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**The Many Behind the Few: The Lives and Emotions of Erks
and WAAFs of RAF Bomber Command 1939 -1945.**

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Thesis submitted for
the degree of PhD in
History at the
University of
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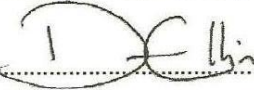
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DECLARATION

This thesis is the author's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the lives and emotions of male and female ground personnel who served in Bomber Command during the Second World War. Histories of Bomber Command usually focus on the flyers, or on the strategy of the bombing campaign. The experiences of four fifths of the service, the ground personnel, are often neglected. They are frequently reduced to two dimensional stereotypes, as the 'Erk' who serviced the aircraft, or the WAAF 'chop girl' whose sexual promiscuity presaged death. The RAF assigned personnel to different trades ranging from the most technical to the most mundane. The central theme of this thesis is the gendered hierarchy of trades within Bomber Command. It was constructed in part by widespread beliefs about fear, heroism and stoicism, the interconnected discourses of class and gender, and specific quirks of RAF culture. These included its trade selection process, dialect, pay scale, and trades' perceived importance to the *raison d'être* of Bomber Command. The hierarchy is important in explaining the experiences of ground personnel, as some personnel were overstretched while others felt that they were not 'doing their bit.' Bomber Command servicemen and women were part of a community that experienced high rates of air crew loss. This thesis also discusses their emotional responses to service life and the treatment by the RAF medical services of those who suffered breakdowns. In examining non-combatant military personnel who served on operational stations but were also part of the home front, my thesis will inform and bring together different areas of study. It gives a voice to an important but previously underrepresented group and in doing so,

contributes to the histories of the RAF, emotions, military medicine and psychiatry, as well as understandings of the wartime experience, work and citizenship.

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ABBREVIATIONS

In the 1940s, it was common to use a full-stop in between the letters of acronyms, (R.A.F. for example). Following modern practice however, I have omitted them, except where they are included in direct quotations.

A/C	Aircraft
ACH	Aircrafthand
AC1	Aircraftsman first Class
AC2	Aircraftsman Second Class
ACW2	Aircraftswoman Second Class
AM	Air Ministry
AMO	Air Ministry Order
AMCO	Air Ministry Confidential Order
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
AWL	Absent Without Leave
BCATP	British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
BMJ	British Medical Journal
CO	Commanding Officer
CTTB	Central Trade test Board
DAH	Disordered Action of the Heart
DGMS	Director General Medical Services
DI	Daily Inspection

DRO	Daily Routine Orders
DWAAF	Director Women's Auxiliary Air Force
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
ENSA	Entertainments National Service Association
FFI	Free From Infection
FPRC	Flying Personnel Research Committee
GD	General Duties or Ground Defence
HCU	Heavy Conversion Unit
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LAC	Leading Aircraftsman
LACW	Leading Aircraftswoman
LMF	Lack of Moral Fibre
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationary Office
MOA	Mass-Observation Archive
MO	Medical Officer
MOI	Ministry of Information
MRC	Modern Records Centre University of Warwick
MSU	Mobile Signals Unit
MT	Motor Transport
NAAFI	Navy Army and Air Force Institute
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NSA	National Service Act
NYDN	Not Yet Diagnosed Neuropsychiatric
ORB	Operational Record Book

OTU	Operational Training Unit
PNB	Pilot, Navigator, Bomb Aimer
PT	Physical Training
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFVR	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
RAFMH	Royal Air Force Museum Hendon
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RDF	Radio Direction Finding (Radar)
RT	Radio Telephone
SD	Special Duties
SSQ	Station Sick Quarters
TNA	The National Archives
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
VE Day	Victory in Europe Day (8 May 1945)
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WL	Wellcome Library
WMC	RAF Wickenby Memorial Collection
WOM	Wireless Operator/ Mechanic
WOP	Wireless Operator
WReN	Women's Royal Naval Service
WT	Wireless Telephone
YMCA	Young men's Christian Association

INTRODUCTION

Eric Sykes 'Ode to the Erk' (1942)

Wherever you walk, you will hear people talk,
Of the men who go up in the air.
Of the dare-devil way, they go into the fray;
Facing death without turning a hair.
They'll raise a cheer and buy lots of beer,
For a pilot who's home on leave;
But they don't give a jigger
For a flight mech or rigger
With nothing but 'props' on his sleeve.¹
They just say 'Nice day' and then turn away,
With never a mention or praise.
And the poor bloody 'erk' who does all the work;
Just orders his own beer And pays!

They've never been told of the hours in the cold
That he spends sealing Germany's fate.
How he works on a kite, till all hours of the night;
And then turns up next morning at eight.
He gets no rake-off for working till take off;
Or helping the aircrew prepare;
But whenever there's trouble, it's 'Quick at the double';
The man on the ground must be there.
Each flying crew could tell it to you;
They know what this man's really worth.
They know he's part of the RAF's heart,
Even though he stays close to earth.
He doesn't want glory, but please tell his story;
Spread a little of his fame around.
He's one of the few so give him his due;
Three cheers for the man on the ground.²

¹ The 'props' on his sleeve refers to the representation of a propeller which was the badge of rank of a leading Aircraftman (LAC).

