

65 years on - An Ex-Met' WAAF returns to Oban and Tiree

Having completed my square-bashing in Wilmslow, the Met' training course in London and teleprinter course in Cranwell, I arrived in the early spring of 1945, to my first posting in Oban way up on the west coast of Scotland.

I have a memory of some wonderful mountains and lochs and of being met at Oban station and taken to Bumbank - a house on the Dunollie Road, just off the Corran Esplanade. I went to the RAF HQ at Dungallan House, along the Sound of Kerrera, to do my duties. It was all quite bewildering for a girl of 18 years who had never been away from home before, but I had always longed for adventure.

The work was very interesting and came quite easily to me after my good grounding in the WJAC, where I had gained the rank of Warrant Officer. I remember my first partner who was an airman named Ben from Benbecula - at first I could not understand a word he said, but we soon become good pals.

Doing the observations meant going up on to the roof. It was fantastic to see all the flying-boats bobbing on the water. I don't know if they were Sunderlands or Catalinas. Sadly that squadron soon left and that meant that our office had to close down. I was silly enough to admit to being a typist, so our senior forecaster put me to work on typing out the whole inventory. He was such a kind man though, he called everyone 'old horse' on the telephone!

I didn't have to feel too sad as, around that Easter, I was posted to somewhere even more exciting- the beautiful Isle of Tiree (the Isle of Barley to give it it's Gaelic name). For six months I was stationed at this magical place in the Inner Hebrides, admiring the blue skies and seas, the white sandy beaches and carpet of flowers in all their wild profusion. It was truly a dream posting.

When VE Day came I remember feeling a wave of relief, but it seemed a million miles from my childhood of sirens, black-outs and bombs, and as we were all involved in meteorology, we carried on just the same as before. 518 Squadron still flew the Halifax on regular sorties over the Atlantic and we Met' WAAFs still went on doing obs', plotting charts and making tea for the tired crews, when they returned to base after gruelling flights of up to 12 hours.

Now 65 years on I have just had the opportunity to return and re-live all my wonderful memories.

2010- Oban - such a delightful town. It is totally unspoilt. McCaig's Tower still dominates the heights above (but now with lovely flower gardens added). The MacBraynes ferries still sail in and out, taking people through the Sound of Mull to the distant Isles. The warmth of the local people is still the same as before. A great new feature is the 'War and Peace Museum' - just along from the sea-front

hotels where I was ^{later} billeted in a splendid building on the sea-front. This is the best wartime related museum I have ever seen. I really recommend a visit - Old Oban ^{Times} Building, Corran Esplanade, Oban, Argyll, PA34 5 PX.

www.obanmuesum@aol.com . One of the founders was the local historian - Mike Hughes** author of 'The Hebrides at War' and 'Stornoway in WW2'.

I walked along to Dungallan House, (now a hotel) and looked out at all the familiar views of Kerrera Island and the distant hills of Mull. I saw a beautiful sunset over the far Scottish hills and looked forward to the next day with mounting excitement.

~~Tiree~~ - but oh - the weather had the last laugh. On reaching the pier one could hardly see the ferry, let alone the islands. All was shrouded in a thick sea fog! However, I could only carry on with my plans, so I sailed away into the mist and hoped for the best. On arrival at Scarinish Harbour the mist was as thick as ever, but I was met by a Tirean lady from Kennedy's Car Hire and she took me on a tour. The old RAF site was gone but there is still a small civil airport (no planes were able to fly that day!), and some of the old buildings have been put to use. There is a very nice Rural Centre with lots of local information and a welcome cafe. I was taken to meet an Islander whose croft stands right by the sandy bay at Crossapol, where we WAAFs used to swim. I remembered so well the camp dances when the band played eightsome reels to the delight of ^{the} Islanders. The most nostalgic part of all was being driven across to the Atlantic side and to walk on the deserted sands of Balephetrish Bay, where I gained my main objective, to collect another souvenir pebble to remind me of this pristine paradise.

It is always a risk to return to places you have known and loved in the past, but this time it really paid off.

Greta Trevers June 2010
