The tables hadn't been cleaned and were covered in blobs of mustard and tomato sauce, spilled tea, and bits of bread. Strangely enough, I don't remember the food, except for one disgusting breakfast. This was served from large, anodised metal cans, and was a lump of liver in a watery gravy, dumped on a piece of toast. After night duty particularly, the smell as we opened the door, was awful. We marched from the Ops Room to everywhere in a column of 2, and one morning we were lined up on the staircase outside the Mess door. Being near the rear of the column, I was on the next-to-top flight of stairs. When we were all assembled, the Corporal gave the signal to the first 2 girls at the head of the column on the top flight, to open the doors, which opened outward. The effect was comical. Apparently, the awful blast of liver-smelling air bursting forth, made the first 2 girls faint, and they fell backward onto the next girls, who fell backward onto the next girls, who toppled the next girls, and so it went down the column, until the last 2 sets of girls stopped it. We, on the lower flight, wondered what on earth was happening, and it turned out the cause was a liver-breakfast-morning.

Just down from the Guard House and the gates, on the opposite side of the Perimeter Road, there started a long, semicircular road where officer housing was built. At the beginning was a cluster of small red brick houses where WAAF were billeted. Then came individual red brick houses for Station officers, the higher the rank, the bigger the house. The biggest was the C/O's, in the middle of the semicircle, then the road continued on round to the junior officers' quarters, ending in the Officers' Mess. I shared the top front bedroom of one of the small houses with our Corporal, Dorothy Evemy, and my new friend, Joan Kitchen, known as Kitch, a tall, slim, blue-eyed blonde beauty, her beauty marred only by unaligned eye teeth. At the back of the houses were lots of cream coloured, flat, smooth stones, about 6 inches long, some smaller. I collected these, and built onto the back wall of the house, a 3 sided double wall, making a large square of several feet, about 6 inches high, leaving a gap between. This I filled with earth and planted flowers, marigolds and daisies, if I remember correctly, maybe a few pansies in between. Wouldn't it be remarkable, if, after all these years, it is still there?

The Operations Room was somewhere on campus, I don't remember where. It was a large, high-ceilinged room, with the huge, sloping Sector Table Map occupying most of the space. My position was on the East Coast at the top of the table, because I could plot upside-down easier than the right way up, facing the upper deck and the Controller and Officer liaisons, and the lower deck and NCO liaisons. Kitch was on the North Sea position to my left at the end of the table. If I remember correctly, when we were first operational, our planes patrolled from the East coast right across to the West, until another Fighter station was completed in the West. On the wall was a large clock, each 5 minute section coloured red, yellow and blue. Our plastic plotting arrows matched the colour of each 5 minutes, and if the plot was 15 minutes old, the former arrows laid down were removed, and we started again with red. Squadron numbers on duty were lighted up on the wall near the clock. There were 4 duty watches of plotters, A, B, C and D watch, mixed RAF and WAAF. I was on "A" watch, the "Brainy Watch". "B" watch was known as the "Beauty Watch", and I don't remember if the other 2 watches were named for anything. We worked around the clock on various shifts for 3 days, then had a 24 hour stand-off from 1pm one day to 1pm the next.

The first squadrons that came to train were Polish, learning RAF procedure, and many to learn English. At some time that summer, the Poles gave a dance for the Station, holding it in a hangar, the roof festooned with garlands of twisted toilet paper, (yes, there was toilet paper in those early days), and a Polish military band on a large wooden platform in the middle. The concrete floor was sprinkled with French chalk and the dancing began. "A" watch was on stand-off and we were able to go. A stocky young Polish airman came and faced me, clicked his heels, bowed, and held out his arms, and off we went to the most wonderful Viennese waltz I have ever danced! Another memory of that time is not so pleasant. I had had a terrible stand-off, suffering all night with toothache in the first upper right molar. It throbbed so much, I was sure

the walls were going in and out, and proof of it, to me, the filling came out sometime during that miserable night. The next morning the right cheek was very swollen, of all colours, the eye shut, and half the lips swollen too. I was sent off to Sickbay, and was sitting up in bed when the RAF doctor made his rounds. A Polish doctor was with him and they were speaking in French, not knowing I understood. The Polish doctor said, "Le visage est comme un arc-en-ciel, n'est ce pas?" "Her face is like a rainbow, isn't it?"

