

**Memoirs of a WAAF**

Daphne Dangerfield / Sue Edwards

# **Memoirs of a WAAF**

From Gloucester and Cranwell,  
to Bradwell Bay 1942–1943

Recounted from the secret, newly-found  
diaries of Daphne Dangerfield  
and edited by Sue Edwards

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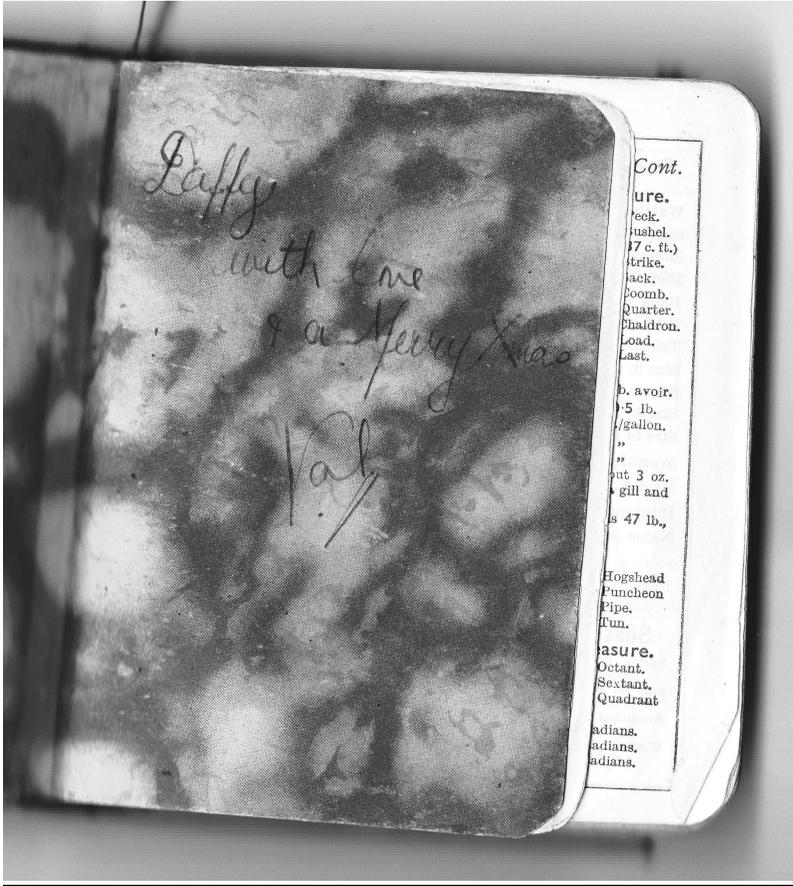
Daphne Dangerfield (1943), proudly wearing her WAAF uniform with the Canadian Wings and Sparks Badge on the right shoulder.

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*“Choose not your friends from outside show,  
Feathers float, but pearls lie low”*

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*This seems to be a favourite saying of Daffs as it appears a number of times throughout the diaries. It is understood to be a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Canadian or American proverb.*



Christmas message from Daff's sister Val.  
Inside cover of the diary

## Foreword

This book has taken a lot of time and effort to produce and of course there are several people I need to mention and thank.

My mum's first reaction when I suggested producing a book was "Do you think it's interesting enough?" I giggled and said "Of course I do". Having mentioned the idea to my brother Jim in Canada, whose reaction was "brilliant idea, why not, look at JK Rowling!"

"I don't think so" I thought. However I did think it was worth making it into a book, and started on the long road to typing it up, getting the photos sorted and doing loads of research, determined to finish it one day.

During the later stages my husband Phil also helped, not only by proof reading but carrying out some of the necessary research, making suggestions and finishing off the website. The more he got involved the more interested he became, and for that I have to thank him enormously. Without his input and support (supportive as he is with everything I do), I'm sure the whole project would not have been finished nearly so quickly, if at all!

Not forgetting my dad of course, who also played his part in the proof reading, and spelling is something he's always very hot on.

Of course I have to thank my mum for giving me the chance to do this 'project', as not only has it raised a fair amount of interest within my own business, but I have really enjoyed doing it, and I have learnt a lot from it too. Mum has also been very patient with me, answering lots of questions, some of which were not easy to answer as it's obviously a long time ago.

One thing I do find hard to believe is that mum was such a 'cheeky' young lady, making friends with all the men, in the nicest way possible of course! Hardly surprising I guess due to her looks, nature and Canadian accent. She had so many boyfriends I lost count.

So I write this not long before we go to print and sincerely hope, not just for my mums sake, that it is a success. I'm sure there will be a few tears in our eyes, both mum and me, when the finished book finally arrives.

Sue Edwards, November 2010

## Introduction



Over the years Daphne Dangerfield, known to her friends as Daff, has reminisced about her time spent in the WAAF from 1942 - 1946, some good times, some bad.

Daff and her husband Maurice are now in their 80's and last year sadly, due to increasing immobility, had to move from their lovely home in East Grinstead, where they had lived since 1960 and brought up their two children. During

the move to a flat only  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away, she was re-united with a number of photos, notes, diaries and sketches from her time served in the WAAF.

The diaries had become very tatty and almost unreadable in places. Realising that the only way to preserve the content while her memory was still good would be to put it all onto computer, she asked her daughter Sue to help. After reading some of the entries Sue suggested producing a book, as a lot of interesting and often funny details had been logged, including many names of friends and little pictures Daff had sketched during her free time. She still paints today.

After a lot of research the first edition of 'Memoirs of a WAAF' was born, relating the first 18 months of her service.

The diaries are quite a rare find, as during the war such information was considered highly confidential, so it had to be written very much in private. Towards the end of December 1943 she mentions, for the first time, about her note taking:

*"I'm writing about my life in the WAAF. It should be very interesting later on in life."*

Even Daff had forgotten about their existence until their house move, when they were discovered hidden in a drawer amongst a lot of photos.

Her notes show a real insight into what was expected of them, the way they were treated, the conditions tolerated, and how the girls, and their airmen friends passed the time when not on duty. She also tells of the numerous men she met, and went out with, every time a new Squadron (Sqn) arrived.

*Some of this story is told as it happened, on a daily basis. You can often 'hear' Daffs voice speaking as she relates her thoughts and feelings.*

Daff was born in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and lived there for about 9 years, before returning with her family to England, so her writing is influenced by Canadian words and phrases, which she still retains today, and her family and friends often laugh about it.

It all starts in the autumn of 1942 when Daphne decided to join up...

## Joining up

I joined the WAAF on September 18<sup>th</sup> 1942. I had only just started work three months previously, following a secretarial course. I was just a schoolgirl and I certainly acted like one - irresponsible, carefree and full of life. But I felt restless and ill at ease at my job as a receptionist at the Wembley Town Hall. I felt that an older woman would be more suitable to take my place, while I could be doing more useful jobs by helping the war effort instead.

I saw service women of every description in the streets every day, looking most important, and I felt very out of it. For several days I thought about it, secretly thinking what a grand life it must be, making it appear much more glamorous than it really was! I wrote to the Wrens because my brother, Hec, was an officer in the Navy, and I liked the uniform. But it was not to be:

“Sorry you’re not qualified enough!!!” was the answer.

Anyway, one lunch time I went home and resolved to tell Mother I wanted to join the WAAF. She naturally tried to persuade me to wait a year, as 18 year-old’s were not called up at that time, but no, I had made up my mind and nothing would stop me.

I filled in the necessary forms, sent them off, and a week later I was called up for a medical examination. I waited with ten other girls, to be examined and our particulars were taken. It was a strange but exciting ordeal. We stood talking in anticipation, wondering what was coming next! We were herded into separate cubicles, gave a sample, and then trotted into a big room where several doctors were waiting

for us. Eventually it was my turn and it only took ten minutes!! It certainly wasn't a stiff medical and if anyone had anything radically wrong with them, they wouldn't have known. Several of the girls would not have got in the WAAF if it had been a bit stiffer. Luckily I passed A1.

When we had dressed again, a WAAF gave us a form to fill in - another one! Just the usual red tape! We carefully took in every detail of her uniform and wondered whether we would look as nice as her. We were given our official number, mine being 2131416. After quite a bit of waiting, which I would get used to in time, we went in to see a WAAF officer, who gave us ration money and told us to report to Waterloo Station three days later with "small kit" i.e.: pants, vest, stockings, washing stuff etc.

I couldn't keep still for those three days! I handed in my resignation and said goodbye to all my colleagues at Wembley Town Hall. I'm sure that inwardly they envied me but I wondered whether I was jumping out of the frying pan into the fire! I must admit I had rather a sinking feeling when I said farewell to the folks at home, but I was excited too.

## Waterloo Station

At last the time had come and I was instructed to make my way to Gloucester, the first of many journeys. I arrived at the station in plenty of time. Several other girls were already there so I joined in chatting nervously. My Mother came up to London with me to see me off and while we were waiting I saw her chatting to one of her friends, who was also there with her daughter Margaret. Margaret (Marg) and I were to remain friends for the whole of the WAAF and even continued to see each other afterwards.

