

# **World War Two**

## **The Royal Air Force**

### **Return of the RAF to Norton**

In 1939, the people of Norton must have been slightly dismayed when they were told that the Royal Air Force was returning to the parish. A letter to a local paper pointed out that the land between Meadowhead and Jordanthorpe was still covered with the remains of hangars and workshops used in the First World War. Nevertheless, the Air Ministry took over some fields between Lightwood and Herdings, straddling the Yorkshire-Derbyshire border to the south of Norton Avenue, and the Balloon Centre came into being. This area is now often referred to as Norton Aerodrome but it was not an aerodrome in the commonly accepted sense because it had no operational aircraft or runways.

Many people have contributed personal reminiscences to this section and we are grateful to them all. Names of those quoted will be acknowledged elsewhere in the book. Balloon Operators, whether their stories are quoted or not, have helped us to gain an insight into their dangerous service life and filled us with admiration for their fortitude.

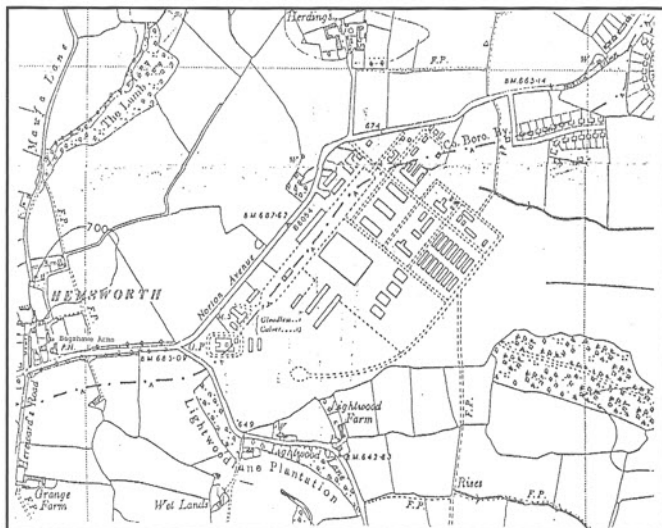
### **Preparation for a Balloon Barrage**

It was realised that if war did break out, barrage balloons would be a real deterrent to enemy bombers and so, in November 1938, RAF Balloon Command was formed. An administrative office was set up in Sheffield at 641, Attercliffe Road and, in February 1939, three Auxiliary Air Force Squadrons were raised under the command of Squadron Leader R.Caley, M.C., assisted by the adjutant, Flight Lieutenant E.O.Whitamore.

An advertisement asked for men aged from 25-50 to enlist for a period of four years. They had to be fairly fit and would be required to pass a medical examination; wearing glasses would not count against them. Training would take two hours on one night a week and one week-end out of three and attendance at an annual camp of fifteen days was required. Pay was 6d. an hour whilst training, plus travelling expenses.

About 1,000 men from Sheffield and district volunteered for service, the majority having served in the First World War. They went to Bridge Street and were "embodied" the same day by repeating the Oath of Allegiance and taking the King's Shilling. They began training in an old factory in Bridge Street, learning about knots, how to splice ropes and wires and the theory of how to fly balloons.

## No.16 Balloon Centre, Sheffield



*Plan of No. 16 Balloon Centre, Sheffield, overprinted on 1898 Ordnance Survey mapping.*

*Reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO*

The 150-acre Lightwood site at Norton was designated as No.16 Balloon Centre, Sheffield, the main administrative centre for the operational squadrons. Lt Col R.E.M. Cherry, M.C. took command with the RAF rank of Wing Commander. Building work started in March 1939 and by July steel-framed hangars were up, concrete roads laid, a wooden hut built to accommodate regular airmen and an officers' mess provided. Many of the workmen were Irish and, later on, some of them joined the RAF.

During the summer, the HQ personnel moved to Norton. At first most of them stayed with local families. Wing Commander

Cherry lived for five months at Norton Green, home of Major Guy Newton, and two airmen were billeted at Spring House on Norton Lane (the "little shop", now demolished).

A number of local people can remember houses which were rented as officers' quarters, for example in School Lane, Norton. Some houses were built for RAF personnel in Adastral Avenue, Luna Croft and Bowman Drive. Part of this area, to the east of the site, is still owned by the Ministry.

