

Elsie Miller's memories of the RCAF Women's Division.

When 19 years old in 1943 I joined the R.C.A.F., a big step in my life. My ticket to Ottawa came two weeks before I had to report. I spent a week with my Mom and Dad in Penticton and then took the Kettle Valley train to Midway B.C., where we caught the mainline train to Nelson. We were given meal tickets to use as we saw fit, and had seats that pulled together to form bunks for sleeping. I stopped over for a week at Moose Jaw to see my grandmother Jane Conn Glover, and was then on my way to Ottawa and Rockcliffe Basic Training Depot, the first time I had ever been east of Moose Jaw. I wondered what life would have in store now I was on my own.

I soon found out. After signing in at Rockcliffe I chose a bunk and locker in a big wooden framed building with double bunks. Each bed had two sheets, a pillow and blanket, with another if we needed it. After familiarization with the station next morning we were each provided with a dress until our uniforms were ready, and an Airforce Women's Division hat. Later we received our blue uniform for winter, khaki for summer, a Burberry raincoat, a shoulder bag for goodies, comb, brush etc, and a winter greatcoat that seemed to weigh 50lbs. The size and scope of the mess hall, with hundreds of girls at each meal, was unbelievable, but we got used to it, and to drill drill and more drill.

Each Sunday the church parade was taken by a different Padre, "other denominations" taking a step back as ordered by the parade officer.

The girls of No. 3 Squadron gathered in the canteen or recreation hall, and after introductions soon became first rate friends, a wonderful group of girls from every walk of life. A special lifelong friend was Ruby McArthur from Nova Scotia, with whom I was posted to Trenton for training as Equipment Assistant, then to Claresholme SFT (Service Flying and Training School) in Alberta. We still keep in touch, and I visited Ruby in Toronto in 1994 before she moved with her husband to Waterloo Ontario. Men from Australia, New Zealand, England and Canada were trained on single- or dual-engined planes (Class 96 while we were there). After 16 months at Claresholme SFT Ruby was posted to Ottawa and I to Sea Island Depot B.C.

At Sea Island Depot we supplied the materials for lots of air and ground crew mechanics inspecting and repairing equipment, putting planes into perfect condition ready to fly. At Boundary Bay Operational Training Unit air crew were trained on bombers for the last part of their training for overseas duty. Our barracks were in line with the runway, and we heard them at night taking off and returning.

I often think of these brave young men and their hops and dreams. I think of all the Army, Navy and Air Force men who gave their lives, and all others who fought and worked diligently so we could have our freedom.

As we stand with our heads bowed in prayer on November 11th at the Remembrance Day service I remember them and their loved ones whose hearts are still filled with pain.

Elsie Miller has lived in the Pemberton Valley for 50 years. In 1950 she married Donald Miller, of a pioneer family in the valley. She has four children, thirteen grandchildren, one greatgrandchild.

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