At 1030 that Monday morning we were finally herded together, just like a bunch of cattle, onto a train heading towards the reception centre at Gloucester.

## To Gloucester...

Transport was waiting at the station when we arrived and carried us off to the huge camp. Transport was usually a very bumpy truck ride. The vehicle was open on both sides and we had to stand for the whole journey.

Gloucester, when we arrived, looked a very bare, grim place. Some very new rookie looking WAAF were wandering round looking forlorn and homesick, but they waved to us and smiled a sickly grin with a look of pity on their faces; I came to understand why in time.

We were about to enter into a strange, new world, completely unaware of what was going to happen next.



Daff displays her number on arrival at Gloucester.

On arrival we piled out of the truck and were taken into a hut where we were given our “irons”, which consisted of a

knife, fork and spoon, which we learnt we had to keep hold of for each mealtime.

Once we had received our bed sheets and hut number, we were marched off, or at least tried to, to the cook house. This was a bare affair with rows and rows of wooden benches and tables. We had a strange but filling meal consisting of corned beef, beetroot, baked potatoes and rice pudding. Certainly nothing like the meals we had at home.

We were then distributed into different huts and what cold places these were. One's breath could be seen and even piling on our Great Coats didn't help. One's feet could not be straightened out for the cold and I was in agony by morning. At least I managed to bag a bed third from the end, near the fire.

It was a huge wooden hut with thirty beds in it and two stoves, one either end. The beds were so close together there was no privacy to be had; there were literally only a couple of feet between each one.

We were a motley bunch of girls, supposedly ranging from 17 (bet they weren't!) to 40. There were girls who had been servants, clerks, mannequins, in fact every walk of life. We sorted ourselves into different groups. I made friends with a very sweet girl called Monica and together we would make our Gloucester days quite happy.

Once settled in we asked each other what we thought of our first few hours in the WAAF, but we couldn't really decide, it was too early to say. Some of the girls were already weeping and grumbling, but they hadn't given it a fair chance. Of course it was nothing like home, far from it. One was herded here and there, and treated just like a flock of sheep.

Lights, we were told, would go out at 10pm and that night I slept like a log.

The following morning we were rudely wakened at 6am by a bugle, a sound I hated all the time I was at Gloucester. We got out of bed, often with plenty of grumbling that it was so different to home, and followed what was to be our daily routine of traipsing over to breakfast with dawn just breaking. We had to wait in a queue that went right round the cookhouse and practically outside of it. By the time you got your breakfast you didn't feel like it!

After breakfast, which was always some non-descript meal, we had to wash our treasured irons in a trough filled with sterilised water which was constantly boiling, but I never thought it looked very hygienic.

Back to our billets we went, to stack our 'biscuits', which were 3 square, hair-filled mattresses, then fold our blankets and polish our bed space, which we were expected to do on a regular basis.

All this was supervised by the Corporal (Cpl) in charge and each hut had its own. They had a tough job indeed handling thousands of girls week in, week out, but for all this they were most kind and considerate.

Our first days at Gloucester were hectic ones for all concerned. FFI's and job interviews were held, FFI's meaning free from infection, and these occurred very frequently. Then we were taught how to march. Everything went quite smoothly, but there was a lot of hanging about.

My time at Gloucester was spent 'square bashing' (marching), and attending lectures of all kinds. However I missed quite a bit, as I caught laryngitis and was sent to the camp hospital to recover. Gloucester was such a damp place and we had to hang around in thin 'civvies' (civilian clothes)

for quite a few days before getting our uniform, and I just couldn't resist the cold.

By the time I was discharged from hospital we were given our uniforms. We were marched to a different hanger, where row after row of different clothing were stacked. We passed from one counter to another, collecting shoes, stockings, underwear etc, everything that was required was issued.

When we had collected all our kit, transport was waiting to cart us back to our billets. As soon as we returned we all dived into our uniforms, it was so exciting! All dressed up, we seemed completely new and different people, we were so smart and neat; at least some of us were!

In time we learnt also that pressing our clothes with a hot iron and a damp cloth made all the difference to ones uniform. Many hours too were spent polishing buttons. We were dying to go out and show off! We did a few hours later, but as there were so many other "blue bods" about we didn't feel strange.

*Service personnel were only allowed out of uniform whilst on home leave. RAF personnel were known as 'blue bods' because of the colour of the uniform. Although wearing a uniform around town seemed odd to a new recruit like Daff, it didn't feel that strange because so many other people were.*

One rule among many stated that we had to salute an officer – the lowest form of animal life! The first time I had to it was a wonder I didn't lift the wrong arm as we hadn't been shown.



Daphne at home posing in her new WAAF uniform

We were only at Gloucester for a month and that time passed very quickly. During that time we had all our vaccinations and after mine two girls had to practically carry me back to the billet I felt so awful. I lay on my bed and cried for some time. Later on half the girls in our hut were doing the same! It was only afterwards we saw the funny side of it.

One day one of the girls and I went to Cheltenham for a change. There were bags of Yanks there and I remember saluting one of them, thinking he was an Officer - never had I felt so silly.

The end of the month drew to a close and we had to assemble in a huge hanger to be told that our next posting would be to Cranwell for training in the signals section (Radio Telephone Operator, RTO). Cranwell, we learnt, was a huge place where training of all sorts took place.

When we left Gloucester in October 1942 it felt exciting leaving behind what seemed like a 'prison' to mix with the civilian population again.

We each lugged our heavy kit half way around London (it seemed like it anyway!) and found our way to Kings Cross Station. We had a couple of hours to wait there, so I went over to my sister Val's office in London to help pass the time away. She didn't recognise me as it was the first time she had seen me in uniform!

Finally we caught the 1600 train that afternoon. It was a pleasant journey due mostly to the fact that our compartment was full of sailors!

We arrived at Lincoln later that evening, where we had to change trains for Sleaford, where the usual transport was awaiting us. By that time we were all tired and hungry. The journey to the camp had seemed never ending.

## Cranwell

It was dark by the time we arrived, and we were eventually dropped off, by what I found out later was the East Camp guard room. We were shown our billets by some nasty looking Sergeant (Sgt) and we had to drag our kit bags to our beds. The billets here were super. They were evidently married quarters originally, consisting of two rooms upstairs, one big room downstairs and a kitchen etc. I was put in one of the rooms upstairs, with a girl called Madeline. We went round together all the time I was at Cranwell, she was good company.

Cranwell was a huge camp, holding at least a thousand personnel of all nationalities, men outnumbering the girls. We soon settled down to the rather hectic life here. The daily routine consisted of getting up at six in the morning, going to breakfast in the dark at 7am, and we had to be in class by 8am. Wherever we went we had to march to our respective classes.

I was in class 38 with about fifteen other girls; it was just like being at school. We had a timetable and changed over classrooms according to the subject. We had to learn all about electrical circuits and accumulators, which was taught to us by a Cpl Reynolds. Considering we were so dumb he was a very patient man. Then we had 'procedure', given to us by an elderly man – Cpl Grant, whose voice often made me feel sleepy!

After class was over, the leader marched us to lunch, where we would have to queue up, again. It was an indifferent sort of lunch, which we would have to dash through in time for afternoon class. We broke up at 1700 every day and had the rest of the evening to do as we

pleased, but Madeline and I usually stayed in and swotted, for at that time I couldn't dance, which was the usual evenings entertainment

Cranwell was a wonderful station for entertainment with something on every night. I went out with an RAF chap called Cpl Brooks, who sometimes took us for different subjects. He was a tall, fair chap with glasses, but he was nice and I often went to the flicks (cinema) with him.

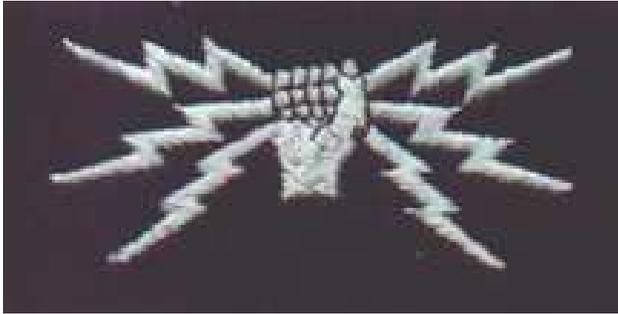
Time passed swiftly at this camp. We had the usual routine of inoculations, but we must have been getting used to it as this time it didn't make us feel so bad, just a very stiff arm. During our two months stay here, Madeline and I made a few trips to Lincoln, where we visited the impressive cathedral on one occasion.

During my time here I was put on two separate charges. One for taking bread and margarine out of the cookhouse, which was strictly forbidden, and the other for not having my hat on. I could never get used to the beastly thing, and more than once I was told off for not having it on. On one occasion I was going across a field to the decontamination hut to have a bath, when some upstart of a Cpl who had just got her tapes decided to nab me. The penalty for this was three days 'CB' (confined to barracks).

We had a series of exams to do at Cranwell, but I didn't feel I knew very much. The great day came when at last the exams were over and I learnt that I had passed only by the skin of my teeth. We were all hugely relieved when they were over and there was a farewell party, but I was feeling too ill to go. Those two months certainly took it out of me.