² RAF Wickenby Memorial Collection (WMC), E. Sykes, 'Three Cheers For The Men On The Ground' *The Wickenby Register Newsletter*, (1988), No. 26, p. 8. This poem was written in 1942 by electrician LAC Eric Sykes in 1942. (Conversation with Geoff and Margret Sykes 27 June 2014.) It is frequently quoted on internet forums and on websites concerning the RAF during the Second World

Concentrating on RAF Bomber Command between 1939 and 1945, this thesis examines the lives and emotions of ‘WAAFs’ of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, and ‘Erks’, as low ranking RAF ground personnel were colloquially known.³ Throughout this thesis ‘ground personnel’ will refer to service personnel, of all ranks, and all trades who were not air crew; ‘ground crew’ refers only to those mechanics, riggers and fitters who worked directly on the aircraft. Flyers accounted for only 16 per cent of the home force, indeed between 1942 and 1944 there were more women in the service.⁴ At its peak in 1944, more than 190,000 male and female ground personnel worked to support around 36,000 Bomber Command air crew;⁵ ground personnel accounted for more than four-fifths of the population on an operational station. As the poem suggests, ground personnel acknowledged that, despite playing a vital role in the war, their importance was largely unrecognised; they are also often overlooked in popular and academic histories. Men and women from a wide variety of social groups, including exiles from occupied Europe, and volunteers from the British Empire and the Dominions, served in Bomber Command. Ground personnel included ‘professionals’ who joined in the interwar period, and volunteers and conscripts who were ‘in for the duration.’ Beginning with an examination of their recruitment and training, this thesis investigates what it was like

War. See for example: T. Bint, ‘626 Squadron and RAF Wickenby: The Ground crews’ (2012) <http://www.626-squadron.co.uk/groundcrew.htm> (accessed 22 January 2015). The actor and comedian Eric Sykes was a leading aircraftman in the RAF during the war. He joined in mid 1941 and after being trained as a wireless operator he served in a Mobile Signals Unit (MSU) in Europe after D-day. However, he was never posted to an operational aerodrome. See: E. Sykes, *If I Don’t Write it, Nobody Else Will*, (London, Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 131. Songs with similar sentiments were sung at station concert parties. See for example Ward- Jackson W. C. (ed) *Airman’s Song Book*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1945), p.168, 173.

³ It is likely that the etymology of ‘Erk’ was a bastardisation of ‘aircraftsman’, or its acronym, A.C., the lowest rank in the RAF.

⁴ Air Ministry, *Royal Air Force Personnel Statistics for the period 3rd September 1939 to 1st September 1945*, (Air Ministry, 1946), pp. 1-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.6-31.

to serve as ground personnel on an operational bomber station. Engaging with the history of emotions, it asks how they coped with hardship, while the final chapters consider the medical treatment of those who were perceived to be insufficient to the task.

Historiography

The historiography of the RAF prioritises ‘the cult of the flyer’,⁶ while social and cultural histories, and the historiography of wartime mental health, usually examine either combatants or civilians. The lives and experiences of non-combatant ground personnel are infrequently addressed. In the political context of the Cold War and its aftermath, historians have debated the ethics and morality of the bombing, its economic effectiveness, and strategic counter-factuals as new evidence became available. The materiel and strategies of RAF have been compared and contrasted to the USAAF, and there is a multitude of other publications on Bomber Command.⁷ First published in 2001, Mark Connelly examines representations of Bomber Command during and after the war and how the modern impression of Bomber Command has been constructed,⁸ and most recently Richard Overy considered the technological, strategic and political influences on the bombing war. From both sides of the conflict, he discusses the experiences of those who carried out the bombing,

⁶ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008), p. 201.

⁷ See for example: P. Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back 1940-1945*, (London, Harper press, 2007), M. Middlebrook, *The Nuremburg Raid: 31-31 March 1944*, (London, Cassell, 2000), D. Richards, *The Hardest Victory: RAF Bomber Command in the Second World War*, (London, Penguin, 2001) or K. Wilson, *Bomber Boys: The Ruhr, the Dambusters and bloody Berlin*, (London, Casell, 2005), A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: was the Allied bombing of civilians in WWII a necessity or a crime?* (London, Bloomsbury, 2006).

⁸ M. Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A History of Bomber Command*, (London, Tauris, 2014).

and those who were unfortunate enough to be targeted.⁹ Some examinations of the psychological effects of combat on air crew have been published, and several studies have considered the RAF policy on ‘lack of moral fibre’ (LMF).¹⁰ In *The Flyer*, Martin Francis examines the place of the RAF airman in British popular culture during the war. He discusses gender and how the concepts of courage, cowardice and fears impacted on airmen’s masculinity, but in focusing on ‘the flyer’ Francis does not examine the overwhelming majority of RAF personnel.¹¹ As yet there has been very little academic interest in ground personnel. Some work has been published on women in the WAAF, but this tends to be anecdotal and descriptive rather than analytical.¹² An exception is the feminist historian Tessa Stone, who examined women of the WAAF through the lens of the ‘double helix’ model of gender relations; she focuses on their role as workers and their adoption of uniform.¹³

⁹ R. Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945*, (London, Allen Lane, 2013).

¹⁰ Although the RAF admitted that some emotional casualties had genuine medical reasons for their inability to fly, many were seen to have a weakness of character. The term ‘Lack of Moral Fibre’ (LMF) was first recorded as being used by the RAF in March 1940 after a meeting to discuss the treatment and disposal of men, without a medical reason to explain their actions, who openly admitted they did not intend to fly. See: J. McCarthy, ‘Air crew and ‘Lack of Moral Fibre’ in the Second World War’ *War and Society*, Vol.2, 1984, pp. 87-101. See also: J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line*, (Ware, 1997), S. Brandon, ‘LMF in Bomber Command 1939-45: Diagnosis or Denouncement?’ in Freeman & Berrios (eds) *150 Years of British Psychiatry, Vol. 2: The Aftermath*, (Athlone, 1996), pp. 119-129. A. D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Air crew, 1939 – 1945*, (Montreal & Kingston), 1996. E. Jones, ‘LMF: The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War’ *The Journal of Military History*, 70 (2006), pp. 439-458. B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, 2000). See also: B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4 (1999), pp. 491-524, and M. K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Air crew Experience in the Second World War*, (London, 1995).

