

DOROTHY MARCH

ATS

When I was 17 1/2, I volunteered for the ATS. I came from a really big family and it was one way to get away from the crowded conditions at home. I did my training at Fulford barracks at York and then from there I went to Radcliffe at Nottingham. I was trained for radar location, which was to predict the range and bearing of enemy fire. I was in the 484 heavy duty mixed ack ack squad. In 1943 my sister, who was also in the ATS and I were sent to Belgium to help shoot down the VE 2's or doodle bugs as we called them. One time we shot down a German plane and we had to take the pilot (and he was just a bit of a lad) by gun point to the guard room. We were over the moon when we saw that plane come down.

The conditions were really bad, every day we ate dehydrated potato, bully beef and dog biscuits, the weather was awful and there was no sanitation to speak of. The loo was a bucket with a curtain around it for privacy. Two at a time we had to carry that bucket the 1/2 a mile to where it was emptied. We always remembered to wear our wellies.

Once a month around 1/2 dozen of us would go to the Montgomery club in Brussels for a dance, all the Belgium women were done up like buttered buns, with flowers in their hair. We wore our uniforms with studs on our shoes and all, and we looked just as good, but the dancing.....there was a moving floor and a special band for the waltzes and one for the rumbas.

When you were in the ATS one of the dress codes was that your hair had to be, at all times, tied up 2 inches above your collar, but this one night I decided to let mine down whilst I danced and I was pulled up for it by one of the red caps. The next day I was put on Jankers for a week with no pay (this was potato peeling duty), but it was worth it.

9 years away

I remember the day my older brother came home from the war. We had had a letter from the war office saying he was missing presumed dead, but he was in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, we didn't see him for 9 years.

I remember the day he came home. I was sitting in the kitchen with my mam when we heard the front door open and saw this kit back slide up the hall on the lino and come to a stop under the table. My mam told me to go and see who it was so I went to the front door and there he was, skin and bone, black as coal and with a moustache. My mother fainted at the sight and we had to bring her round. She'd always said that one day he would come back home.

My first drink

It was my 21st birthday and I was still stationed over in Belgium and I decided to buy a bottle of wine, Well, I'd never had wine before and I drank the whole bottle right out of my tin mug. The next day I had to be excused from my duties and lay on my bunk with a blinding head. Yes, I remember my first drink pretty clearly.