Shortly after receiving our exam results, we packed our kit for seven days leave and did we need them! I arrived home in a whirl of excitement with my new 'sparks' badge

on my arm. This was sewn on to my left arm to denote that I was a RTO (Radio Telephone Operator), and very proud of it I was too.



Embroidered 'sparks' badge denoting an RTO

The days passed all too quickly, and on the 6<sup>th</sup> day an official letter arrived saying that I was to be posted to Bradwell Bay, an operational station in Essex.

“How exciting” I thought, only to find out later that it would be a complete bore!

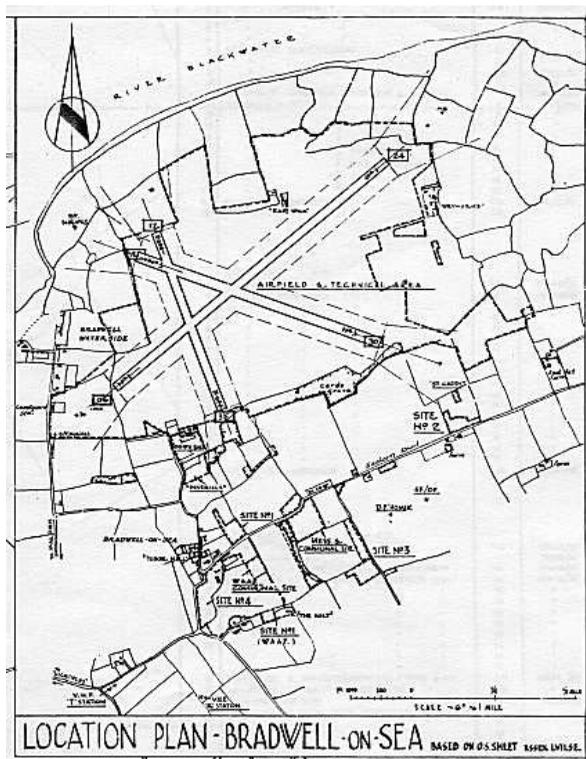
Following my seven days leave, it was time to head for my new posting at Bradwell Bay. When I arrived at Liverpool Street Station, to my delight I came across Marg again, who had also been at Gloucester and Cranwell.

It was great having company when travelling to a new station as it was a tiresome journey, with two changes along the way. We finally arrived at Southminster at 4pm and we hung about on the station for three hours waiting for transport to take us to Bradwell Bay, eight miles away. After ringing to check a couple of times it finally arrived at 7pm. By then it was dark and raining, with water and mud everywhere.

## The history of Bradwell-on-Sea

*Before I continue, I am grateful to Christer Landberg for permission to use the following information telling the history of Bradwell Bay.*

*Situated on the extreme, and somewhat desolate, east coast of Essex, this Second World War fighter station started out as a primitive landing ground in late 1936. It was used as a re-fuelling and re-arming point by fighter aircraft using the air to ground firing ranges at close by Denghie Flats*



Bradwell Bay aerodrome. The runways can still be seen in aerial photographs

*During the early 1940s there was a growing need for more fighter stations to the east of London to improve the capitals air defences, especially airfields which had solid runways that were desirable for larger twin-engined fighters envisaged.*

*To fulfil the above requirement work commenced to further develop this site in March 1941. It was furnished with three hardcore and asphalt runways plus a perimeter track, around which were nearly 30 fighter pens cum dispersal points. One Bellman type steel hangar was erected, supplemented by a further twelve Blister types dispersed around the perimeter. Several building and Nissen hut sites were provided which could house nearly 2000 personnel.*

*On its completion in April 1942 the station was taken over by No.11 Group of Fighter Command, to act as an independent fighter base within the Hornchurch Sector. On the 15th of the month the first of many fighter squadrons to be based here over the next three and a half years arrived. This was a Canadian manned squadron (No.418) equipped with the twin-engine Boston aircraft that were painted all over in matt black.*

*This type of aircraft was of American origin and had a tricycle undercarriage so definitely needed Bradwell's hard runways. The main task for this squadron was not defensive but more offensive as they were employed chiefly on night intruder missions to airfields on the Continent. In August they were joined by a British squadron who had just converted from Boston's onto Mosquitoes, and they were similarly employed on attacking targets in France.*

*Due to its position near the English Channel, the airfield was constantly being used by aircraft in distress or short of fuel, especially bombers such as Lancaster's and Halifaxes, particularly before the special emergency landing runway was brought into use at Woodbridge.*

*In June 1943 squadrons equipped with Typhoons also operated alongside the Boston's and Mosquitoes as this was a very busy period for Bradwell when the softening up process was beginning to take place to France and Belgium, in readiness for the forthcoming Invasion of Europe.*



A Hawker Tempest at Bradwell Bay

*Numerous fighter squadrons came and went over the following year. By 1944 accent was on providing escorts for our daylight bombing raids to the Continent, or taking part in daylight strafing missions against French railways etc.*

*The Boston's had departed in late 1943 and the most prominent aircraft operating from the station by then were Spitfires. There was however still the odd Mosquito or Beaufighter squadron in attendance for night fighter defence duties because London was still being blitzed at night. Also present in the latter half of 1944 were squadrons operating with Tempests that were attempting to bring down pilot-less flying bombs on their way to the capital.*

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## Bradwell Bay

On arrival we weren't impressed with Bradwell Bay. There were also several other new RTO's and we all felt very 'cheesed off!'

A Cpl took us to a Nissen Hut, which on this camp was a semi-circular building made of corrugated steel and held about 25 girls. The five girls already in the hut didn't give us a very hearty welcome, in fact they didn't pay us the slightest bit of attention, so after sitting on our beds 'binding' (moaning) we went to sleep.

By the morning our impressions of our new station were no better. I had only been in operation a couple of months before we arrived. There were only about a hundred WAAF compared to three times this number of men!

A LACW (Leading Aircraft Woman) called Bobby who was in charge, told us our duty rotas. It was Christmas week and she saw to it that we were all on duty! "Duty" was up in the Control Tower four minutes bike ride away.

The Control Tower was a two-storey stone building, half way down the runway and to one side, so that it had a clear view of aircraft taking off and landing.

Two of us worked in a little room with a small window in it, which looked into the control room itself. This room was called 'cabins', and was where all the equipment was housed. Our "duty" was to sit there from 0800 to 1300 with headphones on, logging down everything that was said by the pilots. Sometimes we were given the opportunity to reply to them saying "roger" (okay) to land or take off etc.

The cabins were supposed to be out of bounds to all other personnel. My first night duty came as a bit of a shock! From midnight to eight in the morning we sat there

feeling so sleepy that I had to use all my willpower not to fall asleep, which was considered a great offence during the war. Hour after hour the kites (aircraft) came back from their operations over Germany and their pilots would contact flying control by using the call sign "Gangplank" to ask for permission to land. Of course there were anxious times when aircraft were late returning and sorrow when they were known to be missing.

Many of the pilots would come to the control tower to discuss the weather, wind directions etc. Sometimes they would look through the window at us and maybe come in and have a chat. I was on watch with a girl called Betty at that time. She was my best pal. The following year she was posted elsewhere.

We had a super Christmas that year. We were treated to a dinner which came up to the standards of a home-cooked one and was served by the officers. Everything was done for us. There was bags of beer and entertainment, and this being the first drink I'd ever had, I was naturally pretty squiffy (drunk) but I soon became accustomed to it.

Together Betty and I would go wild, doing all the mad things under the sun!

Squadrons with different aircraft came and went. The girls made dates with the blokes and broke them again as if they had done it all their lives.

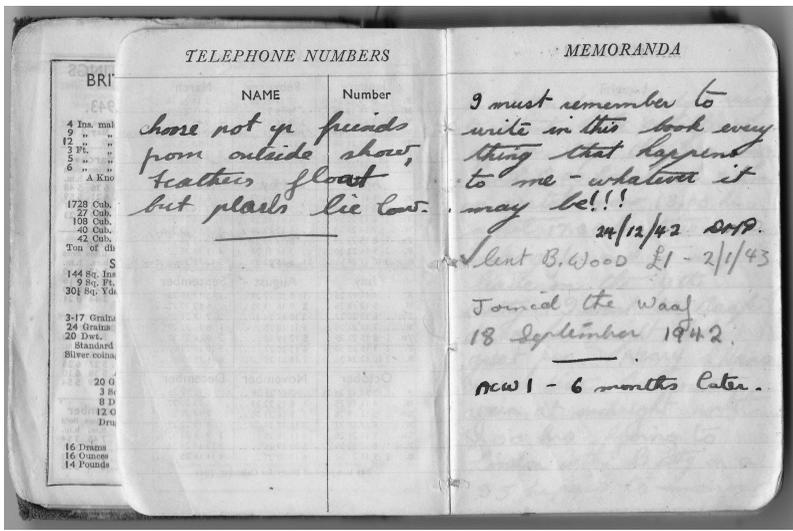
Yes, I certainly pulled my socks up and things shook me considerably. Girls were getting discharged from the WAAF, one after another for having babies – unmarried of course! They seemed to run wild, losing all sense of responsibility.