A WAAF officer recalls, "An interesting point about Norton was the number of RAF officers who lived locally. They just went off home in the evenings."

## Organisation and supply of sites

The three Squadron Leaders set to work, deciding on the limits of their own operational area and organising the search for suitable sites within that area. The Centre provided space, which had not been available at Bridge Street, for the practical training of crews in inflating and flying balloons. About a dozen Regular RAF men instructed Auxiliary Air Force crews. These men went out to prepare the balloon sites and get them ready for action. Mr Eric Webb recalls, "We'd take a winch vehicle and new balloon from Norton and all the tackle and get the

site going, giving them a rough idea how to carry on. We'd go from one site to another, that's how it was to start with.

The Cooke and Beard Homes site at Carfield was the first one that I set up; it was part of C Flight (HQ at Nether Edge Hall) 939 Sqn. It was a difficult job getting in and out with the long winch vehicle, going up the hill then turning through the gateway in front of the almshouses. I laid out the balloon bed, inflated the balloon and stayed about two days, giving them an idea of how to drive the winch and get the balloon up and down. Some of the Auxiliaries did not have uniform yet. I was billeted with a lady who still remembers me giving site orders, "Man the tackle" and "All tackle." She is 86 now and lives in Dronfield Woodhouse."

When trained, each crew had two Regular NCOs, usually a Sergeant and a Corporal. Once the site was established, all supplies of hydrogen gas, pay and rations were taken there from the Centre at Norton.

## **Ready for war**

On 24th August 1939, just days before the declaration of war, the Squadrons, Nos. 939 (West), 940 (Rotherham) and 941 (Central), were mobilized. The first barrage balloons were flown on 26th August.

A barrage balloon measured 63 ft long and contained 19,600 cubic feet of hydrogen gas. At the beginning of the war it took 40 minutes for ten men to raise a balloon to about 6,000 ft, the usual operational height. The main function of the balloon was to hold up cables which stopped enemy aircraft from dive-bombing.

The balloons were made from gas-tight rubber-proofed cotton fabric, each using 600 pieces of fabric totalling 1,000 yards of material. They were tested daily with a leak detector. Punctures had to be repaired swiftly; pin holes and tears up to three inches across were patched, using rubber solution, then the repair was painted with aluminium dope.

No.16 Balloon Centre was the control centre of the Sheffield and Rotherham Balloon Squadrons. Three fully trained meteorological officers received weather reports from all over the country via secure telephone links and teleprinters. WAAF Mrs Currie worked locally at Parkhead sending the combined forecasts from N.E.England to Downing Street. Forecasts of the expected weather and orders to fly the balloons were passed on to the squadrons. Men called dispatch riders delivered these and other messages throughout the city, often using their own motor cycles.

In December 1939, Wg Cdr Cherry transferred back to the Army and Sqdn Ldr Caley, the C.O. of 939 Squadron, was promoted to Wing Commander and took charge at Norton. In April 1940, flights from 941 Squadron went to 939 and 940 Squadrons and the three squadrons at Sheffield merged into two.

On the memorable night of December 12th, 1940, the barrage round Sheffield was at its full strength of 72 balloons. Of these, no fewer than 47 were damaged by enemy planes or by shrapnel. By the great effort of the crews, the barrage was restored to full strength within 24 hours of the end of the raid and was ready and waiting when the next blitz came a few days later.

## **WAAF at Norton**

From 1939, the staff at Norton included about ten WAAF. Up to the spring of 1941 they lived in billets within walking or cycling distance of the Centre. Two stayed with a Norton Lane family but several lived in houses in the nearby Gleadless area. One lady recalls her billet in White Lane as “rather like being at home” while another says, “Two of us lived with my aunt in Smithfield Road. Early in the war, when the sirens went, several of the lads would turn up with fish and chips. They were not expected to go back to camp until the all clear siren sounded. In the 1939-1940 winter we were snowbound, with drifts on each side making cycling impossible.”

The women had joined the No.34 County of York Company, WAAF, at Bridge Street, under the command of Flight Officer Spafford. At first most of them had no uniform. “I had only an armband.” “I had to wear RAF uniform, buttoned the wrong way round.” Memories of training in Sheffield include learning to march “on cobbled streets in Pitsmoor, some of the girls in shoes with 3" high heels.”

