

Memories

The enthralling memories of octogenarian and former Brattleby resident Arthur Melton who emigrated to Australia in 1963, continue with an adapted account of the War years - 1939-1945. One of my early memories of the war as a 12 year old, was an almighty explosion on Scampton camp, followed by a huge column of smoke. Word soon got around that some mines had exploded. As we lived only a few hundred yards away, at 'Glebe Farm', we could hardly have missed it with the bomb dump situated in the North East corner of the airfield (Brattleby Hill top). In those days there was a pub close by, called the 'Midge Inn'. (demolished shortly afterwards)

Early on in 1940, a squad of army guys moved into the paddock near the farm and dug earthworks to accommodate a 'Searchlight Battery'. This included the Searchlight, a Lewis gun, a Sound Locator, a Radio room and accommodation. The sound locator was a contraption mounted on a swivel with trumpet shaped sound tubes. One night a German raider paid RAF Scampton a visit and the searchlight was switched on. This illuminated the surrounding area and the airfield. The raiding aircraft dived towards the beam of light, so it was hurriedly switched off. Shortly afterwards, the whole site was moved down near the end of Thorpe Lane.

Good Friday in 1940 was a very warm day and two of the soldiers were sharing a few bottles of beer. I joined them and 'slunk' off with a bottle to try it. When I awoke, I found myself sitting on the knee of one of the soldiers, while my Mother played hell with them. After that the beer was kept well out of my way.

The corporal in charge went down to the village one night, so one of the squaddies decided to play a trick. He put a gas cape and a gas mask which had two eye holes in it. He waited until the corporal was halfway through 'Pitts Wood' (top of Brattleby Hill) and shone a torch through the eye holes making whoo-oo sounds. The poor bloke thought 'old nick' was after him!

Not long after the start of the war, the MOD built us an air raid shelter about 25 yard from 'Cliff Farm' in the apple orchard. It was a concrete and brick construction with interlocking roof slabs. It was dug into the ground, with concrete seats and brick walls. In the back was a doorway, but no door, we hung a blanket over the doorway to prevent light showing from the

candles. The back wall was constructed with a dry mortar brickwork, which, could be pushed out in the event of us being trapped. There was also a blast wall across the front. We spent many a night in there when “Jerry” was attacking RAF Scampton – if we had sufficient time to get in it - otherwise, we had a very strong kitchen table we used to shelter under.

If it happened to be a moonlit night, quite often a couple of ‘Jerry’ aircraft would appear. Using Lincoln Cathedral as a ‘land mark’, one would fly off to RAF Waddington and the other to Scampton. On one occasion things got a bit close to home when one of the raiders was shot down by a night fighter. We heard the cannon fire over Carlton, the burning aircraft turned and flew over our house just missing the trees and crashed in the lane near the camp. We visited the crash site next day and saw the bodies under a tarpaulin, with their feet sticking out. My Mother commented, “Even Germans have to darn their socks!”

On another occasion, we heard bombs exploding in the Ingham camp direction. A German daylight raider dropped a bomb on the middle street and then flew to Brattleby and machine gunned the village. Reputedly, a spent bullet was found in Les Fox’s bed! The aircraft then flew towards our house and put a line of bullets down the gateway next to the house and continued to the camp and machine gunned them. We heard later, he’d gone onto the coast where he was shot down over the sea. The crews of two raiders are buried in Scampton churchyard. On the day of their funeral, we were in school (Scampton) and heard the rifles being fired, as they were buried with full military honours.

Both the ‘Lincolnshire Regiment’ and the ‘Sherwood Foresters’ used ‘Pitts Wood’ for mock battles. Afterwards, they’d cook a meal with wood fires and ‘billy cans’. I used to visit them and if I got bit too cheeky they would chase after me, throwing ‘Thunder-flashes’.

My Father was in the local ‘Home Guard’ along with others from the near-by villages. He was armed with a rifle and ten rounds of ammunition, later changed to a rifle with a ‘cup discharger’, which could propel a hand grenade a fair distance. The Home Guard also carried out mock battles in the wood. Later on in the war they got a field gun, this was called a ‘Blacka Bombard’ (a kind of mortar) which was sited on Aisthorpe lane and fired practice shells in the big field near there.

One day, I was stood outside watching a pilot doing a 'follow my leader' exercise, when I became aware of a Hurricane coming straight down with no chance of pulling up. As he disappeared behind the trees I felt the thud as he crashed. The pilot was an American from Texas who had joined the RAF at the beginning of the war, he's buried in Kirton Lindsay churchyard.

Another crash occurred at Brattleby just north of the village, involving an RAF Lancaster with two Canadians among the crew. This happened on a very windy night and no-one heard the crash, it was discovered when the early morning workman's bus came along. All the crew were killed, one living for two days before he too died.

A foot note to the story of Guy Gibson playing Brattleby church organ at night, he must have had a helper, as in those days the bellows behind the organ needed working by hand. I know, because I was sweet on the attractive young organist and got the job of blowing up these bellows while she played the organ, her kisses certainly didn't come cheap!

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