Anyway, many an evening a crowd of us would go down to the 'Green Man', have a couple of drinks and see

who we could have some fun with; we always found it! We looked forward to the dances which were held each week. We always had our eye on a bloke and more often than not we'd get hold of one!

A little note in the diary on Christmas Eve 1942 says: "I must remember to write in this book everything that happens to me – whatever it may be".

Thank goodness she did as now, over 60 years later, the stories are rapidly becoming lost to future generations.



Daff's note on Christmas Eve 1942

## January 1943

The beginning of the month was windy and wet. "What a rotten way to start the New Year" I thought.

On New Years' Day I slept in until midday, as I often did, not that sleeping was easy with so much noise going on in the hut. My next watch was from 1300 hours until 1700 hours, and again from midnight 'til 0800 hours, so I tried to get some rest.

Betty and I took advantage of a 35 hour pass to go to London. We met up with a Canadian airman and he took us to a New Zealand club for drinks then to Lyons Corner House for supper. He's very nice and knows quite a few RTO's in our hut. Betty and I slept at a services club, which was beautifully clean, with twin beds and running water in the bedroom. We only just managed to catch transport back at 1345.

The next day we met Bill at Earls Court, then on to a flat owned by one of his friends. He treated us to a marvellous dinner of partridge, and then we stayed in all afternoon talking.

One lovely, bright, cold day was marred by the death of my friend Jennie's Canadian husband Johnny. His pilot, Peter, and two ATC (Air Training Corps) cadets were also killed in the crash. They were evidently banking at 1,000 feet and couldn't pull out.

Jennie and Johnny were only married six months previously. I couldn't believe he was dead, felt terribly fed up. She went home for 7 days and was later discharged as she was expecting his baby in the September.

On one of my days off duty I went to a clothing parade to get an issue of another pair of stockings and 2 pairs of

pants, after which Betty and I went to the flicks. I had arranged to go out with Bill and Betty later on, but Bill had to go on duty.

On duty on one occasion the observer and the pilot of a Beaufighter came up to the control. They had been forced to land here because of the weather. Bill, the observer, insisted on meeting us, so we did. Later on we decided to go to the local Green Man pub for a few drinks. Bill kissed me lord knows how many times but spoiled it by being a trifle uncouth!

At the beginning of January I had a weeks pass, which I had to collect the day before departure. I arrived in London at 1300 hours, after what seemed a very short but very cold journey. Once home everyone seemed pleased to see me! I spent the afternoon asleep on the sofa, wondering whether Bobby would be home today too, but I heard he was arriving the next evening.

Bobby's a nice chap that my brother Hec knew. Auntie Moggs (Mums sister) and her son Bill, were due to come over too, but couldn't as it was too foggy. Bobby didn't come either, so I did some sewing and read instead, keeping nice and comfy! Bobby did finally arrive at midnight however.

I went to the Town Hall the following morning and saw one of my old colleagues called Roy again – he was just the same. We met for dinner, and planned to meet again the following day.

Bobby came over again and spent all evening with us. He kissed me I don't know how many times, and said he has fallen! Boy oh boy what fun we girls had!!

My sister Val, and I (in uniform) went up to Baker Street in London to have our photos taken and she treated me to a pair of shoes and stockings. We met Mum and Pop (Dad)

there too and we all had lunch at Scotts, which was marvellous. Afterwards we went to see the play "Flare Path" which was very good indeed.

Another day Bobby and I had lunch at Dickens & Jones, and then we went to Harrods. Later we went to see "Quiet Weekend" at the cinema, which was excellent. We did have a lovely day on the whole and I thought Bobby was a swell guy.

All too soon it was time to return to Bradwell and Pop saw me off at Harrow. I talked to a nice army chap on the train which helped pass the time. I was looking forward to seeing Betty again.

On my many return journeys to Bradwell Bay I would visit a private house where a bunch of people (usually 7 or 8) would all be eating bacon and eggs. The couple who provided this were marvellous.

Back in the swing of things I had to go to church parade the following day. Betty and I went for a bike ride in the afternoon and that evening we went to the Sgt's Mess dance, which was great fun! Later that same evening I was up all night on duty from 23.00 hours, during which time I landed about 30 aircraft on the 'drome. There were so many enemy aircraft about I didn't get any rest. I heard there had been a raid over London that night too.

During my time in the WAAF I was allocated duty at 'Receivers' on several occasions. 'Receivers' was a little brick building in the middle of a field which held all the receiving equipment, which had to be kept in 'tune'. A bed was provided, but it was regularly covered in insects that would fall from the ceiling. Needless to say I didn't like being on duty in there. Apart from the 'bugs' it was a very dark, damp and lonely place, with only one person on duty at a

time. On one occasion I was sent to 'receivers' for two weeks. Betty and I did curse!

Another time the set went wrong and I nearly lost a kite. The Signals Officer rang me up asking to see me the following day, and stopped my 35-hour pass for a whole month. I thought it very unfair as I hadn't been doing the job very long. I was told that had the kite crashed, I would have been court-martialled. It was quite upsetting, but I had a letter from my friend Jack telling me not to worry about it – what a sweet thing!

One morning after a session in 'Receivers', I was standing-down as the visibility was nil. I went to the clothing parade in the afternoon with Betty and was on duty later. I did a lot of "logging" today of everything the pilots said. Meanwhile I got on with my knitting. The mist wasn't so bad that night. I was finally in bed by 0100 hours.

Jack was one of my boyfriends at Bradwell. We would go to the flicks and maybe go for a walk afterwards. He was the most decent guy I'd ever met, and said he was very fond of me. We kissed too! Boy oh boy what a dance we girls would lead them!!

On one occasion when I met Jack we went for a lovely walk and stopped briefly for a rest at a hay stack. I thought he was trustworthy, however several times when we'd fixed a date he didn't turn up, only to see him another time full of excuses. I saw him at one of the WAAF dances and we went for a walk afterwards. Evidently he doesn't really like socials etc and seems uncomfortable in the presence of a lot of people. It certainly explained his weird behaviour in the past.

As time went by Betty and I regularly went to dances in our Mess. Often I would dance with quite a few people, and gradually I seemed to be acquiring the art of dancing.

Towards the end of January the weather was horrid, terribly windy and rainy. I reported in sick with a cough and cold, but managed to get hold of some medicine.

## February 1943

I had a letter from Bobby and one from Monica, who seemed to be enjoying her time in the WAAF. They cheered me up as I still wasn't feeling very well.

February was turning out to be lovely and sunny and we all got issued with rubber boots. I tried to get a bike but there were none available.

Sometimes Mother would send me parcels to cheer me up with things like a tin of milk, cheese and a cake. All these were rationed during the war and hard to come by, so they were a real treat. She also sent photos of me in uniform. Aunty Kath (Mums other sister) would send parcels too and on one occasion she sent me a jumper, face towel, tissues and sweets.

One day a badly damaged bomber landed on the aerodrome and three of the crew were wounded. It was very busy on duty that evening too with lots of "logging". A bit later on another damaged bomber landed but no-one was wounded this time. It was all very exciting!

One of my friends, Hoppy (Hopkins) seemed an odd character, I couldn't make him out at all. For days on end there would be no sign of him, then suddenly he would turn up and we would go out. Sometimes for a bike ride to nearby Tillingham or go for a walk.

He said he was 33, but one night after a good discussion with the girls we discovered that he must be going on 48. And I wanted to be sure that he wasn't married, but I found out that in fact he was, so I'm not seeing him again. He only wants to go out when he feels like it. I don't understand him at all!

As I often did shift work at night time I was allowed quite a lot of leave. This time, after attending the CO's (Commanding Officers) parade one morning, I got ready and caught the transport at 1430, finally arriving at 1800 hours. It was good to be home again.

The following morning I stayed in bed until 1000, it was so lovely and cosy and in the afternoon Mum and I went to see Auntie Moggs. It was only a short leave this time though, and I had to catch the 0820 train back, which nearly didn't get out of Wickford it was so foggy. On my return to Bradwell I had to go straight back on watch, but nothing happened.

The following day I went for a drink with Betty and Marg. Hoppy was on a 48-hour pass, so I wouldn't be seeing him for a while. We all got slightly tight (tipsy!) that evening. I had five beers and four glasses of port. Enough for anyone I think! When we weren't on duty there was little to do, except go to the flicks or go to a pub (to find some talent) or maybe to the occasional dance.

I had my ACWI board today. Betty and I decided to go to the flicks and Hoppy was there but he didn't even smile at me!

Four of us went on one of our many bike rides one afternoon, it was absolutely marvellous. We picked some violets and had some pop at a shop. Going for a ride was one of the few ways to get away from it all. There was certainly no privacy in our hut.

It was nearing the end of February and I found out that I'd passed my exams with 64%, meaning that I was now an ACWI: astounding! Betty and I went to Maldon to see Ronald Coleman and Jean Arthur at the flicks later and finished the day with a late supper for once. I saw another

chap called Dicky today and waved to him. Hoppy was with him too but he didn't smile!