“We had to carry our tin hat and gas mask everywhere. It was not allowed to put anything in our uniform pockets, so we would tuck things into the gas mask box. Later on, officers were issued with a handbag.”

Two of the fabric workers had worked as a carpet stitcher and as an embroiderer and so had been directed into “fabric bashing”. “I remember working from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and also that we had to drink a glass of milk at 11 a.m. every day in order to counteract any ill effects of breathing in the dope.” “I remember how strange we looked, covered with the silver powder which came off from the balloon fabric.”

Another memory is of a fire. "A terrible fire occurred in a hangar at Norton when a balloon was being repaired and the hydrogen gas ignited. Every precaution was taken to avoid a spark and we could only think that a "Kirby" grip holding a WAAF's hair was responsible. Several WAAF were very badly burned. This was not reported to the public, of course, because it would have been bad for morale."

One WAAF who went to Norton in August 1941 as a fabric worker transferred to office duties. She thought that the permanent office staff had a relatively easy time. They did not work shifts, just daytime from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Office mail was sent out via a post box which the G.P.O. placed for them on Norton Avenue near the entrance to the Balloon Centre.

"The three office blocks were used for administration by Flt Lt Marshall and Flt Lt Richardson, by Sergeant Duroe and by the RAF Instructors. Sgt Duroe was in charge of ten or twelve airmen who had worked on sites in Sheffield. They were now acting as instructors and as relief staff to the sites being taken over by the WAAF. Most of the RAF personnel on camp were from the South Yorkshire area whilst the WAAF came from all over Britain. Some of these local men were Ted Hodgson, Alf Chamberlain and Jack Beaumont."

"We had many week-ends free. Pay parade was on Thursday or Friday, before week-end passes were issued, so we had pay to take home." "If our mother was alive we were given 3s. 6d. a week for her while we were at home on leave. We had four rail passes a year. An evening pass lasted to 11.59 p.m."

"It was not easy to travel to the city. The No. 2 Circular bus route had started and passed the camp while the 101/102 bus finished at Gleadless Town End. The nearest trams were at the bottom of Hollinsend Road and on the far side of Graves Park, both about two miles away."

"In 1940 we had a sports field by the Bagshawe Arms. I was asked to be in a hockey team against the WAAC, although I had never played before. Someone in our team must have been good because we won. It was fun and we had a good meal in the NAAFI afterwards."

"The NAAFI had a reasonably sized hall and stage where visiting ENSA shows performed. The staff also put on some entertainments. I sang and there was a WAAF concert troupe called the Norton Follies. A RAF pianist played for us. We had some contact with local families and civilians came to some of our concerts."

“From 1939 to 1941 we had a dance every Saturday night in the NAAFI. We always went, although the ratio was 5:1 on our side.” A Gleadless resident said that his mother went to the camp to play the piano for shows and dances and other local people remember going to dances there, during and after the war.

Another facility in the NAAFI was a small snooker room and later there was a cinema which, in common with other RAF cinemas, was called “The Astra”.

“We were given enough food but we all used the NAAFI as well. We also went to the local pub, the Bagshawe Arms.” “The Bagshawe Arms was the favourite watering hole, also the Red Lion, Gleadless Town End. Anything to get away from the NAAFI.”

“The WAAF were taken to “entertainments” in 5-ton trucks. We had no choice in the matter. We saw Freddie Mills box in a hall at Greenhill and went to Finningley to support the Norton Centre boxing team.”

In 1941 Eric Webb represented the Balloon Centre as a boxer at several places including Hull and Finningley. The RAF No.33 Group Boxing Championships were held in a big hall and the Central Band of the RAF attended. Famous boxers, including Peter Cairns, Jack London and Len Harvey gave exhibition bouts.

## **The WAAF band**

Early in 1940 a RAF Corporal started a WAAF drum and bugle band at Norton. Ethel France was the solo kettle drummer, using a drum supplied by the Enniskillen Dragoon Guards. “We used to practice on Morning Parade but it is hard to beat time when you are standing still yourself. They would plead to have a quick march next time! We went to the University Sports Ground to play at a rucker match and went to Welbeck with the Scots Pipers and marched along the road through the Golden Gates at Welbeck Abbey.”