¹¹ Francis, *The Flyer*.

¹² See for example: B. E. Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue: The story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, (Wellingborough, 1989) and B. E. Escott, *Our Wartime Days: The WAAF*, (Stroud, 2005) For autobiographical sources see for example: P. Beck, *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, 2004) M. Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue: Experiences in the WAAF*, (Stroud, 2006) D. Lindo, *A WAAF at War: Wartime Jottings of a WAAF Driver 1941 – 1946*, (Fontwell, 1992). S. Pickering, *Tales of a Bomber Command WAAF (& her horse)*, (Bognor Regis, 2002) and J. Wyndham, *Love is Blue: A Wartime diary*, (London, 1987).

¹³ T. Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War’ *Women’s History Review*, 8, 4, (1999), pp. 605- 624. See also: T. J.

However, by including a more in depth consideration of male ground personnel identities using the theories of Raewyn Connell, David Morgan, and Frank Barrett,¹⁴ this thesis will examine the gendered cultural hierarchy of the RAF from a more inclusive and wider perspective.

Theoretical approaches including class and gender are more frequently applied to other areas of twentieth century conflicts, and several are pertinent to my thesis. Histories of emotion and gender have been more often applied to combatants in the First World War however, and there has been a renewed interest in what enabled these men to keep going in spite of the odds that they faced. In *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* Michael Roper applies Kleinian psychology to combatants' memoirs, letters and diaries.¹⁵ He examines the emotional damage caused by the war and how support from home and from comrades enabled combatants to attempt to come to terms with their role in the war. This thesis will occasionally use a similar methodology; as well as receiving support from their families, ground personnel relied on friendship groups and emotional communities. After his seminal work on World War One, Paul Fussell considered understanding and behaviour in the Second World War. Through poetry and literature he examined the discourses of war, and considered 'the rationalizations and euphemisms' combatants used to come to terms with their part of the 'unacceptable actuality' of

Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War.' PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁴ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), F. J. Barrett, 'The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: The case of the U.S. Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3, 3, (1996), pp. 129-142. D. Morgan, 'Theatre of War: Combat, the military and masculinity' in: Brod, H & Kaufman, M (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, (London, Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 165-182.

¹⁵ M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009).

the industrialised slaughter.¹⁶ Sonya Rose examines the impact of gender, race and class on the citizenship and national identity of the non-combatant work force, and the relationship between individuals and society.¹⁷ As a period of rapid social change, wars are often regarded as a pivotal point in various narrative trajectories such as the decline in the importance of class culture, the rise of democracy, feminist emancipation and the creation of the ‘modern self.’¹⁸ James Hinton examines how, by negotiating conflicting cultural sources and discourses, ‘individuals sought to construct a coherent sense of their own identities.’¹⁹ My research will also highlight ontological conflicts between individual identities and the responsibilities of a communal wartime citizenship in this previously understudied group. In particular this thesis examines how ground personnel constructed their identity and a sense of meaning through language, shared identities, ‘otherings’ and binary oppositions within the hierarchical structure of Bomber Command.

The ‘no neuroses myth’, that the public stoically accepted the hardships of war and only a small minority suffered and broke down was formed during the war and was perpetuated in popular history.²⁰ Using oral interviews, Penny Summerfield has defined two contrasting discourses with which women constructed their wartime roles: women were either ‘heroic’, (enjoying masculine roles and seeing the war as a

¹⁶ P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), p. ix.

¹⁷ S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003).

¹⁸ See for example: C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), C. Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), and K. A. Cerulo, ‘Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, (1997), pp. 385-409.

¹⁹ J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, (Oxford, 2010), p. 17.

²⁰ See: Glover, E. 'Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population (3) The "Blitz" - 1940-41' *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 23, (1942), p. 36. See also: E. Jones, R. Woolven, B. Durodié, and S. Wessely, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-examined’ *Social History of Medicine*, 17, 3, (2004), pp. 463-479.

period of dramatic change) or they were ‘stoic’ (enduring the war and creating a narrative of continuity).²¹ My work examines how men and women in the military, but not in a combat role, fit this paradigm. Seen in comparison to heroic flyers and stoic civilians who endured the Blitz, members of the WAAF and RAF ground personnel either maintained their role as efficient workers dedicated to the war effort, or failed. The bravery and masculinity of those who broke down could be called into question, and failures were either diagnosed as congenitally weak and predisposed to psychoneuroses or regarded as unpatriotic malingerers. My thesis engages with the historiographies of civilian war neuroses and ‘LMF’ within the RAF. Unlike many studies of the history of military psychiatry and mental health, it considers the treatment of patients with a strong understanding of their place in the social structure of the military.²² By engaging with mid twentieth-century ideas of mental health and theories concerning predisposition to neuroses in this previously unexamined group, my thesis will inform areas of the History of Medicine and in particular give new perspectives on the history of psychiatry.

Often focussing on a single emotion,²³ the history of emotions studies the social construction of how feelings were expressed and the history of how displays of

²¹ P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1998), pp. 78-105.

²² See for example: J. Bourke, ‘Disciplining the Emotions: Fear, Psychiatry and the Second World War’ in: Cooter, R. Harrison, M. and Sturdy, S. (eds) *War Medicine and Modernity*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 225-234, E. Jones, and S. Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*, (Hove, Psychology Press, 2005), N. Thalassis, ‘Useless Soldiers: The Dilemma of Discharging Mentally Unfit Soldiers during the Second World War’ *Social History of Medicine* 23, 1, (2010), pp. 98-115, M. Thomson, ‘Status, Manpower, and Mental Deficiency in the First World War’, in Cooter, R. Harrison, M. and Sturdy, S. (eds.), *War, Medicine and Modernity*, (Stroud, Sutton Press, 1999), pp. 149-66, B. Shephard, ‘‘Pitiless Psychology’’: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4, (1999), pp. 491-524, and B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000).