Oops, missed church parade again today. I can't think why they never count the heads! Bet and I went to the Kings Head later and got slightly squiffy! We had a marvellous time at the Mess and Dicky was there too. I had lots of dances with him and we sneaked off in the middle of it and sat in the dark in their rest room. Boy what a kisser he was!! He seemed pretty keen and really was a sweet chap.

We heard that our local the Green Man pub had some cosmetics in, so Betty and I cycled down and got a lipstick each. Things like this were strictly rationed and rare, so we were thrilled to get them.

## March 1943

I was bored stiff on morning watch today! I had a nap after dinner and collected my wrist watch later on, which I have been really missing.

The following day I had a tooth out at the dentist. He was a sweet man; luckily it didn't hurt at all. I went to the flicks later on with Betty to see "Young Mr Pitt", which was very good. Hoppy was there but he didn't see us.

I had another bad cold this month, so I spent the whole day in bed again. I didn't even get up for any meals. I did receive a parcel full of cake from Mum though, which made me feel better.

There was a lot of activity last night with lots of Huns (German aircraft) and loads of gun fire and bombs; all very noisy!

I dashed back from cabins in time to catch the 0945 bus for London and went to our usual sleeping place in Paddington. The following day we had a lovely lunch at the New Zealand Club, then took advantage of the lovely weather and went for a walk in St James's Park, where I saw Ralph Richardson and managed to get his autograph! When we returned to the New Zealand Club we met a rather nice Sgt/Pilot, who took us to the station. He wanted to write to me, so I gave him my address. What fun and games!

I was on duty from 2359 to 0800 hours the following night and what a busy one it was...

The flying Control Officer brought in several bombers that had been flying over Germany and almost ran out of petrol. The watch the following morning was very quiet however and that afternoon I had PT, which was outside, but at least we were allowed to wear slacks.

I heard that 418 squadron is going! Hoppy too. I hoped I would see him to say goodbye. They said the next lot on its way, 157, would be a yank squadron. They turned out to be a mixed crowd, but not too bad.

I answered lots of kites this afternoon, it was grand fun. I'm not on watch with Betty this time, but we're together next week.

Hoppy called for me at Control today and we made a date for 1930. We went for a walk then on to the flicks. He said he was sorry to be leaving. He's a really swell chap.

At 0730 one morning two Huns gunned our Control Tower. They came in from the sun so no-one could see them, but luckily nobody was hurt. We'd been on duty all night and were getting ready to depart. I happened to be looking out of the window at the time and clearly saw the pilots. If I had had a gun I could have shot them they were so low. They shot the place up and flew away.

The lookouts, which were usually manned by guns, were silent at that time of the morning as they were not expecting any trouble. The aerodrome was quiet as everyone was asleep, so luckily no-one was hurt. The CO's parade usually took place outside the Control Tower, and if it had been on that morning a lot of harm could have been done. Five minutes later and we would have been on our bikes going off duty.

Hoppy is supposed to be flying off this afternoon, but it's all rather uncertain. He went out on "ops" last night, but returned an hour overdue. I tried calling him on channel A and felt awful as I was sure he'd "had it", but I later heard that he'd had engine trouble but managed to land ok. I was hoping to see him again before he left.

I heard that there had been more bombing today. They hit a factory and some shops at North Wembley, causing a big fire. Hec and Pam, his wife, stood outside watching. Evidently it was like loads of fireworks going off and for at least an hour.

The weather for the next few days was lovely, so I took advantage (as I often did) and went for a cycle ride. It was nice and flat at Bradwell so cycling was easy and the countryside was quite nice. I was back on duty again later and it was busy.

Couldn't be bothered to go to church parade today. Didn't even care if I was put on charge! On duty this evening I answered Hoppy and a few other kites. I heard that 'B' Flight was going to Ford (in Sussex) and they swept over control before they went. 'A' flight were also off tomorrow. Hoppy is flying tonight, which means I won't see him, worse luck!

Another marvellous day today and we all decided to go to Control to see the boys off. We climbed up onto the roof and waved them off, but I didn't see Hoppy again to say goodbye. I did miss him after he left. I wondered if he would write.

A nice-looking new squadron arrived today. Betty and I went to the Naafi dance which was jolly good, and I met a nice Canadian Officer called Ted. He walked me home and kissed me goodnight, several times!

Three of our boys came back this afternoon for a visit. I answered a lot of new kites on duty this evening. These Mosquitoes aren't nearly as nice as the Boston's.

I left the cabins at 0600 this morning on another 24-hour pass, finally reaching home at 1030. Mother and I went up to the town in the afternoon to do some shopping, then we met

Pop and had some tea. It had been a long day so I went to bed early. It was lovely to be home again though, with good food and comfort.

The following day Mother came up to Liverpool Street with me to see me off on the train back again. When we got to Southminster there was no transport or bus for us, but luckily I managed to hop on an open lorry, which was on its way to Bradwell which was rather fun.

Hoppy popped in for an hour this afternoon. Said he doesn't like Ford a bit. "...just because I'm not there I bet!" He says he's not on "ops" any more; he's a Ferry Pilot instead.

On one of our nights out Marg and I went on the booze and got tight as anything! On our way home from the pub we giggled our way back to the billet through the local cemetery, where I laid down on one of the tombstones, with not a care in the world. God knows why! Did we have the time of our lives!



Marg, a good friend throughout the WAAF days

I said I would ring Sgt Harding after 1700 tomorrow. He's from 'A' Flight and we met him at the Sgt's Mess dance. He's an English chap and very nice indeed! One evening Marg and I got as tight as anything and he tried to help me pull myself together. It's a bit difficult trying to get to know all the guys from 157, but still...

Had FFI this afternoon. Neither Marg nor I were feeling too good after yesterday's booze-up! I'm not doing that again for a while!!

Back on duty the following day I answered a lot of kites and had great fun. Marg, Hettie and I went to Naafi dance later. There weren't many there but we had a great time anyway. 'Snow White' and Harry danced with me all evening.

The next day I stayed in bed until 1815 then went to Ralph Readers' "Gang Show" with Betty and Judy which was jolly good, the best we have been to for a long time.

I know it sounds silly but I'm dying for a letter from Hoppy – I miss him like anything, but wonder if he ever thinks of me? He is the first guy I could really fall for – I don't know why I'm sure! I guess I'll get over it!

My friend Eric rang up just before I was going off duty today and we made a date for 2000 hours. We went for a walk and had a great discussion. He's a swell guy and not at all mushy! Apparently he is quite attached to a girl, but it's great to be just friends with a boy. Later, on duty I slept quite a lot as nothing was happening.

I had to relieve Rene this evening so she could go to the WAAF dance. She said she would relieve me the following night, so Marg and I could go to the Sgt's Mess dance.

I had a quarrel with my friend Betty the following day. I think she's cross because Marg and I are going out while she's on duty, although we weren't on the same watch.

I enjoyed fried egg and bacon for breakfast this morning. This was a special meal, only offered to those with more important jobs and covering night duty. Another lovely day followed, but it clouded up later on. Rene relieved me at 2000.

I heard that the Sgt's Mess dance was off as it was invitation only, so I ended up going to bed early instead. I had a bit of a headache anyway.

Had a dentist appointment today at 1530 and it hurt! Marg, Betty and I decided to go for a bike ride later which was marvellous.

I heard a rumour that Harry has fallen in love with me! We will see!

Marg and I went to the flicks and I had a nap afterwards until it was time for duty, when I brought in two damaged bombers. I was still tired though and not feeling so good. So the following day I had a long lie in 'til 1900, then I had to do a shift in Receivers. There was a dance on later but I still didn't feel like it. I heard that Eric had been posted, which was rather a pity as he was rather sweet.

Hoppy and two other kites landed here this morning. I said hello to him and we had a wee chat through the window. It was good to see him again, but nothing much else happened. The weather was too bad for Hoppy to take off again, it was so windy.

## April 1943

**April 1st** - It's the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the RAF today!

Hoppy came to see me on duty and say goodbye, poking his head through the window of Control again.

The next day I had to go on parade in the pouring rain and stand there while listening to a CO's speech about the RAF. At lunch time we were waited on by the officers and had quite a nice meal, followed by a dance in evening, but it was too crowded for me.

The following day after a long lie-in, I had to get up for our usual pay parade. I picked up my 48-hour pass, had tea, and then skipped off, ready to catch the workmen's bus to Wickford for my two days off. I shouldn't really have gone until tomorrow dinner time, but someone was doing my duty for me. I had to be back by Monday.

What a gorgeous day for my return home, so I went shopping to Harrow. Bobby (who's just home for the day) and Evelyn (home for Easter) came round in the morning and we had a wee chat. Val and I decided to go to the flicks later on. The following day Val and I went to see grandpa and he gave me 5/- . We sat in the garden and I got loads of freckles! Oh it's lovely to be home.

Mum came shopping with me today, then we sat in the garden again in the afternoon, it was delightful. Mum came back up to London with me the same evening, where we met Pop and I caught the 0800 train back. I did feel better for my holiday.

Luckily I wasn't on duty today, so Betty and I went for a bike ride as it was another lovely day. We went primrose picking in the afternoon followed by duty at 1730, but

nothing exciting happened, so I wrote another letter home. There were no restrictions on letters so we wrote often and it did help pass the time.