“We were proud to have a WAAF band at Norton. We marched to St James's, all the way round the road.” “A WAAF band of drums and bugles always played as we marched to St James's. If you were on camp you attended Church Parade; it was not held every week. The RAF padre, the Rev. Pegge, visited the camp to give us teaching for



*WAAF Ethel France, Norton Avenue, below Herdings.. opposite the guard room of the No. 16 Balloon Centre.*

Confirmation and I was confirmed at St James's by the Bishop of Derby.”

## Inspection by Commandant

A report of a visit by the Duchess of Gloucester, Air Commandant WAAF, in the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 5th April 1941, gives a good idea of the work of WAAF at the Centre. The Duchess spoke to telephone and teleprinter operators, surgery attendants, transport drivers, cooks and bandswomen.



*Drums and drummers of the No 16 Balloon Centre WAAF Band*

In the cookhouse, Mrs Cowley of Gleadless was in charge of a team of eight WAAF cooks. Ethel France, also of Gleadless, was the first WAAF at the Centre to be made a Corporal Rigger in charge of the fabric workers and so was chosen to be introduced to the Duchess.

A WAAF officer had been allowed to keep her dog, a cocker spaniel called Rusty. Everyone was lined up ready for inspection on the day of the Duchess's visit when, to the horror of the officer, Rusty trotted between the Duchess and the parade, carrying a string of sausages in its mouth!

In 1941 Group Captain N.W.R.Mawle, D.F.C., became the CO of No. 16 Balloon Centre and Squadron Officer Enid Spafford was the chief WAAF officer. “Ma'am Spaff” seems to have been popular with all ranks.

The CO liked the Centre to be kept in an immaculate state; every brick was painted white! He was perhaps not too keen on women in the Mess because about 9 p.m. he would hint that WAAF officers should go to their quarters, “so we went to our hut, the Retreat. It is still standing; one of the few buildings on the site now.”

## Air Training Corps 1941

At the end of January 1941 the Air Training Corps was established and within a few weeks 2,000 people had volunteered, forming 10 Squadrons. Norton was the base for 367 Squadron,

Sheffield South. Many ex-RFC men volunteered to act as ATC officers and went for refresher courses at Norton.

A De Havilland Gypsy Moth, G-AAEE, was given to Sheffield Wing ATC on 24th May 1941 by Major R. Senior and handed over at No.16 Balloon Centre, to be used on the ground for training purposes.

The Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 13th June 1941, records that the Duke of Kent had visited the Sheffield Wing ATC and a "North Midlands barrage balloon station" on the previous day. The Duke inspected the RAF trainees at Norton and watched WAAF repairing and patching the fabric of balloons. He asked the WAAF about their pre-war job and one girl told him that she had acted on the London stage.

## **A new stage in the war**

As the war progressed, more men were needed overseas. The demand for trained manpower of all kinds was so great that a serious shortage developed within the country. Balloon crews went to other parts of England and to the Mediterranean. The only way to keep up a defensive balloon barrage throughout Britain was to train women to do the job, so in January 1941 the Air Officer Commanding Balloon Command was asked to consider employing women as Balloon Operatives.

An advert asking for WAAF recruits to take over the balloon barrage states:

"It's a fine healthy life for women who are fit and strong and fond of the open air. You must be 5ft.1in. tall or over and aged between 17 yrs 6 mths and 43 yrs. After training you will be posted to a balloon site where you will live and work in a small community of about a dozen or so. When fully trained your minimum pay is 3/- a day and all found.

A Serviceman's wife does NOT lose her allowances on joining up and she IS granted her leave to coincide with her husband's leave, subject only to urgent Service considerations.

Single girls born between 1st Jan 1918 and 30th June 1922 come under the National Service Act and must go to an Employment Exchange not a Recruiting Centre."