²³ See for example: J. Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, (London, Virago Press 2006), S. J. Matt, ‘You Can’t Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History’ *The Journal of American History*, 94, 2, (2007), pp. 469–497, or B. H. Rosenwein, *Anger's Past: Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, (Cornell, Cornell University Press, 1998).

emotion were regarded.²⁴ Joanna Bourke's work on fear is most pertinent to this study.²⁵ This thesis will also examine fear and other emotions (including anxiety, grief and boredom), commonly experienced in wartime in a previously overlooked group.

Cultural Representations of Bomber Command

Although Churchill's famous speech about 'The Few' had originally included the role played by all the RAF and the importance of Bomber Command's disruption of the German's build up of invasion barges in winning 'The Battle of Britain',²⁶ the dominant narrative of the RAF was of heroes of Fighter Command defending homes, businesses and the civilian population. The supremacy of the Spitfire and Fighter Command was quickly established in wartime propaganda and in popular culture, and has continued in the decades afterwards.²⁷ Nationwide Battle of Britain anniversary services were held in the month of September throughout the war (and since) to raise funds and to commemorate 'Battle of Britain Day' 15 September, the supposed turning point of the battle. These celebrations prioritised the fighters over the bombers and the importance of the RAF's defensive rather than offensive role, as it fitted rather better into the powerful cultural construction of the British underdog

²⁴ S. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out,' *Emotion Review* 3, 1, (2011), p. 118.

²⁵ Bourke, *Fear*, and J. Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914 – 45' *Historical Research*, 74. 185, (2001), pp. 314–330. See also: Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 273–283.

²⁶ W. S. Churchill, *Never Give in! The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*, (New York, Hyperion, 2003), p. 238. In his speech on 20 August 1940 he went on to say: 'but we must never forget that all the time, night after night, month after month, our bomber squadrons travel far into Germany, find their targets in the darkness by the highest navigational skill, aim their attacks, often under the heaviest fire, often with serious loss, with deliberate careful discrimination, and inflict shattering blows upon the whole of the technical and war-making structure of the Nazi power.'

²⁷ M. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, (London, Michael Joseph, 1980), p. 42, 346. See for example: L. Howard, *The First of the Few*, (Leslie Howard Production, 1942). Telling how Reginald Mitchell developed the Spitfire, the film quotes Churchill's speech about 'The Few.'

winning against the odds.²⁸ Naming and defining an event or period of history is a political rather than a historical necessity,²⁹ and the 'Battle of Britain' was soon defined as having a beginning and an end, and Fighter Command was seen to win a decisive victory that could be celebrated. In contrast, while Arthur Harris, the commander of Bomber Command from early 1942, was keen to describe different 'battles' over specific targets, operations against German targets were a constant throughout the war, and the bombing of German cities and the targeting of German morale failed to bring about the victory Harris hoped it would achieve.³⁰ Although after D-day there was less about Bomber Command in the press, for much of the war a large amount of 'print and celluloid were devoted to it.'³¹ Throughout the war the public were 'firmly in favour' of the bombing campaign against Germany.³² The popular press 'hinted at Bomber Command's awesome powers of mass destruction',³³ but for most of the war the popular narratives concerning Bomber Command were of the accurate bombing of military targets, and, fighting for survival against the elements, flak, searchlights and fighters, either a heroic sacrifice, or a safe return to England against the odds. However 'the British people must have had knowledge of what British bombing policy actually entailed.'³⁴ By the last stages of the war, the myths of accurate bombing of military targets could not be maintained due to a growing awareness of the effects of area bombing. The continuing controversy over the effectiveness and ethics of bombing has shaped the personal testimony of individual members of Bomber Command recorded since the war.

²⁸ A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London, Pimlico, 2008), p. 4.

²⁹ Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.55.

³⁰ Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 619.

³¹ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p. 128.

³² M. Connelly, 'The British People, the Press, and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany', *Contemporary British History* 16, 2, (2002). p 40.

³³ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p. 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Parallels have been drawn between Harris and the bombing campaign, and the futility and stubbornness of Haig and the attrition and sacrifice of the trench warfare of The First World War.³⁵

Partially constructed by propaganda,³⁶ unifying discourses were a particularly strong part of the hegemonic narrative of the war.³⁷ To encourage volunteers and to enlighten new recruits about the recruitment and training process, an official narrative of life on a bomber command station began to be created during the war itself. Propaganda in books such as Bill Hooper's *Behind the Spitfires*,³⁸ as well as films, newsreels, newspapers, public recruiting events and marches also helped to construct a narrative of life in the RAF. To counter the general belief that women in uniform suggested immorality and promiscuity,³⁹ as well as the Markham report,⁴⁰ books such as *Girls you Amaze Me* and *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, and films such as *The Gentle Sex* informed the public and potential women recruits what to expect in military service.⁴¹ Serving WAAFs were also recruited as publicity officers,⁴² and early in the war other ranks were encouraged to record their experiences for potential

³⁵ M. Middlebrook, *The Nuremburg Raid: 31-31March 1944*, (London, Cassell, 2000), p. 10. See also: Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 52, 288, 325, 609, and Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p.243.

³⁶ Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 21.

³⁷ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p.12.

³⁸ Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941). 'Raff' was the pseudonym of Bill Hooper. See also: B. Boothroyd, *Adastral Bodies*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942). B. Boothroyd, *Are Sergeants Human?* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1944). J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: New & Enlarged Edition*, (London, Amalgamated Press, 1943). A. J. Brown, *Ground Staff*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1943).

³⁹ A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London, Pimlico, 1994), p. 335.