September 15th 1940 was a Sunday that year, and it was my 23rd birthday. "A" Watch, my watch, was on duty in the Ops Room at RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey, on the morning shift, 8am to 1pm. My position on the huge Sector Table Map was on the east coast at the top of the table, because I could plot upside down easier than the right way up. I faced the Controller and liaison officers on the Upper Deck and liaison NCOs on the Lower Deck. It was the usual slow Sunday morning, 2 or 3 pilots practicing bumps and grinds after breakfast. Nothing spectacular.

Then Intelligence came through that the Luftwaffe was sending over a second wave of bombers and fighters, bigger than the first, and an SOS went out all over Britain for every available pilot and plane to report to the south. We had 2 squadrons of Spitfires and 2 of Hurricanes at that time, and they were scrambled. We plotted them off the table. After the bustle of their leaving, there was no more activity, and quiet settled down, everyone left to his or her own thoughts. Many prayers went up that morning for the safe return of our pilots. We were relieved at 1pm, and after a silent lunch, my new pal, Joan Kitchen and I went to our billet, waiting for news. The WAAF were billeted in the cluster of small red brick houses at the beginning of the long semi-circular road, off the Perimeter Road, which held all the senior officers' houses, leading to the largest, the C/O's, in the middle of the semi-circle, and continuing on round to the Officers' Mess on the opposite side. (Our C/O was Group Captain Stephen Hall, and later when I was at Bletchley Park, I learned he had died on the same day as President Roosevelt). In peacetime, our little red brick houses would be assigned to senior NCOs and their families.

Joan and I shared the upper front bedroom with our corporal, Dorothy Evemy. Dorothy wasn't there, and Joan went downstairs to do 'smalls'. I took down the wrapped-in-blanket bed clothes from the top of the three biscuits that formed the mattress, made up the bed, lay down and tried to concentrate on a crossword, my thoughts elsewhere. Then Dorothy came in with the news that most of our pilots had returned to base, some having had to land on other 'drones on the way back, and a few who didn't make it back. Among those was a friend of mine, Ft/Sgt "Johnnie" Johnson, a quiet man with a great sense of humour, from Chalfont St. Giles. I had only met him recently. It was a platonic friendship, we shared the same interests, music and the theatre, and he respected my engagement ring, given by my fiancé, a pre-war RAF pilot, who was posted to no. 4 FTS, Ismailia, Egypt, in April, 1939. It was a horrible afternoon, tears being shed for Johnnie. Then later, thank goodness, came the news that he had been a Tail End Charlie, had been shot down, had ditched in the Channel, and had been taken prisoner, but no one knew where. I bought some paperbacks that I knew would interest him, saved up my Bourneville chocolate ration, cadging some from girls who didn't like it, and made up a small parcel to take to the Red Cross. To my disgust, they wouldn't take it because I wasn't his fiancée or a family member, so I have never known what became of him. Thus ended my BofB Day experience.

Of course, now everyone knows Fighter Command shot down more planes that morning than at any other time during the BofB, and it is now BofB Day. When I was finally commissioned in Intelligence and posted to Bletchley Park in Feb '43, among the first things I saw there were recce photos of the invasion barges, hundreds of them, all piled high with war materiel, lined up all along the inner waterways of the French coast across the Channel. The invasion threat was very real then, and the RAF "Few" saved us. God bless them all.

This year it's the 70th Anniversary, and my 93rd birthday. The RCAF in Colorado Springs hosts an annual ceremony here, attended by an RAF contingent from Aurora, near Denver, and many other people, military and civilian. I only heard about it 2 years ago, and hope to be there this year, with bells on!