When substitution of WAAF for RAF was being investigated, Mr Webb was chosen from all of the winch drivers to demonstrate the new winch system of hauling a balloon right down to



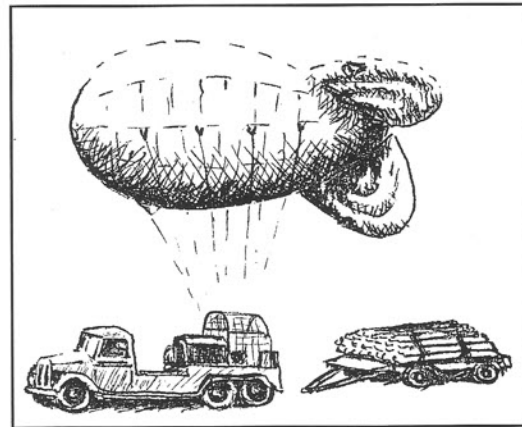
“bed”. Despite being posted sick at the time, he managed to do this, at the Broadfield Road site, in front of “top brass”. He was excused collar and tie for this job and wore a roll-neck pullover. The system made things somewhat easier for the WAAF because it used a power-driven bollard (windlass) at the side of the winch vehicle to haul the balloon, instead of rope and blocks, but it was still a very strenuous job.

Medical Officers thought that balloon work would be too hard for women and might affect their ability to have children. Some did have problems later but others found that they became physically stronger. It was suggested that twenty two women would be needed in one crew but this figure was brought down to twelve (one Sergeant, one Corporal, ten aircraftwomen).

Twenty volunteers from Sheffield were taken by Ethel France to Cardington, where they formed part of the “A Amazon” Flight. They spent two months there, living in tents in glorious weather, and were fully trained by the end of June 1941. The whole Flight then came to Sheffield, which had been chosen for the “WAAFization experiment”.

Shortly afterwards a local newspaper printed an article about the “strapping members of the WAAF stationed somewhere in the North” who were operating on three balloon sites. It stated, “The girls have their own huts on each site and live there, sleeping in comfortable bunks” but this is not borne out by a photograph of one of the sites, showing bell tents on a playing field at Shirecliffe. “We went to local houses for a bath. Mrs Bingham in Teynham Road was kind, giving me supper afterwards.”

The experiment was a great success. By the end of July, women crews were deployed on eight Sheffield sites, comprising D Flight of 939 Squadron. Over one thousand WAAF officers, NCOs and airwomen moved into the area for training and by December 1941 the WAAF were operating most of the balloons.



*Barrage  
balloon,  
winch vehicle  
and gas  
cylinder trailer.*

## **Difficult and dangerous work**

It was a very dangerous job at times, especially if the balloon was dragged about in a high wind, and it was very tiring, too. Fordson winch vehicles were used to pay out and wind in the heavy cables. It was important that all parts of the cable winch and vehicle were tested daily.

“Operating the winch was rather like driving a car without a steering wheel.” The operator sat above the winch engine in a cage which was made from wire mesh fastened over two curved metal bars. This gave some protection against loose or broken cables, which lashed about with considerable force. “The girls had some severe injuries. The steel hawsers cut their hands and could inflict horrible damage when they broke. They often lost part of a finger by this means and sometimes trapped their fingers in the winch.”

Small trailers carried 36 hydrogen gas cylinders which could all be opened at the same time in order to inflate a balloon at speed. All hydrogen at Norton was supplied by ICI. Great care was taken but a resident of Millmount Road at that time tells of seeing a barrage balloon on fire in Meersbrook Park.

Balloons also “escaped” occasionally. Any material which came to earth from damaged balloons was gathered up swiftly by local people. It made good strong shopping bags and one man found it ideal for covering a motor-bike parked in the open.

Some of the WAAF thought that girl munitions workers had an easy time compared with their spartan life on balloon sites. A visit was arranged to a major steel works, where an officer and about twenty girls spent the whole day, and a return visit to Norton was made by the munitions workers. As a result, they all appreciated the hardships endured by the others; the heat and noise in the works, the cold and danger on the sites.

## **Training at Norton**

WAAF officers at Norton cared for the crews on the sites. Sometimes they lived away from the Balloon Centre for a while. One remembers living at The Knoll, Handsworth, with another WAAF officer and two RAF officers, visiting sites in Attercliffe, Darnall and Handsworth. She says in a letter in a local magazine, “They were a splendid lot of women - tough, brave, uncomplaining and cheerful, doing a very dangerous job.”

The Norton WAAF who were in the first Flights to train at Cardington returned to Sheffield as Sergeant or Corporal in charge of a balloon crew. After a few months, Ethel France then went

back to Cardington as an Instructor, with the rank of Flight Sergeant. She was later awarded the British Empire Medal for her work.

