

## **Written by Hilda Graty (nee Lynas)**

My father was John William Moon Lynas. He was born in Gosport and ran away from home when he was 12 years old to join the Queen's Navy. He saw action in the Boer war and World War One, and was a Life Member of the Royal British Legion.

I, Hilda Edith Lynas was born in February 1917 in Leeds in Yorkshire. I worked in Schofield's store in Leeds until 1939 when I left to be married. I married Douglas Gordon Stanley (b. 15<sup>th</sup> July 1920) after being engaged for a couple of years, on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1939. We had hoped to go on a cruise with his parents on the SS Orford when War was declared. The Orford later went down with all hands.

Douglas joined the RASC in Leeds but was posted to Richmond in Yorkshire before being sent abroad. I had been staying in a miner's cottage and saw the group marching off. I returned to a temporary home with Douglas' replacement of the aluminium company in which he worked in Leeds, and my parents had been housed in a one bedroom flat. I remember seeing a banner which read 'Join the ATS' so I went straight into their office, and I was told that contingent was being sent to London, as the recruitment there was in short supply. Of course I had to have a medical, and the doctor who examined me stated that because I'd had a burst appendix and Peritonitis as a result, he could not let me pass. I argued with him and we came to a kind of agreement. He would pass my medical if I promised to leave the Army if my health problems got worse. He also said that he bet I would be out of the Army within 1 month. I did 5 years! Just 3 days later I was on an Army lorry travelling to King's Cross. I went from London to Aldermaston by train.

We had no uniform or equipment for roughly 4 weeks, before being posted back to Buckingham Palace Road in London, and each day at Kensington Telephone Exchange where I was taught by the Supervisor.

I was with the East Surrey Regiment at Kingston on Thames operating the switchboard in the entrance, as the walls there were thicker. Two steps from there was the entrance to where the soldiers stood guard with rifles and bayonets. When I got up to leave after my shift and walked to the entrance, I suddenly remembered I'd left my book at the switchboard and as I walked back towards it I heard a loud bang. I turned to see that the rookie guard had inadvertently discharged his rifle and a bullet had lodged itself into the wall – the exact area I had just vacated.

Although the walls were several inches thick, when the building next door suffered a direct hit all the plugs on my switchboard fell out! We slept in huts in Richmond Park and were blown out of bed one night with a falling bomb. There was considerable bombing around Kingston and it was common to see whole shop windows blown out, and clothes, including lingerie, hanging on tree branches.

I was then posted to the East Surrey Regiment at Kingston upon Thames for 2 years. Whilst at the East Surrey regiment in Richmond Park, the Queen was doing car mechanic training at the same time. The

East Surrey Regiment moved to Canterbury and I was sent to the Coldstream Guards, and then transferred to the Scots Guards and I was made up to Lance Corporal.

The regiment was then posted to Canterbury and the officers in charge said I would go with them but I was instead posted to the guards' camp in Purbright. I was attached to the Coldstream Guards and manned the Purbright telephone exchange. I was then transferred to the Scots Guards before being made NCO Lance Corporal. We were trained by the Scots Guards Drill Sergeant to take part in a competition at Chelsea Barracks. During intense heat we had been doing Scots Guards drill and not ATS drill, and because of this we came in 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Sometime after we had the option to either train for driving or the Royal Corps of Signals, so I chose to go to Kingston Hill to be re-trained for the Signals, which involved all aspects of communication, including bomb disposal and manning the Ops room. Having passed my exams I was posted to Fishbourne Halt in Chichester. We were billeted in Nissan huts in a field where the Ops room was. There were 16 of us on watch at all times.

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 1943 I was sent back home to Leeds on compassionate grounds as my Mum had suffered a stroke. I had applied together with my friend Betty Thomas to volunteer for the Middle East and we were accepted, but as I had to go back to Leeds I didn't get to go after all. That was a shame as I had planned to meet up with Douglas in Cairo. Douglas had been with the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Division and sent me a photo of himself driving Rommel's car. He was sent to Sicily and was shot by a German sniper on his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1943.

I returned to Chichester but was then posted to Wickham Court in West Wickham in Bromley. We lived on the premises and worked with security, then moved to the Ops room which is now Bromley College. I manned army boards for the RAF and worked in conjunction at Biggin Hill. There was a threat to bomb the Ops room at the Bromley College site, and at Biggin Hill there was a direct hit on the safe quarters (Air Force shelters) and all were killed.

I took part in drill parade at Chelsea Barracks. After we were given the opportunity to transfer to learn to drive, or work for Royal Corps Signals and I chose the signals as it had better opportunities.

I ended up at Biggin Hill and some of the time we had to sleep in Chislehurst Caves, but this meant walking on planks over water. Sometimes we would sneak to a local B&B in Widmore Road for a good night's sleep for the price of half a crown!

One particular night I had permission to sleep in the billet as I had a doctor's appointment the following day. I could see a bright light and could hear heavy machinery and the sound of glass falling. I got out of bed and pushed open the door, which actually fell over, before discovering the cause of the racket. It had been a Doodlebug and I spent the rest of the night pulling broken glass out of my hair and head.

Early one morning I saw many chocolates and leaflets on the ground, and the leaflets were written in German. A loudspeaker could be heard telling everyone in the neighbourhood not to eat the chocolates!

In the middle of Chichester was a stone water trough, and almost every night a Canadian soldier would end up in it after a few drinks. We girls were taken to an airfield for a tour and we were to be collected at 11pm. The drinks room was very pretty and colourful and bedecked with flowers. Unfortunately, some uninvited French Canadians came into the room and smashed everything to pieces. Betty and I got to the ground and edged our way along the wall. Betty bumped into someone from the Black watch and went off with him, while I spent the evening talking to a young Canadian lad. My driver took me back to the Nissan Huts without Betty. Sometime during the night there was a huge crash and I heard a drawling Betty shout out 'Mickie! Mickie – I've come home in a bloody tank!' I got Betty into bed and spent most of the night pushing her back in every time she fell out. She needed a little help with kneeling down in church the following day!

I was eventually discharged from the Army after 5 years, to be married to John in 1945.