The first squadrons to come to train at Kirton were Polish, in the late autumn of '40, the first American Eagle Squadron came.

Early on, the NAAFI sent an elderly, retired Shakespearean actor to form a concert party for the Station, and he wanted to call us "The Air Optimists", but I could plainly see we should be "The Kirton Raisers", and that's what we officially became. When my standoff coincided with a concert, I was able to take part in the sketches and sing. (I had been trained in my teens, and was a member of the London Amateur Stage before I joined up. A story goes with that, pertaining to my joining up, that I won't bother you with now).

The NAAFI also held weekly Saturday dances in a long oblong hall, the tiled-floor liberally sprinkled with French chalk, with the orchestra on a platform at one end. It was a treat to be on standoff on a Saturday, and a tall young Army Corporal often used to dance with me, and we did a mean tango, but he always wore khaki plimsolls. To you young'uns, plimsolls were gym shoes. Perhaps they still are, or is everything Reeboks etc these days? Another treat on a standoff was to go to the Salvation Army tent for their special, which was a big pile of freshly fried, thin crispy chips, topped by a poached, fresh farm egg, dabbled with ketchup. Delicious!!! Now Kirton had been built on open land which was dotted with clods of Esparto (?) grass. This grass grew in clumps of many thinly rolled stems about 5 inches long, with the flat coarse grass blades emerging and hanging down to the ground. The clods were all over the open ground. The Salvation Army had a huge tent erected on this ground, the kitchen and living quarters at one end, a table tennis table at the other, where we played ping pong, stumbling over those clods. (That ping pong playing comes into a post-war story when I was in Brussels with BRAREA IS9). The kitchen end of the tent was generally filled with

blue smoke from the frying, as there was no outlet. The young couple in charge were newly-weds. He was tall and thin, and had alopecia, poor soul, which left bald patches all over his head. She was a beautiful wee Scots lassie, with smoky gray eyes, dark eyebrows, long dark lashes, and thick, wavy mid-blonde hair, which escaped into tendrils, framing her small face. One day we found her in tears. The beastly earwigs had invaded her trunk and eaten holes in all her white, crepe-de-chine trousseau pretty things. Those wretched earwigs had a season, when they were into everything. Our towels and facecloths hung on pegs, and we had to shake them out each time we used them, because the earwigs hid in the damp folds. Bags, shoes, everything had to be inspected, and once, a disgusting thing happened to me. I was undressing after duty, and had rolled down the right gray lisle stocking with its miserable thick seams, and there, on the top of my instep, was the crushed body of an earwig!!! It must have been in the stocking when I put it on, and I had crushed it when I tied the shoelaces. Ugh!

Some time before the Eagles arrived we had an "incident". "A" watch was on the morning shift, 8am to 1pm, with Sqn Ldr Shipwright (known as 'Shippers') as Controller. Around mid-morning, the Look-out came on the air, saying very calmly, "One Heinkel approaching the 'drome, Sir, going south". Shippers immediately scrambled 3 Spits, but there was a lone Hurricane already airborne, listening to the vectors, and we suddenly heard him yell, "Tally-ho!" He got in a few bursts, apparently with no effect, the Heinkel kept going south. A little later on, tho', news came that it had gone down in the sea, still in our sector, and the Hurry pilot was given the credit. He may have been Polish; he was on a training flight.

The Kirton Raisers were giving a concert that night, and being on standoff, I was going to be in it. That afternoon, I wrote simple lyrics about the incident, to the tune of "Lover Come Back To Me", (from a Jeannette MacDonald film). Here it is:-

The sky was blue, and way on high, a Heinkel flew up in the sky,
And way back Hitler started saying, "Heinkel come back to me-ee".
It came at last o'er Kirton's 'drome, and flew right past on its way home,
And way back Hitler kept on neighing, "Heinkel come back to me-ee".
When the Look-out on the Tannoy told us of this plane,
Station Defence was so excited. Shippers sent up all his Spitfires and a Hurricane,
Who yelled, "One enemy is sighted".
The clouds were low, the sky was gray, that ruddy plane, it got away,
But in the sea it fell, leaving Hitler vainly praying, "Heinkel come back to me".