Following the success of the WAAF balloon operators in Sheffield, training began at No.16 Balloon Centre and the other Centres throughout Britain. The CO at Norton was now Wg Cdr R.B. Dowling, "a considerate and popular Commanding Officer."

Girls trained at the Centre for up to six weeks. "The WAAF quarters were near the hangars. A few permanent girls were there too and the NCOs slept at one end of the huts." In the balloon shed at Norton there was a central gantry with a block and tackle running along it. This was used to unload a balloon, "no light weight", from its lorry.

The next stage was to work on a training site, which seems usually to have been the City Surveyor's Ground, Heeley Bank. Some came back to Norton later, to take tests in order to become a Leading Aircraftwoman (LACW) and so receive more pay.

"The training was complicated and some of us had a struggle to get through. We were put on a charge once. The two Balloon Op's on duty at a site were not allowed to go together to wake the relief guard but one night we did this, without thinking, unfortunately just as a WAAF officer and RAF Sergeant arrived. The Sergeant started the winch engine, making a pointed demonstration that it had been left unguarded."

"Two of us together did guard duty on the site, 2 hours on and 4 hours off. We carried a torch, a truncheon and a whistle. It could be quite creepy because eerie whistling and sighing noises came from the balloon. The Sergeant arranged the duty rota. Sometimes we had time off, using a 24 hour pass, otherwise we worked through the week and weekend."

## **Life on site**

In addition to their "best blue" uniform, WAAF balloon crews were issued with warm kit, consisting of airman's rough serge battle-dress top and trousers; seaman's pullover, stockings and sou'wester; grey woollen knee-length under garment; clog type hob-nailed boots and rubber boots; dungarees; beret. Some were given a Sheffield-made pocket knife. When the Balloon Op's re-mustered in October 1944, they were issued with blue slacks and 2 blue overall coats to replace their heavy kit. A Norton WAAF recalled that any missing kit had to be paid for. She was charged 2s.6d. for a missing undergarment!

Good food was also necessary and all WAAF on balloon sites received three meals a day, with RAF rations. The girls took weekly turns at being the cook. A 1940 menu includes plenty

of porridge, baked beans, cabbage, corned beef, boiled jam roll and cocoa. “We drank gallons of cocoa. I honestly believe it was that which kept us going during long periods of the night with little sleep.”

At Cricket Inn Road the site was next to the abattoir. “A very kind ARP Warden brought us steaks from the abattoir. It was some time before we discovered that they were horsemeat but we were assured that they came from very high quality horses which the owners could not feed in wartime.”

As well as a thorough grounding in operating a balloon, all personnel received general training. They were told to remember that their work was covered by the Official Secrets Act and that they must be careful not to give away information. When off duty, in trains or pubs, on the telephone or at the hairdresser's, they may be off guard.

One WAAF has sent extracts from her notebook concerning kit inspection, the use of anti-gas equipment, the range of official forms, the role of WAAF police and possible offences. The latter included having hands in pockets, dirty buttons, wearing coloured scarves and singing and shouting in the street!

“We were going home one night, about 2 a.m., and started to sing to cheer ourselves up. A policeman arrived on site the next evening and asked who had been making a disturbance in the night. The Sergeant was cross and asked if the songs had been “dirty” ones! When we assured her that they were not, she let us off.”

To avoid the offences of hair below the collar and wearing coloured hair ribbon, “We cut a piece from the top of an old stocking, pulled it on to our head and tucked our hair into it in a tidy roll.” [Ask your Granny how to do this!]



*March Past, Warship Week 1940. No. 16 Centre WAAF contingent led by Squadron Officer Spafford.*

“We had to keep clean, especially on the balloon sites. The water supply was only cold water and we put that in galvanised or enamel bowls. Once a week, if we could manage to heat some water, we had a bath and washed our hair. There was a wartime regulation which said that a depth of only four inches of water could be used in a bath.”

Another ex-WAAF recalls, “It was not much fun at Petre Street. The only water supply was through a stand-pipe so the WAAF went once a week to the public baths. We marched down, taking our own towel, and took the opportunity to wash our personal laundry at the same time.”