⁴⁰ Following the public concern about the morality of the conditions in the women's services an investigation was carried out and the report, chaired by Violet Markham, was published in 1942. See: Markham, V. Cazalet, T. Elliot, W. Milner, J. Munro, D. Stocks, J. L. Summerskill, E. Sykes, F. 'Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women's Services' (1942), The National Archives (TNA), CAB 66/27/41.

⁴¹ J. Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1944). V. Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me*, (London, Hurricane Books, 1943). L. Howard, *The Gentle Sex*, (Two Cities Film, 1943).

⁴² K. Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, (London, Hutchinson, 1943).

propaganda and recruitment purposes.⁴³ A final discourse that should be considered was that, in order to win the war, the British armed forces needed to modernise and become as ruthlessly efficient as the enemy were perceived to be.⁴⁴ The RAF, as the youngest and most modern service, was regarded as the epitome of this efficiency. Early in the war they were seen as the only force capable of taking the war to the enemy and, regardless of their capability to do so,⁴⁵ the bombing of German industry and cities was thought to be an important step towards victory.⁴⁶

As Martin Francis maintains, it is important to consider how understanding of the campaign of area bombing influenced representations and self-understandings of Bomber Command; it is more complicated than a simple binary between opposing representations of the command as either war criminals or victims made scapegoats 'by an embarrassed military and political establishment'.⁴⁷ Michael Roper and others have argued it has become hard to formulate a unified public memory since the war.⁴⁸ A multitude of conflicting and competing narratives exist simultaneously, but certain 'signal events' dominate the cultural memory of the war.⁴⁹ Continuing the wartime fixation with the Spitfires of Fighter Command, one popular conception of the history of the war has reduced the story of the RAF to the 'few' who saved Britain during a few months in 1940; indeed, the one remaining airworthy Lancaster

⁴³ 'Log of events submitted by W.A.A.F. detachments at various R.A.F. Stations', (1940), TNA, AIR 24/1641. 'Log of events submitted by W.A.A.F. detachments at various R.A.F. Stations', (1940-1941), TNA, AIR 24/1642.

⁴⁴ This one of the messages of Powell and Pressburger's film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, (Archers, 1943). See also: Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 3-13.

⁴⁵ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Ground Staff*, pp. 166-169.

⁴⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.172.

⁴⁸ Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.26. S. Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 21.

⁴⁹ F. Houghton, 'The "Missing Chapter" Bomber Command aircrew memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s' in: L. Noakes, & J. Pattinson, (eds) *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, (London Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 162.

bomber in this country has become part of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Bomber Command's role does not sit comfortably within the discourse of the war being a good war, or Britain's 'finest hour',⁵⁰ but a popular narrative has been created around 617 Squadron's famous raid against the dams in the Ruhr valley. Influenced by the 1955 film *The Dam Busters*,⁵¹ the raid has become a synecdoche for Bomber Command and, like the film, the Lancaster bomber itself has come to represent Bomber Command's campaigns in public memory. The dams raid is acceptable in public opinion because it is portrayed as a skilful and daring precision attack against a legitimate target. The targets were inanimate concrete objects; the bouncing bomb Barnes Wallis designed only indirectly killed people, and at a great cost to the air crews.

Similar to the 'memory boom' identified by Jay Winter decades after the First World War,⁵² as they reached their old age, many veterans of the Second World War felt the need to tell their stories and actively to transmit the past to future generations.⁵³ Often encouraged by the sequence of fiftieth anniversaries that began in 1989,⁵⁴ Squadron and station associations, newsletters and reunions - 'fictive kinships' and 'families of remembrance' - were formed as an act of memorialisation to share experiences and to reaffirm the events of the war.⁵⁵ Physical memorials were

⁵⁰ Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 1. See also: W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman *1066 And All That*, (London, Harmondsworth, 1969).

⁵¹ M. Anderson, *The Dam Busters*, (Associated British Picture Corporation, 1955). See also: P. Brickhill, *The Dam Busters*, (London, The Companion Book Club, 1952).

⁵² J. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Historical Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Yale University, 2006), passim.

⁵³ Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.44.

⁵⁴ Houghton, 'The Missing Chapter', p. 155.

⁵⁵ Winter, *Remembering War*, pp. 136-137. Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.29. J. Winter and E. Sivan, (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.41.

created by these groups,⁵⁶ and personal testimony was recorded and either published, or saved in archives. It must be acknowledged that individual memory of events was likely to have been reconstructed through a discussion of events with others, through retelling, as well as with the aid of diaries, personal papers, and official records such as unit operational record books (ORBs).⁵⁷ In the last few decades, the counter narrative of the injustice that the Command did not receive official commemoration has become prevalent in the media. The controversy about area bombing and the Dresden raids were countered by tales of the sacrifice made by the flyers and the unfairness of their lack of recognition.⁵⁸ Official commemoration came slowly: the memorial to Arthur Harris was unveiled in 1992, the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park in London 2012, and the issue of the Bomber Command clasp to veterans in 2013.⁵⁹ Bomber Command's role in the war remains contentious even today.

Methodology and sources

Like other studies of the wartime RAF, use has been made of administrative sources such as Operation Record Books (ORBs), and other official reports and publications preserved in museums and archives. To study personal responses to service in Bomber Command however, different sources have been drawn on. Some archived oral history has been utilised, in addition to sources such as archived letters, diaries and Mass-Observation reports created during the war, but this thesis relies heavily on life writing, published and unpublished personal testimonies created in the decades

⁵⁶ M. Ingham, *Air Force Memorials of Lincolnshire*, (Leicester, Midland Publishing, 1995).

⁵⁷ ORBs were de-classified in the 1970s following the thirty year rule and enabled an explosion of new memoirs and histories to be written and published. See J. Falconer, *RAF Bomber Command in Fact, Film and Fiction*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1996), p. 52.