It went over big that night.

As I remember it, the first American Eagle Squadron arrived in England amid much hype. They were accompanied by Charles Sweeney, Jr, who, with his twin brother Robert, organised the 3 squadrons, one after the other, in the US. Their father, millionaire Charles Sweeney, Sr, had organised the Lafayette Escadrille in France, when America came into WW 1. The first squadron came to Kirton in the late autumn of '40, and at a NAAFI dance one Saturday, Sqn/Ldr MacKenzie, our avuncular Admin Officer, introduced "A" watch to them. I only remember Red Tobin, a tall, square-shouldered Texan, with bright blue eyes and red hair; --- Shorty?, a much smaller man with a limp, who seemed to be the Squadron mascot; --- Indian Jim, a tall slim man from Oklahoma with a shock of straight black hair; --- and Byron (Jack) Kennerly, a tall, athletic Californian, with a tanned face, red showing on his cheeks under the tan, and black wavy hair. They were exotic figures to us, from all over the States, former airmail pilots, barnstormers, stunt men and the like, or so we were told. The wonder was that they had left their own peaceful country to fight for Britain in the RAF. It is only in the last 10 years, that in a book by an American military historian, I discovered it is against the law in America to fight for any other country, and that a number of the young men never reached England --- they were torpedoed on the way over.

The Eagles attended several concerts, then asked us to do a special one, with them taking part, for a future broadcast to the States. My contribution was the Heinkel song. Their contribution was their own lyrics set to the US Navy tune, "Anchors Aweigh", and they sang it with much gusto. Here it is:-

The Eagles are here, my boys, the Eagles are here.
Thanks to ole (sic) Charlie Sweeney, the big boys and little Teeny.
The Eagles are here my boys, have no more fears.
We'll kick the Axis right down the middle,
So let us give three long and rousing cheers --- Rah - Rah - Rah.
(my note -- "Shorty" didn't rhyme with Sweeney. I never knew his surname)

A few days later, it was broadcast to the States at 2 in the morning, our time, and the Kirton Raisers were given permission to stay up and listen to it. (I never got to know what America thought of the Heinkel song).

We met the Eagles who were interested in dancing, at the weekly NAAFI dances, and after a while, one of them and I got to be partners, altho' my Army Corporal in the plimsoles always came to do the tangos. In January 1941, a wonderful thing happened. A mess was opened up, exclusively for the WAAF, in a Quonset hut near our billets!!! "A" watch was the envy of all the WAAF, because we were on standoff the night of the Gala Opening and Dance. Now some time before, the RAF had recruited the whole orchestra of Romanoff's Restaurant in London, and they had been posted to Kirton and played for all the dances and entertainment. It was a combo of 7 musicians, if I remember rightly. Piano and drums, 2 saxophones, 1 guitar, and 2 violins. The leader,

Tony, was the lead violin. He was of Italian descent, about 5ft 6inches in height, and had straight black hair, pink-rimmed eyelids, and a Buddha stomach, over the top of which he obviously buckled his belt. It caused the front hems of his trousers to ride up, revealing his bootlaces almost to the tops of his boots. Added to which, he often swept high his violin when playing, and then we saw the tops of his pale gray socks! (He played in front of the rest of the combo).

