



# WARTIME MEMORIES

Betty Walker



Excerpt from 'Wartime Memories' by Betty Walker

Because there were shortages of everything, we looked after the things we had. That wasn't always easy to do though. My sister was stationed in the headquarters of Five Group at Grantham in Lincolnshire, and I was in Four Group at Marston Moor. One day she came to see me and I went to the railway station to meet her. As she was much taller than me I could see her easily. I could see this WAAF coming along, and her uniform was a disgrace. Of course, I was always very smart so when we got on the bus I had to speak to her about it.

"Chris, I don't like to say this, but ... you smell," I said.

"We all do," she replied.

"Why haven't you got your good blues on?" I wanted to know.

"This is them," she said.

"What does the warrant officer say when you come in dressed like this?"

"Well," she said, "they're all dressed the same!"

Chris, you see, was in a new camp, but not one of the good ones, as the Canadians and Americans had got them. The British got the ones that had just been built and there was no proper water yet. They were very strictly rationed for drinking water and the water that they had to do their laundry with was dirty-looking and brown. So if they washed their clothes, the uniforms ended up looking rusty. I was in private billets at the time, with a good landlady, so I didn't have that problem.

When my sister came to stay with me, she had to

sleep in my bed with me. However, I told her she wasn't getting in it like that. So I made her take all her clothes off, then I gave her a Jaegar top and some blue gym trousers to wear while I put the gas boiler on and washed everything. Now Chris was tall and thin but I was the opposite so she couldn't go out like that because my clothes didn't properly fit her. She had to wait till they'd all dried and been pressed. She was only with me for 48 hours leave but when she got back to her station they all said, "How come you've got new uniform and we haven't?" So she told them that her sister had washed everything, from the skin out!



Betty Walker in 2018, on her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Betty Falconer was one of nine. Growing up in the 20s and 30s, rural poverty was all around, even in the idyllic village of Milnathort in Scotland. When she started work as a children's nanny, however, Betty had only one child to look after and was waited on hand and foot. But her employer's luxury London apartment was only the start of her journey.

When War broke out, Betty wanted to do her bit. A few short months after joining up, she was in the thick of it – in the Operations Room of an RAF station. In autumn 1941, the aircrews of Bomber Command were gearing up for the long campaign of night raids over Germany. And Betty and the other Watchkeepers were waiting for them to return.