
Vida (Olive) Moir

Vida Moir Remembers Mt Batten

Condensed from Vida Moir's Memoirs by E. Gwyn Williams

In 1941 I joined the British WAAF partly to be patriotic but also because my job in the Library was not considered an essential occupation. Everyone was expected to work towards the War Effort and in my home city of Sheffield were many steel works and I would have been expected to work in one of those for the duration. I decided I'd do my bit in the WAAF.

I did my rookies at Bridgnorth where we were fitted out with our uniforms – a bit of an ordeal for a shy young girl especially as airmen did the measuring! I remember being quite upset when the one who put the measuring tape round me said: "A bit big on the 'ips, miss!" especially as I was a tall slim girl in those days!

Selected for training as a wireless operator, I was posted to Edinburgh in Scotland to learn my trade, which was carried out at the GPO School. After three months I finished the WOP course and was able to wear the Sparks Badge on my sleeve and was posted back to Bridgnorth before going to Blackpool in Lancashire for more training and exams and my promotion to ACW.

The time had come to be posted to a station and we were told we could make a choice from a short list although this was unusual and we might not get the one we had chosen.

I decided to ask for Plymouth – as the Australians were there – with Southampton as second choice where Canadians were stationed. I was fortunate to get Plymouth and I remained and spent the rest of my WAAF service there.

I arrived in Plymouth late at night, very tired after a long journey, where a WAAF driver was waiting to take me to Mount Batten that was right by the water where the Sunderland Flying Boats were moored.

Our billets were near the main gate and were the houses the RAF used as married quarters in peace time. Our mess was at the lower end of the camp and there I saw all the handsome Aussies in their dark uniforms. I thought perhaps I had died and gone to heaven!!!

Now my war work began in earnest and that was in Operations Area which was called "the cabin" and housed W/T/R/T and teleprinters and I was promoted to LACW (Leading Aircraft Woman) and put in charge of the cabin.

We worked three eight-hour watches 8am to 4pm, 4pm to midnight and midnight to 8am. The normal system was a four-hour watch that gave a longer break between watches; however in 1942 there were not enough personnel to use that system.

It couldn't have hurt us as a medical check passed us all with flying colours, in fact, some were declared overweight. That I think was due to the large buns we bought from the NAAFI Van.

Mount Batten was a lovely place to work, I really enjoyed my work and despite air raids, life was very pleasant. I made some good friends such as Topsy who came from Exeter and Norma from Torquay.

In 1994 my husband, Jack and I went to Tasmania for a reunion of the Sunderland group where it was announced we would be visiting a lovely village for morning tea. Whilst there, a lady who had worked in the mess at Mount Batten asked if anyone remembered her. I made myself known, as did another lady who had worked in signals. I asked if she remembered Topsy or Ginge Smith and she said she did. She was in fact Ginge. Then she asked me if I remembered Vida. "I'm Vida!" I cried.

We had a lot to catch up on and have been in touch ever since. I have even found a photo of the three of us taken in 1942 at Batten.

Eventually I was promoted to Corporal and then one day I was called in to the Signals Officer who told me I had been recommended for a Commission and would have to go to Headquarters in London to be interviewed by the Board. I had never been to London and had to find where I was billeted. It was very dark because of the blackout but luckily a Policeman took me right to the door.

The next morning I was given instructions on the correct protocol to be observed and then admitted to be interviewed by about six officers who asked a lot of questions. I was so nervous I could hardly speak. Eventually I was told that my qualifications were in order except that I had not done a course on radar. That was because when I was due to do the course I could not be spared from Mt Batten. However, I was asked to become an Equipment Officer but I declined, as I liked my work in signals. Who knows where I would have ended had I accepted.

In 1943 I married my handsome Aussie and we spent a few days in Newquay for our honeymoon. It was difficult to get leave at the same time but we managed it and then reported for duty at Batten. My promotion to Sergeant came through in 1944 but I had already applied for my discharge from the WAAF, so I did not officially become Sgt Moir.

I think my husband was happy that I wouldn't be spending time in the Sergeant's mess. Eventually, in 1946, I sailed on the Stirling Castle from Southampton and arrived in Australia as a British War Bride. That, however, is another story.