Just 5 of the combo played for the Gala Opening, there wasn't all that much room. The hut was downright cosy. The lights were low, and tables for four people were set all around, sporting real tablecloths and a candle in the centre of each one, There was a small dance floor and they had put decorations everywhere. The dinner was good, too, and altho' I don't remember what it was exactly I know it was quite different from the everyday stuff. Kirton really did us proud that night! Later, when the combo was taking a break, leaving just Tommy, the pianist, at the piano playing softly, my Eagle partner, whom I had invited to the festivities, and I were standing at the end of the piano, talking. I was a drinking a gin and lime, (Roses, of course --- THE female drink of the time), when the partner suddenly said something out of the blue, which shook me. Quite casually he said, "By the way, my roommate is going on leave for the next 4 days, how about coming over and spending them with me?" Startled, my first reaction was anger, because I had told him all about my fiancé in Egypt, and he was well aware of my engagement ring. Then, suddenly, a scenario flashed across my eyes. The 4 watch's usual leave was arranged by sending 3 or 4 people at a time, from each watch. Then some idiot from Admin had the bright idea of sending a whole watch on leave, as an experiment. That played havoc with our duty shifts. Normally we worked from 1pm to 6pm; 6pm to midnight; midnight to 8am; and 8am to 1pm, spread over 3 days. Now the shifts were made much shorter, and became 1pm to 5pm; 5pm to 8pm; 8pm to midnight; midnight to 4 am; 4am to 8am; leaving the morning shift, 8am to 1pm, the only one unchanged, with the usual 24hr standoff unaltered, thank goodness. Now, over the 3 duty days, we always seemed to be going to bed or getting up. I told you that I shared the top front bedroom of our little red brick house, with our Corporal and my friend, Kitch. At 3 o'clock in the morning, a Corporal from the watch on duty used to burst into our bedroom, yelling "Wakey, Wakey!!!", and shine a large torch into each of our faces, the reflected light gleaming on a halo of wretched gold curls and the rims of his gold eyeglasses. We hated him. Well ----- my flash of scenario saw me leaving him a note to wake me as usual --- me climbing out of our kitchen window --- me stumbling over those huge clods of grass, across to the Officers' quarters (quite a distance) --- then me looking for an open window. Seeing all this in my mind's eye, I laughed and said, "And what are you going to do when I have to get up at 3am to go on duty". He threw his cigarette on the floor, ground it out, and said bitterly, "You English girls, you're as cold and passionless as the climate you're brought up in". With that, he stalked out. It was 2 weeks before I saw him again at a NAAFI dance, and he told me how Americans live. You meet a girl at a party, and if there's an attraction, it becomes a matter of 'Your place or mine'. If the attraction is still there the next morning, you continue that way until it dies, then you go on to the next girl. If, tho', the first night is not a success, you say in the morning, "Thanks, but no thanks", and you go on your way. I was pretty naive at that time, and for many years believed him. I was told later, that he became the black sheep of the squadron, and was sent home in disgrace, and made lots of money there, lecturing all over his state as an Eagle war hero.

Earlier on I told you about the Heinkel incident. That was tragically repeated in reverse later on. I wasn't on duty at the time, when the news came to us that Shorty had been airborne on a training flight, and a lone German plane had come out of the clouds, shot him down into the sea, and disappeared fast. The whole station mourned him. As I said before, he had seemed to be the Squadron mascot.

At first, as nothing happened during the midnight shift, half the watch manned the table, and the other half went to an adjoining room to sleep or doze until 4am, when we changed over. The Corporal brought along a large square biscuit tin full of sandwiches to sustain both halves until breakfast at 8.30am. When the lid was removed, invariably the smell that arose was of pilchards in tomato sauce. The smell and the fishy, gloppy sandwiches were quite nauseating at 4 in the morning.

Next is something I'll always remember. One 24 hour standoff, Kitch and I decided to hitchhike to Lincoln and stay the night. A lorry started us out on the journey westward, and another one dropped us off at a crossroads on the Watling Street (?), or the Great North Road (?). I can't recall the name of the old Roman Road that ran straight down the middle of Lincolnshire to Lincoln and points south. The land being flat, we could see in all directions, and no traffic was moving, north or south. We'd been waiting for at least 15 minutes and getting anxious, when something appeared in the north, moving rapidly. It turned out to be a large silver-green car driven by an RAF sergeant, who stopped for us. We climbed in to a wide front seat, beautifully upholstered, easily seating all 3 of us. He said it was an American car, a Lincoln Zephyr, and he was driving down to London. We fairly flew down to Lincoln, and altho' I don't remember what Kitch and I did there or how we got back, that car and name has stayed with me all this time.

