

*Margaret Martin  
(Golspie)*

Until recently I didn't realise how much the W.L.A. contributed to the war effort. I always thought the reason I joined the Land Army was self indulgence. I was born and reared in the industrial town of Middlesbrough. I left school at the age of fourteen and got a job of national importance making soldiers battledress blouses. This was factory work with dozens of industrial machines; they were both noisy and dangerous, many of the workers were injured including myself. I remember having the forefinger of my right hand trapped between the needle and the machine. Once I managed to attract the attention of one of my workmates I was rushed to the clinic and given first aid. I enjoyed this job for a while, however I became allergic to the material so I had to leave this job and move onto another job of national importance, as all jobs were at that time.



*Margaret being Presented with  
her Land Army Medal by  
by Flower Thomson*

Like lots of towns and cities Middlesbrough was heavily bombed, thankfully our home only suffered the blast, which meant we often had ceilings down and windows blasted out and the inside of the house covered in soot. It was on one of these occasions I was helping my mother to clean up the mess, when my friend from the other end of town arrived on her bike to see if we had survived the bombing and asked if I would be able to go on a bike ride with her. My mother said off you go and enjoy yourselves you have helped me all morning, so off we went out into the country. You can't imagine the sense of peace and quiet we felt.

The war had its lighter moments, like the time there was a night raid, my mother, two brothers and sister had gone to the air raid shelter leaving dad and I to lock up the house. When we heard the machine guns of the plane above us, at that very moment my dad gave out a yelp and grabbed the backside of his trousers, I cried "dad, dad, have you been shot?" to which he replied, "no it's a b....y mouse that's run up my trouser leg." He released his hold on the mouse and it dropped to the ground. We then made our way safely to the air raid shelter. The memory of the mouse incident kept coming back to me and I kept having fits of giggles only to find my dad giving me a perishing look which meant behave yourself.

After that day in the country I had a strong urge to join the Land Army. In those days if you wanted anything your mother always said “see what your dad says”, so poor dad, I nagged him relentlessly for permission to join, the answer was always NO. Then one day he put on this broad Yorkshire accent and said to me “what if the farmer says get int’ meadow and stick fork int’ muck”; I said that’s what I will do then.

Not long after this, wanting to join the Land Army had to be put on hold as fate took over in the form of diphtheria. I had a long spell in an isolation hospital, then the day came when I was well enough to go home. The doctor had a word with dad, he told him I wouldn’t be able to ride a bike etc., the whole family looked after me so well that I was soon riding my bike, then the nagging started again and dad said yes I could join the Land Army.

My uniform arrived, then I was on my way to Fyling Old Hall in Fylingdale Robin Hood’s Bay. The questions I asked the farmer when he showed me round the cow byre was which were the bulls, he said he didn’t keep bulls on his farm. I doubted him, then when I realised he really didn’t, I thought dad was right when he told me I didn’t know anything about farming. I thought really I am a towny, however I was a fast learner. Dad was right again as my first job was sticking fork int’ Muck out int’ meadow and I loved it. This was in November on the North Yorkshire moors. I enjoyed my time here even though every time I sat at the table to write a letter home the farmer would put his bare feet on the table and ask me to file his corns. I said I had never filed corns in my life, he passed me this file with a rough side and a smooth side, I thought I would file his corns then maybe I would get peace to write my letter. Until one day he asked, so I took hold of his toe, turned the file to the rough side and gave his corns a real good filing, so much so that he was shouting that’s enough. Peace at last he never asked me again, I wonder why!

After my time in Fylingdale I was transferred to Thirsk Land Army Hostel where there were lots of girls from all over Britain. We used to hold dances in the large dining room with lots of good food laid on. It was at one of these dances that I met my husband, a local lad that had just been demobbed from the Highland Light Infantry after six years service. The doors to the dance had been locked but one of the lads looked out of the window said “George is home,” opened the window and let him in.

Naughty but nice and my family and myself are forever grateful to him for opening that window.

I worked on a dairy farm about five miles from Thirsk, so I had to cycle 10 miles a day, six days a week, I only worked half a day on Saturday. One day I was doing my washing in the laundry which consisted of a large table, scrubbing brushes, soap, sinks, a wringing machine or mangle and a boiler house to dry our clothes. The door opened and there stood a five foot tall girl in a Land Army uniform that would have been too big for a six footer, not only that it was a scorching hot day and her make-up had turned bright orange, this was a girl I used to work with in Middlesbrough. She joined the Land Army and asked to be posted with me and asked if she could also work with me and that's what happened.

Once I recovered from a fit of the giggles, I lent her some of my uniform until she got her own exchanged. The first time she had to go into the cow byre, the sweat poured from her, then she made the sign of the cross. I said just talk to the cows they are very quiet, she soon got over her fears and was very good at her job. Sometimes we had to get the vet to the animals. Our local vet was James Heriot, we knew him as Alf White. I once wrote to him of some of my farming memories and I received a very nice reply.

The winter of 1947 was very hard with snow-drifts like huge icebergs. The prisoners of war were asked to clear the roads but they refused, so the Land Girls had to do it myself included. The newspapers soon got hold of the story and it was front page news. George and I married in June 1947 and settled down to a happy family life.



*Flower Thomson with Margaret and family*

(It was so nice to see two members of same family being recognised  
Margaret and her daughter's husband Gordon Raspin)