

June Pamela Bailey (nee Skinner)

Born 17.5.1924, Notting Hill, London. Left school, boarding school Hitchin Herts Convent, age 16, evacuated from London.

Worked for Northmet Power Co. Volunteered early 1942, wanted to be in it!! Called up August 1942, plotter (Clerk special duties).

Posted to Biggin Hill, Kent, September 1942. Posted to North Weald Essex, September 1944.

Once hostilities had ceased became redundant. Posted to Hinton-in-Hedges, Cheadle, and St John's Wood, London as clerk until demobbed in September 1946.

Married George Bailey, retired Flt/Lt R.A.F, Battle of Britain pilot 234 Sqd in February 1952. Came to Australia on honeymoon February 1952. He became a crop duster pilot for D. Gray and Co. Farming in Mt Barker in WA, 1954. Moved to Albany 1964.

Training

Square bashing, 6 weeks Morecombe

Plotter training, at secret location, 3-4 weeks

Plotter training, Biggin Hill, 2 weeks in Emergency Operations Room.

Trade Tests

Volunteered to go to Dover to relieve WRAF, living in tunnels under the white cliff plotting air sea rescue, shelled from Calais.

HORRIFYING EXPERIENCE

During a life of eight decades spent in both hemispheres one is sure to have had one or two experiences that have not faded with the passing of time. Frights as children, near motor vehicle accidents as teenagers, farm accidents and mishaps to ones own children as toddlers when they were growing up. Many of these episodes were quite horrifying at the time but one stands out in my memory because of the humorous side as well as the frightening aspect.

In 1944 I was serving in the Women's Royal Air Force and stationed at Biggin Hill, one of the front line fighter stations in Kent. The R.A.F. had taken over a very affluent housing estate called Locks Bottom, to billet the girls. A typical English countryside town with detached houses nestled in well-tended gardens that the aged gardeners, too old for service, still attended with loving care.

I lived in a house called "Devon" with twenty other girls, all plotters, who tracked and plotted our fighters and the enemy on vast maps. We were in touch with radar stations all around the south coast, and Observer Corps stationed once the aircraft were inland. Our job was supposed to be top

secret. We were all in our late teens and early twenties, some having joined as soon as war was declared. They came from all walks of life, some straight from school, some landed gentry, hairdressers, clerks and wives of servicemen overseas.

Biggin Hill had its fair share of bombing. We had not any windows left in the house. The holes were covered with blankets. The banisters to the upstairs rooms had vanished the previous winter when we had run out of fuel for the hot water boiler. All the veranda posts had gone the same way. The ceilings were still intact and by scavenging in the local woods we were able to have some fires to make toast when we came off duty.

For weeks before this event took place we were told that if we ever heard "Diver Diver" over our line we were to shout it out immediately to the Controller in charge of the watch. We all presumed "Diver Diver" meant airborne German troops were landing. We hadn't a clue what to do if this was so.

It was a lovely summer night, quite warm for England when suddenly there was the most awful clatter going on in the sky. The noise was deafening and then it stopped and thirty seconds later an explosion. We raced downstairs to the front room where three girls slept. One, Dawn, was rather large and panicky. Barbara, her mate, was very calm. Then the clatter started again, silence, another explosion, nearer. By this time all those upstairs had come down. God, what is it? That clatter started again. Dawn tried to dive under her bed but couldn't because of the size of her bottom. The rest of us crawled under spare beds and into the empty fireplace. Dawn was moaning "Oh God, oh Barbara" over and over again. I think she had more faith in Barbara than God. The clatter started again even nearer, in fact it seemed to be on top of the roof. Then silence. An almighty bang, the plaster came off the walls and the blankets were blown off the windows. Vases of flowers fell to the floor and tin helmets that were not already on heads fell off the top of cupboards. Then everything went quiet. Everybody started talking at once. What the hell was it?

When daylight came we went into our lovely back garden with all its fruit and berry trees. Where the lawn had been was a crater the size of a room. We all stood around in our striped Air Force pyjamas, hair in curlers and bare feet surveying our hole and the damage to our house. We could not dally too long as we were on duty at 7.30am and had to get to the cookhouse for breakfast first. A mile to the cookhouse and then another two miles to the Ops room on our trusty bicycles.

The crew that we were relieving were still in the Ops room. We were allowed in two at a time to take our places and the crew coming off were so superior. "We've had Diver Diver!" "What is it?" "Pilotless planes". No sooner had I put the headset on that somebody miles away shouted "Diver Diver" into my ears. We had new plots all over the table, yellow hostile plots, and friendly fighters chasing them. They were everywhere. Then the clatter started overhead

again, silence, we all dived under the map table, bang, and out we all crawled. This in the first five minutes of an eight-hour watch.

After about three days we became used to it. The road to the Ops room was in their flight path and down hill. One would start at the top and peddle like mad for the moment the engine stopped, we would dive into the ditch, wait for the bang, remount and off we'd go again. It was the first night that really frightened everybody. I think because it was the unknown. Once we knew what to expect we'd sit around our garden bomb hole in our bra and pants sunbathing and watch them fly overhead, with fighters trying to shoot them down. Eventually we had a great barrier of barrage balloons and the sites where they were launched were bombed and life quietened down again.

Three days after our doodlebug, their nickname, our WAAF officer turned up in a staff car.

"You girls alright?"

"Yes Maam".

"Good show".

Today we would have counsellors.