

WOMEN'S LAND ARMY 1942 - 45

AT THE BEGINNING of March 1942 I travelled from Birkenhead to a small village 6 miles from Nantwich in Cheshire where I met 17 other girls who had come to join the Women's Land Army. We were to spend the next 4 years together in converted stables in the grounds of a Manor House and to cycle to our respective farms each day. When we arrived we were issued with one pair of breeches, two shirts, two pairs of dungarees, a green pullover, an overcoat and a hat. We were given enough coupons to buy our own underwear.

Apart from one, which was a market garden, all the farms were mainly dairy farms and practically all the work was to do with the care and feeding of the cows. I spent the first year on a very small farm, run by an elderly man and his wife. There were 15 cows, one bull, a few calves and one elderly horse, a retired hunter, who bolted every time he heard the hounds. I had to learn to hand milk and the cows always having been milked by one man were none too eager to let down their milk for me and I collected quite a crop of bruises before they settled down.

The first job most of us were given was muck-spreading, which left us at the end of each day with our hair full of straw and cow manure until we got the knack of it. I worked on my own most of the time as the boss never came out after dinner until milking time. I spent a lot of time hoeing, hedging, cutting kale and of course mucking out the shippens.

After a year the farmer's niece came to live with them and took over my work and I moved on to a much larger farm where I stayed for the next three years. There were two other girls and three men working at Home Farm and there were 60 machine milked cows, three horses and one tractor, which the men always used. We worked a horse each, mine was called Peter. We were very near the hostel so we went across for milking at 6 o'clock every morning and went back for breakfast.

In the summer we had to bring the cows in before we started, but in the winter they stayed in the shippens all the time. After breakfast we had to clean out the shippens. This was quite a pleasant job in the summer, barrowing out all the muck and then hosing down but it was a different matter in the winter when it all had to be done around the cows and of course there was a lot more of it.

Life in the hostel was quite fun. There was always someone to talk to or play cards with or we would cycle to Nantwich to the pictures or the local dance or to a local pub where the trainee pilots from the nearby airfield used to gather. We had a matron in charge and we had to be in by 10.00 each night and 11.00 on Saturdays. The food was quite good as we were allowed farm labourer's rations.

Most of us had one weekend in four off, when we would hitchhike home, mostly on the back of milk lorries.

At the end of 1945 the war had ended and my particular pilot returned from the Middle East so I left the land to get married. I was presented with a certificate and a thank you letter from Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother).

Most of the time, bad weather apart, I really enjoyed the experience.

Peggy McAll

Ascott under Wychwood.

A HEAD HERDSWOMAN REMEMBERS

V.E. Day 1945 came when I was pursuing my chosen career to become a Head Herdswoman. I was living in a hamlet called Cudham in West Kent and my friend and I got up extra early to milk the cows and then set off to bike the necessary eight miles to Orpington Railway Station to go to London. There we mingled with the crowds and found it quite frightening at times to have to go where the crowds went, rather than where we wanted to go.

We joined the celebrations in Trafalgar Square and queued on the steps of St. Martin-in-the-Fields for one of the continuous services. It was here that I had a strange meeting, when amongst the people coming out from the previous service was a neighbour from my own street in my home town of Canterbury.

Much later my friend and I took a train back to Orpington and biked wearily back to milk some loudly complaining cows!

Olive Tucker

MEMORIES

SEPTEMBER 1939. We were 16 going on 17 - school boys. The summer holidays were well on. We paid more attention to the newspapers, but in truth the prospects for the next rugger season were more important to us than war in Europe or anywhere else for that matter. We listened to the Prime Minister's broadcast.

Home was in South East London - Blackheath to be exact. The air raid sirens sounded. We went down into the cellar. Nothing happened and after a bit the "all clear" sounded.

The "phoney war" had started. Later that month we went back to school - Windsor - 1st XV Rugby, the Officers Training Corps - uniform - I was a Sergeant. We thought more about the next match than the war. The British Expeditionary Force in France seemed a world away - and then it was May 1940..... The fighting escalated, the casualties mounted, evacuation from Dunkirk and the other channel ports began.

Somehow rowing on the Thames seemed less important.