⁵⁸ Houghton, 'The Missing Chapter', pp. 155-174.

⁵⁹ The International Bomber Command Memorial Centre will be opened in Lincoln in 2015. See: Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial Trust, *International Bomber Command Centre* (2014). <http://www.lincsbombercommandmemorial.com/> (accessed 22 January 2015).

since the end of the war. While this may be regarded as problematic, it is unproductive and restrictive to prioritise the ‘cult of the archive.’ It is the uses made of the sources and how they are interpreted that is important.⁶⁰ If treated with sensitivity and an awareness of potential pitfalls, such witting sources can be revealing, and, when used alongside sources contemporary to the war, the effect of the passage of time since the events they describe can be negotiated. It was decided at the start of the research that while I would make use of archived oral history, I would not conduct my own interviews. The numbers of personnel who are still alive are rapidly diminishing, and tend to be those who were in the service towards the end of the war. It was felt that there were already sufficient sources available. The sources used tend to discuss shared events and themes; narratives of ground personnel’s experiences in Bomber Command established during the war were expanded on by later sources. Commonalities included accounts of their recruitment and training, including kitting out and medical inspections, followed by descriptions of the living and working conditions, as well as the cold, the food and long hours. All sources, whether produced during the war or decades afterwards, commented on the heroism of those who flew.

No source is ever produced in a vacuum. All sources have been constructed in the cultural context of the time in which they were produced, they have been influenced by hegemonic narratives or discourses, and either support or contradict them. Sources produced during the war were influenced by propaganda and popular public narratives of the war. Later sources are mediated between their author’s memory and cultural influences such as official and revisionist histories, shared life

⁶⁰ L. Jordanova, *History in Practice*, (London, Arnold, 2000), pp. 186-189.

stories, newspaper articles, films and the like.⁶¹ They often involve the meaning that people make themselves and express in their own words and narratives.⁶²

During the war individuals negotiated their place within hegemonic or alternative narratives; their experiences recorded in letters, diaries and Mass-Observation reports were filtered through the public culture.⁶³ Individuals unconsciously picked and chose aspects from cultural texts to help them construct their own identity and selfhood.⁶⁴ Consequently, wartime letters and diaries were already intertwined with established narratives and discourses. They can be regarded as a lens onto how their authors rationalised and consumed collective narratives while creating their own personal stories. As Jörg Friedrich argues in *The Fire*, the bomb-loads and the proportions of incendiaries to high explosive carried made it clear to air crew what the intention of the bombing of German cities was.⁶⁵ Armourers would also know the capabilities of the ordnance and, in the context of the war, may have had to come to terms with the role they were playing. The intended audience of a source should be remembered however, as there may be conflict in some sources. Letters could be edited so as not to concern loved ones, the author may have written what they felt they should write when they wrote home,⁶⁶ and while such sources contemporary to the war may be free from teleology, even diaries were a performance to the self. There is a similar intended audience to Mass-

⁶¹ L. Noakes, & J. Pattinson, (eds) *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, (London Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 4. See also: L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91*, (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 12.

⁶² T. G. Ashplant, G. Dawson, & M. Roper, *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory*, (London, Transaction Publishers, 2004), p.12.

⁶³ Rose, *Which People's War*, pp. 20-26. See also: Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.12 and C. Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xvii.

⁶⁴ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ J. Friedrich, (Trans' Brown, A.) *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany 1940-1945*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 44-46.

⁶⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 20.

Observation sources.⁶⁷ Here, as well as private reports and journals, some Mass-Observation correspondents reported conversations. Although some were recorded covertly, some interviews and observations were overt and undertaken with groups of people. Even covertly recorded conversations involved an element of performance, affected by individual's expectations of what was acceptable to their peers.⁶⁸ Similar considerations need to be applied to 'retrospectively crafted narratives', oral history, and published and unpublished memoirs.⁶⁹ Memory is fallible even immediately after the event, and sources produced in the decades after the war will have been altered by the intervening years, by reconstructions and interpretations, and conflicting discourses. Like the construction of identity, memory is also culturally mediated.⁷⁰

Survivor narratives often support the dominant narrative, for example oral history often conforms to the concept of the 'people's war';⁷¹ memories at odds with the hegemonic narrative are often 'muffled.'⁷² The majority of the sources used were produced before the recent memorials and medals were commissioned. In the testimony of personnel who served in Bomber Command, an agenda to set the record straight and to right the perceived injustice of the Command's lack of recognition since the end of the war is often evident. While this is easiest to identify in the

⁶⁷ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, pp. 5-6. Mass-Observation sources are similar to oral history and autobiography. For a discussion of this see: L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91*, (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 80-85.

⁶⁸ See for example: 'Interviews with 54 Ground Defence men, Fire Staff, Police, Cooks, Drivers and Orderlies', (1941), Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), SxMOA1/2/29/4/A/2. See also: WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942). MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁶⁹ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p.30.

⁷¹ Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.52.

⁷² Noakes, & Pattinson, *British Cultural Memory*, p. 7.

memoirs and testimony of air crew,⁷³ it can also be seen in sources created by ground personnel. Sources tend to support a narrative of air crew's heroic sacrifice and the 'sectional narratives' of injustice. Sources created by ex ground personnel often highlight the risk and sacrifice of the flyers and focus on events and narratives of less controversial roles during the war. These 'sectional narratives' which have not yet secured recognition and acceptance into the dominant narratives,⁷⁴ often include descriptions of operation Manna, supplying food to the occupied low countries, and missions to bring home freed prisoners of war. The creators of many of the sources used in this thesis were effectively doubly marginalised because they were not flyers and because they served in Bomber Command. As expected from a marginalised group,⁷⁵ compared to air crew, male ground personnel have produced less life writing, memoirs or archived material. More material concerning female rather than male ground personnel is available. This may be because female personnel felt they had a sufficiently different, interesting or historically important tale to tell, indeed a substantial proportion of sources created by men involve those who served overseas at some point. It would seem that they felt that this made their stories of historical note. Many men may have been reluctant to record their stories because, in common with the dominant narrative of the war, they did not play a big part in the war effort and they have been perceived as un-heroic. The reluctance to tell their story or leave a record of their lives has been problematic for the study of emotions.