At some time, probably in Spring of '41, I can't exactly pinpoint when, the Operations personnel were transferred off campus to the Emergency Ops Room, deep underground in the middle of the woods 6 miles away. The WAAF were billeted at Scawby Grove, a large stone mansion, covered in pyracanthus, standing in a large expanse of grounds, outside the village of Scawby, near Brigg. We went by RAF bus to the Ops Room, down a narrow winding road thru' the woods, which passed over a little humpback bridge over a stream. We discovered that if you sat on the back seat of the bus when going over the bridge, you left the seat and rose in the air, giving quite a tummy thrill. There was always competition for the backseat, until one day, the driver went too fast, and the seated WAAF rose too high and sharply in the air and hit their foreheads on the metal luggage rack that began over the side seats. Quite a bit of damage done, and from thenceforth the back seat was taboo.

Scawby Grove had a large, square, lovely light oak entrance hall, with a sweeping oak staircase up to the 2nd floor, which we were forbidden to use, and a really lovely Adams fireplace on the back wall. There were 3 floors and we used the kitchen stairs at the back to get to the bathrooms. "A" watch was billeted in the drawing room, a high, embossed-ceilinged room, with a wide rectangular bay window, and also a grand fireplace. At school, we had IPP, and I had a German girl from Speyer-am-Rhein, a French girl from Orly, and 2 American girls, one from Massachusetts, the other from Kentucky. These two had lifestyles so utterly unlike, they may well have been from separate countries. As a Christmas present, Laura, from Mass, had given me a year's subscription to the American magazine, "Good Housekeeping", and the coloured photos from the cooking section adorned the wall above my bed in a semicircle. Mouthwatering, but agonising-to-look-at photos of Thanksgiving turkeys and all the trimmings, Christmas prime-rib roast beef dinners and scrumptious pies, Easter ham, lamb and yam dinners, and every month a different beautifully coloured layout of some exotic dish for summer and winter. We all waited expectantly to see what would come each month, the semicircle growing larger as the year passed. It made a grand splash of colour on the wall and helped to cheer life. Coal was rationed, and no matter how bitter the weather, coal was not to be given out until October 15th. When that day came, we were on standoff, and we all gathered around the fireplace to eagerly build a fire. First came cleaning up the fireplace, which hadn't been used for some time, and it took an effort to get the flue opened. There was a set of large brass fire arms and a large iron grate, which we piled high with paper, lots of wood collected from all over, then the precious coal. It blazed merrily for a short while, then suddenly the whole room filled with choking smoke that rose to the high ceiling. Standing up, we could hardly see each other, and then came the daunting task of dismantling the fire. Thank goodness there was a large hearth, and with the tongs and poker, we were able to pull off most of the coal onto the hearth. We had opened the windows and door to let out the smoke, and someone in authority came in, having heard the commotion going on. She knew what had happened and told us what to do. It appears that when storks build a nest, they choose a chimney and proceed to drop sticks down it until it fills up to the top, then they build the nest on this sturdy foundation. A stork had chosen our chimney, and we unbelievably spent the rest of the day hauling down 3 floors' worth of large twigs and sticks! They seemed never to end. At least we had plenty of kindling for the next attempt at making a fire.