I had a dentist appointment this afternoon – ouch it hurt! To make up for it we all went to a dance this evening in the Naafi and had a smashing time. Two boys in the band wanted to take me home! I danced practically all evening with a Canadian officer who was terribly sweet, but he said he was being posted tomorrow, worst luck.

Hoppy was away on ten-days leave and I did miss him. The following day as nothing was happening on either watch I wrote to him, but I wasn't sure he would answer.

My friend Terry just heard that her fiancé Don was missing. She's terribly fed up as they had only been engaged for three months.

Went to the Cricketers for a drink this evening with Betty, Kath and Marg, then on to the Sgt's Mess but there was hardly anyone there, so we danced with each other to gramophone records. It was nothing like Sqn 418 at all, I do miss them. We finally left at 2350, as Betty had to go on duty.

The following day was most heavenly – I 'answered' kites all afternoon. I saw Reg when we were coming off duty and he said we would see him at the dance later, which we did. I danced practically all evening with Harry and had a nice time. Harry and I left at 2350 as he had to go on duty. I rode on his cross bar to the end of our road, then said "good night" – makes a change!

I stayed in bed all day the next day, and finally got up about 2000 to phone Mum.

Several Huns flew over last night and our fighters went up and intercepted them. I heard some bombs drop in the distance, and lots dropped closer and there was bags of

machine gun fire. One of our boys shot 2 down, “good show” I thought.

Nothing happened on morning watch today. I slept on ‘biscuits’ outside in lovely hot sun and got thousands of freckles. I skipped pay parade (again!) and on duty later I answered quite a few kites, otherwise it was quiet.

Tonight was ‘Domestic evening’ when we all had to stay in. I helped polish the WAAF Mess floor and had a short nap before night duty and was awake all night. The next day was a most marvellous day and I took my biscuits and blankets outside, where it was lovely and quiet, and slept out there all day. I got thousands of freckles and very red – needed no rouge whatsoever! Later on we all went to the WAAF dance, but it was very quiet and all the girls laughed at my face.

It was egg and sausage for breakfast again and the start of another lovely day, so I sunbathed, but my face burns easily – we sure do suffer to be beautiful! Nothing happened later that day on night watch.

A rainy day today for a change and nothing happened on either watch. I went to another ENSA show with Marg, but it was awful! I managed to get a pass for tomorrow evening though.

I wished Hoppy would write as I missed him terribly and wondered if he ever thought about me like I did him? Maybe he had left Ford.

Once I was back home Mother and I sat reading by the fire all afternoon as it was a mucky day. The pictures weren’t on until late today so I decided not to bother going. The following day my sister Val and Pop were home, so Val and I went shopping in the morning, followed by a trip to the flicks. Bobby was at home when we came back. I had to be polite to him but that was about all! I saw him off at the gate

and he said he wanted to see me on Tuesday, but I wasn't bothered.

We managed to sit in the garden today for a bit, although it was rather chilly. Our old friends the Rosses came to dinner and tea and it was very nice to see them again, Sandy is a dear. I received a letter from Betty yesterday, so I wrote a reply today.

Moggs came to tea the following day and I read all afternoon and evening! Had a nice lazy time on the whole. I have enjoyed my leave – had a very quiet time, but I needed the rest and it was a nice change.

I went shopping for Mum this morning, then went to the flicks. I'm quite looking forward to going back tomorrow and attacking my work with new vigour!

The following day Bobby came round in the morning and asked me to go for a walk as it was a nice day and Mother asked him to stay for tea. He came up with me to Liverpool Station to see me off. I had an uneventful journey back to Bradwell and went on midnight watch on my return and stood down at 1430.

As the following day was so lovely I slept outside again and got a lovely lot of new freckles! However it clouded up at 1700 so I went in and back to bed, where I stayed all night, ready for watch the following day, but it turned out there was nothing doing on watch so I just sat and read, smoked, and made cocoa.



Daff relaxing in the sun in 1943

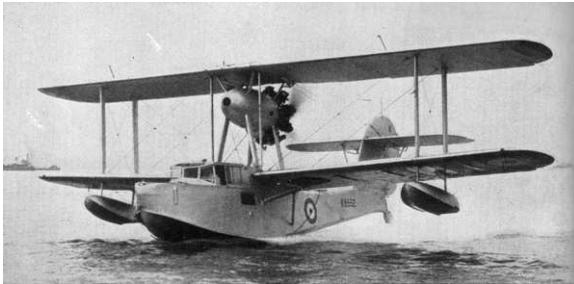
## May 1943

I answered a lot of kites this afternoon and later on we all went to the WAAF dance and I enjoyed myself very much. I stood down all night, it was a terrible night.

Quite a nice day today and I slept out in the sun again and got sunburned this time! Betty said Hoppy came up to Control for a while. We all went to the dance later, where I spent most of the evening with Harry. Betty's Cpl said I had Irish eyes!

I answered more kites today including 27 Sqn with a Canadian pilot - must get to know him!. Marg and I went to the flicks later and had a pretty easy night watch.

Another lie in today following my late night watch. We all went to our usual WAAF dance later and 'Snow White' was there. Denis, the singer, pestered the life out of me, wanted to go out with me – "no fear!" thought I.



Supermarine Walrus

A 'Supermarine Walrus' came in and landed this evening. It's the same kite that my brother Hec flies in. Gosh what a kite! It's a very old bi-plane, with an open cockpit, that's used to rescue casualties from the Channel.

## June 1943

Stayed in bed all day after being up all night on duty, it was raining on and off anyway. I wanted to get to know Nobby better. He was a funny looking kid with huge brown eyes and hair that needs cutting! His teeth weren't even and in fact he was as scruffy as hell, but terribly appealing!.

Went to an ENSA show with Kath the following day and saw Hoppy there. He made me sit beside him. When the show had finished an SWO (Station Warrant Officer) caught me without a hat on and put me on a charge!

I had to go in front of an officer, as did five other girls, and got 1-day 'CB', having to report every hour to do jankers (punishment) of shelling peas! Hoppy was as mad as I was. The SWO was just waiting to catch some of us without caps! Afterwards Hoppy and I went for a drink and he gave me a tin of sweets, trying to flannel me! He is sweet though!

Went to a dance in WAAF Mess this evening, having spent most of the day sunbathing, and had a lovely time. I met a Sgt/Pilot, friend of Hoppy's. He was sweet, and said he wanted to kiss me in the moonlight! Asked him whether I should go out with Hoppy and he replied that Hoppy is "perfectly straightforward" and it would be ok. So I will!

I went to flicks with girls today, followed by a drink at the Green Man. I met Nobby there and he asked me to join him for a ride. He is a marvellously cheery chap – always happy! We had a lovely time. He kisses nicely too!!

I was 20 minutes late for night duty and the WAAF officer tried to peg me for it, but failed!

The following day I heard that Nobby had been killed at 0103 this morning. Pete, his navigator was killed too. I heard that his kite was coming in to land when it blew up. Nobody

knows how or why. I cried all day, just couldn't help it, I missed him so. I just couldn't believe it. He knew he was going, he'd been so quiet these past few days. I think I knew it too somehow. He told me not to love him too much. He wanted to give me a white silk scarf, but he said he couldn't as it brought him luck – some luck!

Hoppy came to see me after his return from leave and said that Nobby's funeral would be later in the week. I asked if I could go but was told not to. He was to be buried at his home. I missed him like hell and thought I would never forget him.

I went on leave to Wales for a week with Mum and Pop. We stayed in a lovely hotel with marvellous scenery all round. It was set high up a hillside with a lovely garden and wizard views. I had been feeling low with a bad cold so I was sure the holiday would make me feel better. Half way through the week however both Mum and I were feeling unwell. We were sure it was due to something we ate, but luckily it didn't last very long.

I was still thinking about Nobby and missing him terribly, and probably will even more so when I return, bless him!

The time flew by and all too soon our week was over but I was not sorry to be going back to camp to get on with the old job. I spent some time cleaning my buttons ready for my return.

My folks shared part of my journey back to camp and got off at Watford. It was good to be back and everybody was pleased to see me. It did seem odd not to see Nobby about though.

## July 1943

July was a quiet month. After my return from holiday it was back to camp routine with trips to the local Cricketers pub. Betty and I went to another ENSA show, and it was a good one for once.

Hoppy introduced me to Gordon, another friend of his. He treated us to some drinks and I had the feeling that he had a crush on me! But I hadn't forgotten Nobby by any means.

One morning I had eggs and bacon again and had to go to church. I had a lump in my throat the whole day so I didn't enjoy it. I went to 'Homer' (a navigation hut on the aerodrome) later the same day and Harry was down there. We had a cup of tea and some toast together and we did enjoy ourselves. I think he's quite keen on me.

Another day Betty and I cycled to Tillingham, where I called Mum to tell her I was coming home on leave the next day. We stopped off at a pub where we met two nice blokes that Betty knew. We had a nice chat and they explained that they had seen Nobbys crash.

I decided to have my hair permed before my return to camp. It took 5 hours, but I was pleased with it. I arrived back at camp very late, met several girls I knew and everyone liked my hair.