⁷³ See for example F. Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers: An RAF Navigator's Perspective*, (Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2005), M. Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger: a flight of recollection and discovery*, (London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1969) or D. Charlwood, *No Moon Tonight*, (Manchester, Crecy Publishing, 2007).

⁷⁴ Ashplant, Dawson, & Roper, *Commemorating War*, p.20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.14.

The recent study of the history of emotions uses a careful choice of texts produced by a community,⁷⁶ usually in order to discern how far emotions were restrained or expressed.⁷⁷ For this study, in a similar way to which Fussell used literature, contemporary sources such as films and novels can be used in an attempt to understand the ‘dominant emotionology’, (the cultural expectations of acceptable behaviour and appropriate expressions of emotion).⁷⁸ Letters, diaries, Mass-Observation and poems are also used to create this picture, but also to examine to what extent individuals conformed to or resisted the norms of society. It should not be forgotten that these records and recollections are not representative of the lives of others. Using memoirs and oral history created after the war to recover how people felt requires care and sensitivity. Although to a lesser extent, in some visual sources such as photographs, film, or cartoons, an interpretation of body language and expression may be made, emotions can only really be accessed through written or spoken language.⁷⁹ However, as with written sources, the changing meaning and the risk of anachronistic modern interpretations has to be considered. It is important to try to understand the interpretation and understanding of emotions at the time; all the same, problems of memory and the effect of the intervening years on memoirs and oral history apply to individuals’ reports of their emotions.

Everyone makes up stories about themselves. Usually they present themselves in a positive light,⁸⁰ and tempered by the idea that anything that ground personnel experienced was unremarkable compared to the life of the flyers, there

⁷⁶ B. Rosenwein in: J. Plamper, ‘The History of Emotions: an Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns’ *History and Theory*, 49, 2, (2010), p. 253.

⁷⁷ Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History’, p. 120.

⁷⁸ P. N. Stearns, & C. Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’ *The American Historical Review*, 90, 4, (1985), p. 830.

⁷⁹ Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History’, p. 119.

⁸⁰ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, p.17.

appears to be reluctance in many sources to moan about their lot or to divulge really unpleasant stories. In many sources produced during or shortly after the war, witnesses seem prepared to talk about someone else who broke down, but not to admit to their own weakness. Later sources seem less reluctant to display their own emotions, although in some sources created in the last decades of the twentieth century descriptions of traumatic events are described through the lens of their author's understanding of PTSD. In all sources however, as discovered by Michael Roper in his study of letters from the previous war, Freudian 'parapraxes', 'slips of the pen, grammatical errors, contradictions, repetitions...[can] give the merest glimpse of emotional states.'⁸¹ Similarly, the emotional impact of retelling stories is evident in oral history through uncharacteristic stuttering or pauses. This 'bottom up' social, cultural and ethnographic methodology will be combined with a 'top down' approach using 'official' records. By close reading and psychological interpretation of such sources, this thesis contrasts dominant discourses with the experiences and emotions of those with the lowest status in the force.

Thesis Themes

Martin Francis acknowledges that the 'institutional culture' of the RAF was influenced by the 'stiflingly hierarchical and class bound' wider society of the 1940s.⁸² 'Wingless wonders' or 'penguins' were marginalised in the RAF; as Mark Wells acknowledges 'these humorous nicknames... [were] clues to the existence of a clearly defined social hierarchy, at the top of which stood the pilots.'⁸³ The central theme of this thesis is how the gendered hierarchy of RAF Bomber Command was

⁸¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 21.

⁸² Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 46.

⁸³ Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, p. 149.

culturally constructed, and how it affected the lives of male and female personnel. The hierarchy was more complex than the structure of rank or pay scales. RAF medics endorsed the idea that some roles were ‘pansy job[s]’,⁸⁴ and it is also evident in ‘Ode to the Erk.’ Mentioning ‘flight mechs’ (mechanics) and ‘riggers’ who worked on the aircraft and those who helped the air crew ‘prepare’, the poem does not include the others further behind the scenes, the clerks, cooks and drivers. Official records make similar omissions. Figure 0.1. shows the personnel ideally needed to keep a Short Stirling flying.

