

Leading Aircraft Woman Margaret L M Doncaster No. 2001460



Date of Birth 16th May 1923

Served in the WAAF from 1st July 1941 to 15th March 1946

Joined as an Orderly and shortly afterwards was reclassified first to ACW1 then to LACW in June 1943. Overseas service from 14th February 1945 to 12th March 1946

WAAF trade, Radio Telephony Operator (RTO), proficiency considered superior

Her commendation read as follows 'She has shown a keen and intelligent approach to her work and can be recommended as a very acceptable member of any staff. Her conduct has at all times been very good.' Dated 4th February 1946. (Att 1 Service Record Book)

At the outbreak of WW2 Margaret was working at United Dairies as an office administrator in Park Royal, West London sending out customers' bills and invoices to company accounts, and at the age of 17 she decided to follow her brother Arthur into the RAF. On joining she was sent to RAF Cranwell and began a 3 months training course as a Radio Telephony Operator.

On completion of her training Margaret was posted to RAF Wartling near Eastbourne, East Sussex. RAF Wartling had become operational in 1941 and was used to control fighter aircraft and guide them towards approaching German aircraft, operational staff were housed in caravans until a permanent brick-built operations centre was erected in 1943. She was billeted at a family home with another WAAF in the town (Att 2 Picture of family group), normally they would be living on the RAF station but due to the numbers now being trained who were placed in limited camp facilities she was moved off base.

Margaret recalled that one day she was in the kitchen with the mother and her 2 children when there was a German air raid along the South coast with bombs dropping nearby. The

house was not equipped with an air raid shelter but instead had a stout metal table bolted to the floor, she and the mother huddled the children under the table until the danger had passed and they came out unscathed. Being on the coast had advantages and when the weather was good, they could relax on the beach. (Att 3 Picture of beach group)

Margaret was based in the Ops room behind glass screens above the plotting room so that she could see the exact movements of aircraft being plotted on the board below. She became the 'eyes and ears' of the RAF pilots who were intercepting the enemy or on night time air raid missions over enemy territory. In direct contact with the aircrew, she gave the position information for interception, and using the latest radar technology her work was highly secretive and specialised.

Although she remained very professional at all times, she said that occasionally her emotions got the better of her when pilots she was in contact with were shot down, as she was the last person some of them spoke to and she could hear their suffering until the contact was lost.

With the air war in Britain declining, she was posted to the Far East in the beginning of 1945, travelling on a troop ship bound for Bombay, India. The convoy stopped at Gibraltar due to the threat of German U-boats operating in the vicinity. Her journey took six weeks in total and by all accounts it was an enjoyable trip as she had never been abroad before and it was an exciting experience. On arrival Margaret's group were stationed at a transit camp before being transferred to RAF Trincomalee, Ceylon. Apart from the RAF personnel in the group there were service men and women from the Army and Navy and it was known as the Combined Forces Base. The daily transfer to the Operations Centre was by RAF launch across the harbour in good weather or by lorry when the sea crossing was not possible. During off duty periods she enjoyed recreational activities and recounted a time when she was taken out in a sailing dinghy which she was nervous about, the boat capsized in strong winds and she became trapped under the boat, an experience that led to a phobia about the water for the rest of her life.

After 6 months at Trincomalee she was posted to an Operations centre in Kandy, in the south of the island where Margaret spent a further 6 months before being moved on to Delhi, India at RAF Palam. During the time spent in Delhi she lived in a camp based at the racecourse and with the war in the East declining her normal role became over staffed so she was assigned to general administration duties until repatriation to the UK in 1946.

Whilst based in Delhi Margaret was lucky enough to attend functions laid on by the RAF Palam Sergeants mess on the 23rd December for a dance and social evening (Att 4 Invitation to dance) and to have her name selected to attend a grand Christmas ball and celebrations hosted by the Maharajah of Jodhpur and held at the Palace in Jodhpur. Along with 19 other RAF personnel she was flown to Jodhpur some 350 miles southwest of Delhi for 4 days of celebrations.

In February 1946 she was repatriated to the UK on the SS Orontes of the Orient Line during which she enjoyed some of the best food she'd had and judging from the breakfast, lunch and dinner menu from the 1st March 1946 she clearly made the most of her journey home.

(Att 5 Menu from steam ship)

Margaret married Jack Skinner in 1949 and together they had 4 children.

Compiled by Michael Skinner (son) assisted by sisters June and Diane, and brother Andrew



Att 2



Att 3



BREAKFAST

STEWED FIGS
FLAKED OATS

KIPPERED HERRINGS

GRILLED BACON WITH BUTTERED EGGS
AMERICAN DRY HASH CAKE

CHILDREN : BOILED EGGS

PRESERVES

TEA

COFFEE

LUNCHEON

FARMHOUSE SOUP

FISH AU GRATIN

~~OCCUP. PRINTANIERE~~

BRAISED STEAK

COLD MEATS

SAUCES SALAD PICKLES

MASHED POTATOES

BUTTER BEANS

BOILED DATE ROLL

CHEESE

COFFEE

CHILDREN : POACHED FISH, PURÉE OF VEGETABLES
MILK PUDDING

DINNER

POTAGE ESPAGNOLE

FILLETS OF HALIBUT, SALAMANDRE

ROAST PORK, APPLE SAUCE

BOILED POTATOES
CAULIFLOWER

APPLE TART

COFFEE

CHILDREN: SCOTCH COLLOPS, PURÉE OF VEGETABLES
STEWED APPLES WITH CUSTARD

2ND SALOON

S.S. "ORONTES"

FRIDAY, 1ST MARCH, 1946



R. A. J. Station, Palam
The W.D. Sgts and Sgts of the Sergeants Mess
present their compliments and
request the pleasure of the company of
the W.A.F.'s of the Paccouai Camp.

at a Dance and Social
in the Sergeants Mess on

Sunday 23rd December 1945.

TRANSPORT WILL
CALL AT
1945. HRS.
Dancing from 8.30 p.m. to ~~11.30~~ 11.30 P.M.

R. S. T. P.

CH. May 1945.
Sergeants Entertaining Committee

ROYAL AIR FORCE CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND RELEASE

R.A.F. Form 2520/11W

SERVICE PARTICULARS—

Service Number } 2001460 Rank L ACW.

W.A.A.F. trade (R.T.O.) RADIO TELEPHONE OPERATOR

Overseas Service 12.2.45 YEAR. 16 12.3.46

W.A.A.F. Character V.G. (see notes on back of certificate on opposite page)

Proficiency A SUPR. (" ")

B - (" ")

Decorations, Medals, Clasp, Mention in Despatches, Commendations, etc.

DEFENCE MEDAL.

Educational and Vocational Training Courses and Results ALL.

DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth 16.5.23 Height 5 FT. 4 INS.

Marks and Scars NIL.

Specimen Signature of Airwoman M. Doncaster

of M.L.M. DONCASTER.

The above-named airwoman served in the W.A.A.F. on full-time service,

from 1.7.41 to 29.1.46.

(Last day of service in unit before leaving for release and release leave).

Particulars of her Service are shown in the margin of this Certificate.

Brief statement of any special aptitudes or qualities or any special types of employment for which recommended:— This airwoman joined the W.A.A.F. as an orderly in 1941 and during the period 1940-41 was classified first to ACW1 and then to LACW1. She transferred to R.T.O. in June 43. She has shown a keen and intelligent approach to her work and can be recommended as a very acceptable member of any staff. Her conduct has at all times been very good.

Date 16.2.46. SQUADRON LEADER.

Signature of Officer Commanding