A Norton man remembers, when he was a boy, seeing WAAF marching to Park Baths from the balloon site below Skye Edge. “Once we threw snowballs at the WAAF and they broke rank and threw some back.” An ex-WAAF at the 1994 reunion laughed and said, “Yes, we did, several times.”

## **Medical care**

There were well equipped sick quarters at the Balloon Centre and the Sheffield hospital specialists helped when needed. Mr Webb said, “Two of the Medical Officers at one time were Wing Commander James and Squadron Leader Connell. Once I was very ill and was taken by ambulance to Norton where Sqn Ldr Connell's father came to see me. Colonel Connell was a consultant at a Sheffield hospital.”

A Balloon Operator said that MO James looked after their health very carefully. A RAF van took them up to Norton from their site for regular check-ups.

“We were supposed to use our own comb and brush but one girl just used the first comb to hand and to our horror we were all taken by ambulance to No.16 Balloon Centre for treatment for head lice.”

A WAAF officer recalled, “The Sick Quarters at Norton were very large and very well equipped. Staff included two RAF Medical Officers, a Nursing Sister (Officer) and a Dental Officer. Once I scalded myself badly when my hot water bottle broke as I got into bed. The MO was called to attend to me and told me, in quite a loud voice, to stand still while he applied some ointment. I was very surprised in the morning to find that I was charged with having a man in my room!”

## **“Naughty Boys”**

A disciplinary training establishment known as the Aircrew Refresher School (ACRS) moved to Norton on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1943. Often the airmen had broken only minor rules but had to be made aware that other men's lives might depend on maintenance of discipline.

“In 1943, air-crew began to arrive. They had mis- behaved, not in a criminal way, but by breaking rules. They were on camp for only two weeks, in the charge of a very stern character, Sqn Ldr Driscoll. We enjoyed being in the post room because we could look out of the window and watch them.”

“The presence of the “naughty boys” at Norton was welcomed by the WAAF. The RAF officers were all middle aged so it was wonderful to see some young men. Their offences were minor on the whole, maybe they had not paid a mess bill. We watched them being drilled, everything was at the double. They ate in the mess but it was absolutely forbidden to talk to them. One evening we had changed into our best blues to go to the mess and when we opened the hut door we saw a circle of the “naughty boys” standing there, weeing!”

“In 1944, a Wellington Bomber crew called “Whittaker's Rabble” disappeared for a while (from a Yorkshire RAF station). When I asked where they had been, they replied, ‘Oh, the naughty boys' school, Norton!’”

The ACRS was transferred to 21 Group and was disbanded in July 1945

## **No.16 Balloon Centre to RAF Norton**

As the amount of bombing in the Sheffield area lessened, the balloon service and supply facilities were gradually reduced. Balloons were lifted for the last time on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1943 and HQ Norton No.939/940 Squadron came to an end three days later. WAAF Balloon Op's continued to work in the south of England until October 1944 when the London area was handed back to the RAF.

During the last two weeks of May 1943, the Motor Transport Service Unit (MTSU) of No.239 Maintenance Unit (MU) transferred to the Norton site from RAF Heywood and was re-named No.241 Maintenance Unit. Hundreds of motor vehicles and motor bicycles were stored in the buildings.

The end of the war in 1945 came without ceremony at the Norton site. The MU continued its work, changing to renovation of vehicles from 1947 to 1949. Norton then became an inactive site for two years.

The memories of the post-war period, particularly of No.3 Ground Radio and Radar Servicing Squadron (No.3GRSS), which moved to Norton in 1951, were still fresh in the minds of many men and women in 1995, when the first edition of *Norton in Wartime* was published.

RAF Norton became an active station from 1952 to 1965. Luckily, a fine and detailed account of this time has been written by Group Captain D.J.Read RAF (Ret'd), MA (Cantab) based upon documents at The National Archives (TNA) Kew; the Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon; the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence; and many personal memories.

This book, Royal Air Force Norton 1943-1965 was published on-line in 2010 and we strongly recommend that it is read by every one with an interest in the history of Norton and Sheffield.

A photograph in the Local Studies Library collection (K 78) shows the closing ceremony on 29th January 1965 when the RAF Ensign was hauled down. The last person left the site in September 1965.