I was nearly driven scatty on watch on one occasion. It was so quiet with not a soul to speak to. One gets tired of eating, sleeping, reading, and listening to the radio. I wished I was back in cabins really.

My friend Terry heard she had been posted to Ford, so we all went for drinks to the Green Man. We knew we would miss her. Betty and I got squiffy on 4 bitters!

I met up with Hetty one day and we went to 'Homer' to see Betty and Marg who were on duty there. We all had egg and chips for supper. Hetty was to be discharged soon as she was expecting a baby.

The following day Marg and I cycled down to Stone and had a lovely swim. I had duty later on but Marg joined me in the evening and we cooked some chips etc, which helped to pass the time beautifully.

That weekend I went to the Sgt's "do" which was a monthly event, with lots of dancing, eats and drinks. There were tons of visiting air crew and I met a very sweet Aussie pilot and he walked me back at the end of the evening. He said he would write to me. He was a damn nice chap.

I had another letter from Mother today and she said Hec was coming home for two weeks leave from tomorrow. I was wishing Nobby was here and thought if I met someone else like him I shall be lucky. He was the sweetest kid.

It was nearing the end of July. I had duty all morning and evening so I couldn't go out. It was the big "29" do on Saturday, where no soldiers were allowed so I thought it wouldn't be crowded.

Betty and I had a fortune telling affair with a bible and a key. If you asked it a question and it turned in reply, it was true. Evidently I was going to marry a rich artist, someone on this station. We would have no children and would not be happy at first!

Today was the day for the big "29" dance and it was wizard. There was free beer, gin and whisky for all WAAF's. Old Hoppy was there and I stayed with him for much of the evening. Prizes were being given away but I didn't win anything. Hoppy liked my curly hair too.



Daffs brother Hec in uniform

## August 1943

I was feeling bored with the same old routine day in, day out, but at least I had some leave to look forward to with decent food again. I thought I shouldn't be grumbling as things could have been worse. At least I felt as though I was helping the war a bit.

I went home today and saw Hec. He says he wants to go back to sea, restless kid! He did look smashing in his uniform though. He's a good looking lad. Everyone at home was OK, and it was nice to have decent food again as usual.

Back at camp a few days later I had to report for Duty Runner. I just had to book the girls in and out, and answer the telephone in the WAAF guard room.

On several occasions during August there was a big sweep on. Squadrons of Spits (Spitfires) would land here to refuel and quickly take off again. On one occasion they had shot down four jerries on their sweep over the other side.

The Sgt tried to get me out of bed this morning - needless to say I stayed. I spent a lot of my time in bed and it's a wonder I didn't get into trouble!

Another busy day today. Visited the flicks with Marg, Phyl and Katie followed by a drink later on when we talked to some Canadians. I saw Hoppy and we both cycled back. We stopped and sat in a field, looking at the lovely moon, and of course he kissed me. He is very sweet, but it's a pity he's married.

The following day, after sunbathing all day, we spent the night in after our Naafi supper. There were only four of us in the hut all night. Evidently everyone was cramming in their leave before the 24<sup>th</sup>, as this was the deadline before some

big “do” was happening. I gather the army had their leave cancelled too.

*Daff wasn't know it at the time of writing her diary, but a huge air-raid took place on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> August when over 700 allied aircraft were despatched to bomb Berlin.*

My friend Gwen went to the WAAF Officer to ask permission to put a show on. She asked me to do a tap dancing show as part of a chorus of eight girls, so now she's teaching me to tap, and she teaches awfully well. Sings marvellously well too. I just hope it comes off!

Had to go to the dentist today to have a tooth out and did it hurt, boy oh boy! We went to the flicks later and saw “Johnny Eager”, it was very good. I had to go on duty later but cooked up some chips, omelette and tomatoes: it was lovely!

The following evening six of us went to a dance in Tillingham and we had a great time. We had a late pass to midnight and I danced nearly all evening with Harry. I got on swell with him!

After a full day on duty Phyl and I went to the flicks and then on to the Sgt's Mess for a drink. I had four whiskies! Hoppy was there too, with his pilot John.

John took me for a ride in his car. First we went to Stone and had a lovely chat. He didn't even kiss me! He is a damn good type though. I thought I could really make something of him. I had to go on duty at 0100 but I hoped to see him again some time.

Hoppy was furious with John for taking me home the other night. I thought it was his fault for not paying much

attention to me in the Mess. Hoppy said he was a very bad type, but he certainly wasn't I thought.

I was wondering about my evening with John, whether he is keen on me or not? He was looking at me a lot that evening and when we went for a drive he put his arm around me, but of course it may not mean anything.

## September 1943

There was a Signals "do" on in Southminster. We had to pay 3/- towards it, which included food and drink, but we thought it pretty good. Transport was provided and we ended up having a real old booze up. There were lots of men there and they were all tight. We got quite merry too. I got in with the lovely singer, who sang several lovely numbers during the evening. He said he works at the Beaver Club.

I took some blackberries home on my next day pass. Mum and I had a trip to the flicks that afternoon. It was well worth going home, even for just a day. We weren't allowed to have a 35-hour pass this month, but it wasn't too bad.

Back on night duty the following day the Sgt told me off for airing my views in the Mess. It seems one can't say a bloody thing in the WAAF. There's lots of red tape.

I went to the Naafi dance with Betty and had great fun. Henry and Hanns were there. I was on duty again from midnight until 0800, but nothing exciting happened.

Went to a newsreel about 1800 and had a drink. Transport was waiting for us on our return, but it was full so we had to get a taxi back to camp.

Went to a dance in the evening and the band posted here were great, we had a good time. There were a few air crew about, but didn't dance with any of them. Harry was there and I danced with him quite a bit.

Just heard the news - Italy has fallen and everyone's very excited!

I still miss Nobby very much. Always think of him, bless him!

## **15<sup>th</sup> September – It's the Anniversary of the Battle of Britain today.**

We had a parade which lasted two hours, nearly everyone on the camp was involved, what a lovely sight it was.

Later on in September we went on a Battle of Britain parade at Maldon. Betty was there too. We marched to church with everyone watching and a nice tea was provided for us. We spent the evening drinking and singing and I got off with a Cpl! He wanted me to go to the flicks with him, but I said "no", definitely no!

I went to pick up my battledress but it wasn't in. I gave back my tunic and slacks and we all had a kit inspection which I passed.

Had Receivers later and managed to get to sleep early on duty, which is allowed. Apparently the sets don't seem to go off tune at night.

It seems I'm putting on weight like hell, but mostly on the derriere I think! It must be all the beer I'm drinking!

Went to the flicks with the 'kids' this evening and sat right next to the Cpl who I met a while ago. Nearly all the RAF Regiment know me – I don't know why though! They're a nice crowd, but a bit common (snob!).

I'm looking forward to another 24-hour pass tomorrow and will be missing pay parade. It's always good to be home again, with decent food etc.

## October 1943

A cold day to start off October. Betty, Marg and I went to Tillingham to a dance, but it wasn't on, so we danced to a piano instead with some nice RAF boys, and ended up going for a drink to the pub with them. I played around on my bike and sat on my handlebars while one of them rode it. I managed to dodge some police because I didn't have my 1250.

More duty-running today - answered the girls queries and the telephone in the WAAF Guard Room. At least it was a change from Receivers, which I had the following day. While I was there a WAAF Officer came down to visit. She created like hell because I was alone - Penny was out with her boyfriend so I was by myself.

**6<sup>th</sup> October - Twenty years old today!** My, I feel really old and wise!! I went home for the day and met mother in town. We had lunch followed by the flicks, then home for tea. On my way back to the camp there was another air raid.

The girls say the boys of the new squadron are very nice - 605 Squadron with their Mosquitoes. "I had better see what I can do!" I thought.

There was an air raid warning in the night - we heard that bombs had dropped in Chelmsford.

A new Controller came down in the morning and we had a nice chat. He's quite young and very nice to talk to. I was on duty again in receivers at 1730. Thank God I'm going to cabins on Sunday. It really is a desolate hole down here - damp as hell and just about as hot!

Got another bloody cold, but still managed to go to the flicks as usual, followed by the WAAF dance later on, but we danced to gramophone records again as the band was on leave. Had quite a good time despite my cold.

I had a telegram to say my brother Hec was coming home for a few days, so I'm going home on Wednesday to see him.

My friend Gwen was going boozing with her boyfriend Terry and they asked me to join them. We got on very well and got rather tight, but wished I hadn't as I was sick several times in the night... serves me right. Probably because I had some Gin, I know!! I ended up with no voice the next day and a very sore throat.

The next day I had a 24-hour pass again and really looked forward to getting home, with my bad cold and throat. At home I had a lovely hot bath and had some hot milk with rum in it, oh it's lovely to be home again. Back to camp tomorrow though.

Betty and Marg are back from leave thank goodness! We all went to the WAAF dance and had a marvellous time. I met a sweet Cpl called Bernard (Zomb). We danced all night and he walked me home later. He cracks jokes all the time and shoots a hell of a line! I don't know much about him though!