In Scawby village, there was a small fish and chip shop. On standoff paydays, we had fish and chips for dinner. Often a line awaited us outside, and once inside, it took a while for our orders to cook. My favourite fish was called rock salmon, a round boneless fish, with a small round spine running down the centre, and narrow pliable long 'bones' coming from the spine at 2 inch intervals. I never saw it in its natural state, but it must have resembled a large eel. The flesh was pure white, delectable and whole, with no pesky bones to ruin the eating. During the winter, we found out that after a long wait in this palace of delight, we had to hang our overcoats on a clothesline outside all night to get rid of the fish-frying smell. Shortly after going to Scawby, I bought a hunter-green sit-up-and-beg-bicycle-with-a-basket in a shop in Brigg, and I biked many a happy mile thru' the surrounding countryside. When I left Kirton, I took the bike back to the Brigg shop, and they nicely bought it back!

We must have been dispersed to Emergency Ops and Scawby in the Spring of '41, because we weren't introduced to any of the members of the 2nd and 3rd Eagle Squadrons, and I can tell you nothing about them, except that over time they came in succession to be trained at Kirton.

In late summer, the Fleet Air Arm came to train on Hurricanes for the infamous Murmansk run. When Hitler broke his treaty with Stalin and started invading Russia, sweeping over vast amounts of territory in days, Britain and America started sending supplies to Russia. The Royal Navy escorted the convoys straight up the North Sea, into the Norwegian Sea, past the long coast of Norway, then turning east into the Barent Sea to the nearest Russian port, Murmansk. A horror run, past occupied Norway where the Luftwaffe joined the attack, along with the U-boats. We were told that old Hurricanes were attached to catapults fixed on the prows of Navy vessels, and, going around Norway, the pilots were catapulted off in the Hurricanes, protecting the convoys, flying until the petrol ran out, then they ditched into the freezing sea until a navy vessel could pick them up. An absolutely incredible, almost unbelievable feat and I don't know if it is true and common knowledge. (If it is wrong, I hope someone can tell me what really happened. If it is true --- "What heroes thou hast bred, oh England, my country"!!!)

I wasn't too thrilled about Scunthorpe being so near us. At night, you could see the glow of the fires of the steel mill, and I was always waiting for it to be bombed. When the Blitz started, the midnight shift became a nightmare. Hundreds of planes came from all directions. We plotted for hours, the table map covered in raid blocks, often running out of the metal blocks and having to use the old wooden ones as well. Sometimes there were so many planes we ran out of raid blocks altogether. We would be relieved, in turn, for 10 minutes to go up outside to get some fresh air. Remember, we were underground. Once outside, in the night sky, we could see the red glow of the cities being blitzed, with bright flare ups as the bombs dropped. We were on duty the night Hull was blitzed, across the Humber. Doncaster to the west was blitzed, and other cities I cannot name, and even from our quiet neck of the woods, we were surrounded by the evidence of war. How it was in London, and Coventry and Sheffield and Birmingham, I just cannot imagine. But we made it thru' and survived.

There are pleasanter memories. At Scawby, some Army types invited 4 of us to go to a pub way out in the country. It was a large place, with an adjacent game room containing a huge, beautiful green-baize-topped billiard table, with 6 sturdy, bulbous legs, indented in strips all the way down to the brass bound feet. The place was packed with people drinking and smoking, and after a while my eyes began to smart and tear. With the blackout curtains in front of the doors, and all the windows shut, the smoke had nowhere to go but hang around. It became unbearable, and the only escape I could find was under the billiard table. I'd been

sitting on the floor there for some time, bent over, when an Army doctor found me, and took me outside to his Army car. He drove for miles thru' the dark countryside, the windows down, and with the wind blowing in, my eyes gradually stopped tearing and returned almost to normal. A real lifesaver, that doctor.

There must have been an Army Unit near Scawby, with no connection to Kirton, because another time the Army types invited us to lunch at a country Inn. What delight awaited! We were served a thick gammon rasher, with a fried sunnyside-up country egg each side of the centre bone. We didn't know such food still existed. and it was such an unexpected mouth watering experience! I don't remember how or where we met these Army types, but they certainly knew the territory.