I was on duty in cabins again today, it was marvellous! We played cards and I wrote to Mum, who's on holiday in Cornwall. I had a wee nap later on and felt better for it.

The following day we went to the Cricketers and met several very sweet aircrew who bought us some tea. I met up with Bernard later and we went to the flicks. It was a good film and he really is a swell guy and he didn't even kiss me! We arranged to meet again later in the week. He

said he's going to the dance this week. I was on duty and despite trying to get off I didn't have any luck. Zomb said he wouldn't stay if I couldn't go. He is a sweet kid, but awfully shy and only a year older than me.

There was air raid last night and I heard talk of a horrible crash, involving a kite in Bradwell. It had failed to take off and burst into flames, neither of the Sgt's surviving, both bodies were burnt. I felt as sick as hell about it.

I got soaked going up to Control today. I met Zomb later and we went to the flicks. We sat rather close together, but he is very sweet and we agreed to see each other again. It was still pouring when we left and this continued until the following day. Another air raid overnight with a lot of gun fire.

A busy afternoon on duty today, answering lots of kites. I met Zomb later and we went to the flicks. He held my hand this time. When we came out he put his arm round my waist, he is sweet!

It's nearly the end of October and I received my battle dress at long last and it fits perfectly. It's lovely and warm and I look quite nice in it too, so everybody says!

Bernard and I went to the usual dance and we spent the evening together. I talked to a lot of his pals, they're nice kids. He's getting quite affectionate now too, had his arm around me most of the evening and kissed me goodnight again! We arranged to meet again on Sunday.

I've got another leave coming up in a couple of days. I can't get away before then, however much wangling I do!

31<sup>st</sup> October - I was quite exciting on duty today, but I can't mention it here as its actually top secret!

*Unfortunately Daff can no longer recall what the secrecy was about on the 31<sup>st</sup> October, and my research hasn't uncovered anything yet, so the detail is sadly missing at the time of printing.*

Didn't feel too good later on in the evening and the following day was even worse, so I didn't go to church parade, but I had to see the Sgt about it.

There's been quite a lot of Hun activity about the last few nights.

## November 1943

Went on leave for 7 days and enjoyed a nap later on in the afternoon. Boy is it good to be home!

Went to the dentist in Uxbridge and had my teeth done by an ex-RAF man, and boy is he nice!!

I met mother at Harrods and we did some shopping then after lunch Val and I went to the flicks to see G. Blacks "Strike a New Note" which was very good indeed.



Daff and her sister Val on holiday

Towards the end of my leave I did a spot of swatting for my LACW (Leading Aircraftwoman) exam. If I pass it will be a miracle!

My last day at home was a very lazy one and I had to reluctantly leave home early evening. It was the first time I haven't wanted to go back. Still the good things in life can't last forever.

Back at the camp nothing had happened since I had been away. Several of the girls in our hut had Scabies though and we had to be fumigated or something! I had to be scrubbed several days later as I had them slightly apparently.

We're noticing the winter nights are drawing in as it's getting dark around 1730 now.

Another duty tonight and I was feeling awfully tired with still another 5 bloody hours to go!! I do miss Bernard a bit. He's a darn nice guy in a funny sort of way.

One evening Marg and I got very merry at the Cricketers, then went on to the Sgt's Mess and went totally over the top. I met a sweet pilot who took me home. We had a community singing and jitterbug session and everyone clapped us. God we had fun! I bowed to my audience! The pilot didn't even kiss me, damn nice chap!! I did feel rough the following day though.

Had some mail to collect from Auntie Kath. She sent me some powder, lipstick and rouge – lovely, and all hard to get hold of.

We got our uniforms back from being "done" and had a hell a lot of pressing to do!

We had our Board exams today, it wasn't too hard, but the officer said he didn't know whether to pass me or not! He says I'm haywire! The Sgt called me a flanneler! I'm sure I haven't passed.

It was grand fun on evening duty today, with bags of panic going on.

I met Bernard at the usual dance, but I feel I'm getting tired of him. I'm trying to think how I can put him off. He said he wanted to see me again tomorrow, but I said I was going to the Sgt's Mess. I saw him again at the next dance and had quite a nice time, he isn't a bad kid – make your mind up Daff!!

I sewed on some new tapes for Mac (FSgt NZ). He is sweet! Both duties were quite exciting. One of our kites 'went for a burton' (crashed) this evening. They're looking out for the boys who jumped from it I hear.

I wasn't able to see the folks back home until a few days later when I got a 24-hour pass. I enjoyed a lovely meal and a hot bath but was back on duty the following day.

While on duty I wrote to Bernard, as nothing else was happening. I thought I had better show my appreciation for all the lovely times he'd given me in the last few months. The Signals Officer caught me asleep on duty. Oh God, I wonder what will happen?

I did a lot of logging on afternoon duty today, met Bernard later on and we went to the flicks. We did bags of snogging; he's a most affectionate, sweet wee soul! He says he thinks I'm a bloody nice girl. We're meeting again tomorrow night and I'm quite looking forward to it. Getting it bad, Daff?

The dance the following evening was super, not too full. Bernard got jealous when someone else asked me to dance. One of the other pilots kept staring and grinning at me. Later on I egged Bernard on and put bags of force behind my kisses, I'll learn him!

## December 1943

Went to another dance but it wasn't very exciting and Bernard wasn't there. I thought I might as well stick with Zomb for now as there isn't anyone better in this squadron.

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*It is worth mentioning that at this point, the beginning of December, Daff made an unusual entry in her diary. She noted:*

**"I'm writing about my life in the WAAF. It should be very interesting later on in life!"**

*This is the first occasion she has mentioned her diary notes and it's not certain why she made reference to it. Maybe it was due to sheer boredom. Her entries thereafter were back to normal with no further mention.*

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On duty this afternoon I brought a bomber in and I felt quite pleased with myself! I met up with Bernard later on and we went to the flicks together. I enjoyed his company very much. He wanted to see me again tomorrow but I wanted to go to the Sgt's Mess so I said no. He said he would go to bed and sulk.

I've got duty again, so I can't go to the dance, damn it! Bernard won't go either. He never does if I can't go.

I took a rabbit home for Mum on another 24-hour pass home today. I gave a farmer 4/- for it, it was a beauty!

I saw quite a lot of Bernard the next few days, went to the flicks and met up with some of his pals. He just keeps kissing me but boy can he kiss nicely!! He's getting so

affectionate, kissing long lingering kisses! He just can't wait to see me. I said the only time he was quiet was when he kissed me! He said his mother always told him never to speak with his mouth full!! I've never laughed so much!

I heard that a Cpl is interested in me. Well, well, there's no-one but Zomb at the present moment!

**18<sup>th</sup> December - I've been here at Bradwell a year today.**

24<sup>th</sup> December - It's Xmas Eve, but it doesn't feel like it. Been going to lots of dances recently, getting tight and meeting a lot of officers, chatting and kissing and having a wonderful time.

25<sup>th</sup> December - Gosh, it's Xmas day and what a wonderful happy atmosphere there is. Had a gorgeous dinner but had to go on duty afterwards. Later on I went to a concert followed by another dance and got slightly tight but had a wonderful time again. I kissed all the boys who said I was the prettiest girl there and they were jealous of Zomb.

31<sup>st</sup> December - Quite exciting on duty. Brought a bomber in! I went to New Years Eve dance and had a lovely time. Danced with Jack and Sandy and Tubby was there too - he took me up to Control. He was tight, but he is a good type though.

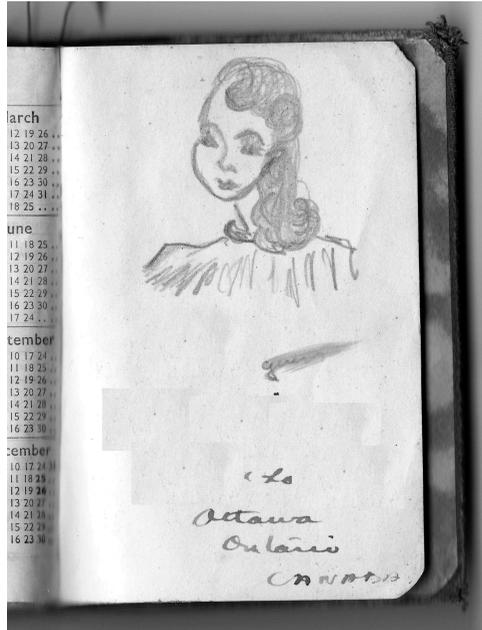
*And so 1943 had come to a close and what a year! The 1943 diary ends with much more notes in detail, comparing the various men that Daff met, down to the colour of their eyes!*

## January 1944

21<sup>st</sup> January 1944 - Lovely day, clear but cold. Bernard rang in the morning. I met him at Baker Street, we went to a tea dance, and then had supper afterwards. He's a sweet kid.

Two alerts in the evening – lots of gun fire. The Germans are after the London docks. We all got under the stairs once or twice.

*A further 3 years were spent in Bradwell Bay, and all this was documented in a further bundle of diaries, which by 2010 had become very tatty. The story continues in Daphne's next book, all about 1944...*



A sketch from the back of the diary