In the summer of '42, the USAAF arrived, causing quite a stir. At the same time, merely by coincidence, our Bourneville chocolate ration was delayed, and for some unknown reason, the airmen's sheets and pillowcases were taken for laundering, as usual, but they never came back, most unusual. Of course, immediately, the rumour swept around campus that it had all been given to the Yanks, which was quite wrong, because they brought with them everything they needed, and then some. It caused a 9 day wonder, tho'.

Access to Emergency Ops was down a long, long, sloping corridor, going down to the depths. Going on evening shift one day, we had started down the corridor, when an RAF sergeant came running up, telling us to go back because a bunch of visitors had just started up. The corridor wasn't wide enough for 2 bunches of people to pass each other. We waited at the top, and the visitors, dressed in black cloth raincoats and US Navy caps, finally came up. As they passed, we saw that one of them was Robert Montgomery, the famous Hollywood actor.

My last memory was a pleasant one - Halloween 1942. We were on standoff and had permission to give a party in the Grove's oak-panelled big square entrance hall. The outside walls were covered in pyracanthus, and this made topical and beautiful decorations for the mantelpiece over the lovely Adam's fireplace and around the sconces on the walls. We also made a few witches and black cats out of black painted Kraft board, and it all looked very festive. The cook came up with lots of pieces of sausages wrapped up in tasty strips of pastry, nicely baked, and also bunches of cheese straws. These, with local cider, made up the feast. We had invited the Army types, and with a gramophone and records, everybody danced and ate, and had a jolly good time. The party was a success and worth the effort.

We must have still been living in Scawby and working in Emergency Ops when I left Kirton, because I have a V-mail from my fiancé in Egypt addressed to the Grove, dated Sept 23rd '42. If the Ops personnel ever returned to campus, I cannot tell you. In December '42 I left to go on OCTU at Bowness-on-Windemere, and then begins the saga of Bletchley Park.

In Jan' 43, I finally went on OCTU to Bowness-on-Windemere. 17 of us passed, then all posted to a 2 week Intelligence course at Highgate. While there, we were interviewed by a bigwig from War Office and one from Air Ministry, to choose 6 WAAF for "a special hush-hush job they could tell us nothing about, but if we were chosen, to please say 'Yes' because the country needed us". I was one of the 6 chosen (I've never known why), and as fate had it, was the only one to go beyond the pale into Hut 3 B/P. Although I was a new girl on the block, they allowed me to sing in their clever original year-end reviews, and I sang in ensembles with Fl/Lt Brin Newton-John who became father of Olivia N-J. (I was a member of the London Amateur Stage before joining up). Hut 3 was Luftwaffe und Wehrmacht, and in that Top Secret holy-of-holies, a huge notice over our door said "TOP SECRET. KEEP OUT". At the end of the European war, we were all declared redundant, and Brin N-J was given the job of saying "Good-bye" to us. He told me I had been recommended for promotion, but I never saw it. Instead of leaving B/P, a Major from the Japanese Section requested I go to work there, and I was at B/P until the end of the Pacific war.

Stooged around doing odd jobs for a while, then Air Ministry called and asked if I'd like to go to Paris or Brussels. I was due to be demobbed in November '45, but was advised to sign on for another 6 months, and I had decided to make the RAF my career, because my fiancé, who was posted April '39 to no. 4 FTS in Ismailia, Egypt, had married a Queen Alexandra Nursing Sister there instead. Having "done" Paris at school, I chose Brussels, and worked for BRAREA (IS9) in the ex-Gestapo HQ on the Avenue Louise. After the war, the British and American governments set up HQ in France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, to try to repay the survivors of the Underground. Very interesting work. (BRAREA --- Bureau de Reserche de l'Aide Rendue aux Evaders Allies (without accents) --- "Research Office of Aid Given to Allied Evaders and Escapers"). Fate stepped in, and in Brussels I met and married an American officer, coming to New York City, on 8/8/46, just 64 years ago, and I've had little contact with the RAF until 2008, at the BofB Day ceremony here, hosted by the RCAF.