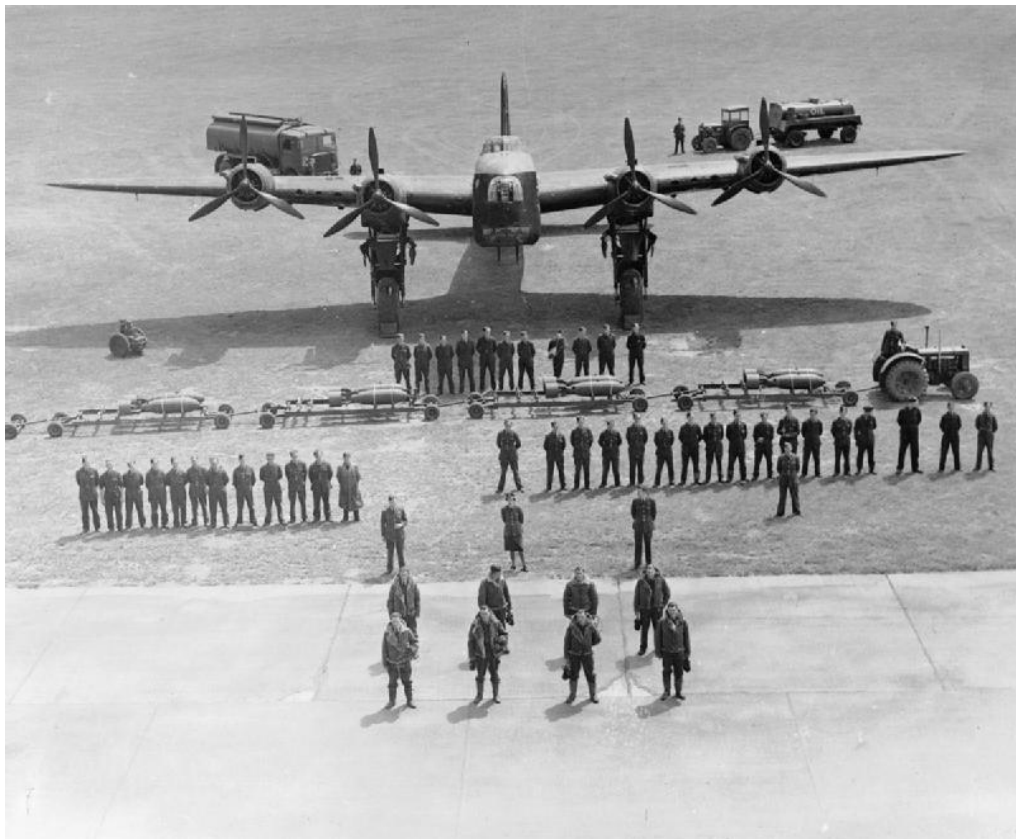


FIG. 0.1. Photographs. Royal air Force Bomber Command 1942 -1945, IWM, CH 5988.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ C. P. Symonds and D. J. Williams, ‘Investigations Of Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel by Unit Medical Officers’ in: Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, (London, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1947), p.95.

⁸⁵ The photograph shows a Short Stirling B Mark I of No. 218 Squadron at RAF Marham in Norfolk.

The eight members of the air crew are in the foreground of the picture; immediately behind them is the meteorological officer, a WAAF parachute packer and the Flying Control officer. The next row consists of 12 flight maintenance crew, and 18 ground service crew; behind them is a bomb train, its driver and 11 armourers. Behind the bomber is a petrol bowser, an oil bowser and their drivers.⁸⁶ The groups are arranged to create the rough cruciform shape of an aircraft, but they also symbolically demonstrate the hierarchy of the RAF. Although the ground crews are part of the service as a whole, they are literally and figuratively behind the aircrew; importantly the vast majority of those who served in other roles are absent. Those in the photograph represent only one of around seventy possible trades for women and merely a handful of the hundred or so ground trades open to men in the RAF.⁸⁷

This thesis examines the gendered hierarchy within the RAF more fully than previous works which focus exclusively either on the flyers or on WAAFs. It will show that the hierarchy of Bomber Command was complex and nuanced. It was constructed by the legacy of the civilian class structure, and by a combination of signifiers particular to the culture of the RAF: the division of labour into specific trades, their pay scales and their respective levels of skill and importance to the war effort. Within the culture of Bomber Command, the trades with the closest association to aircraft or air crew had the highest status, and the power that came from rank and authority was sometimes subverted.

Ground personnel occupied a position in society between civilians and combatants. In bringing this significant group of the wartime population into focus,

⁸⁶ The photograph also depicts the ideal, in practice much smaller teams of ground crew serviced the aircraft.

⁸⁷ For a list of some of the trades open to RAF and WAAF personnel and the numbers of volunteers and conscripts who were recruited to each trade see Appendix B and C.

this thesis will also have an impact on the understanding of wartime experience, work and citizenship. Michael Roper pointed out that, in the trenches of the First World War, even when absent, women played a role in the creation of masculinity.⁸⁸ However, although it was very unusual in a military environment, men and women worked together in the RAF. This study will consider the implications of this relationship for male constructions of technical expertise and heroism, and the corresponding emotions and internal conflicts of women of the WAAF. Women performed male roles and threatened male personnel. This thesis addresses a significant gap in the historiography of the RAF during the Second World War as well as informing debates surrounding the social and cultural history of the home front, the history of emotions and the history of medicine.

Through an examination of a selection of contemporary novels, films, cartoons and propaganda, chapter one examines cultural representations of the RAF personnel as seen by the wartime population, and by the study of relationships, and the language peculiar to the service, the chapter introduces the concept of the hierarchy of trades and roles implicit but recognisable in the wartime RAF. It considers how perceptions of both the Erk and the WAAF were constructed, and how the ‘dilution’ of trades previously thought of as masculine by WAAF personnel impacted on both male and female identities. Chapter two describes the expansion of Bomber Command, and the recruitment, initial training, trade selection and training of ground personnel. It examines attempts to use psychological testing to facilitate the trade selection of ground personnel, and discusses individuals’ reaction to common experiences including their inoculations and medical inspections. In its

⁸⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*.

examination of the living and working conditions on operational bomber stations, chapter three develops the concept of the hierarchy of RAF and WAAF trades further. It examines three groups of personnel, those who worked directly with the aircraft and members of air crew, those who sometimes did, and those, such as clerks and ground defence personnel furthest removed from the *raison d'être* of the Air Force. It discusses how the sometimes harsh living and working conditions impacted on the lives of ground personnel and describes some of the dangers and traumatic events they faced. Chapter four directly examines the lives and emotions of ground personnel. It begins with a discussion of the history of emotions and examines the emotional regimes of the RAF. It highlights the wartime construction of fear and anxiety, and personnel's responses to traumatic events, loss and grief. Personnel had to cope with a range of events and resultant emotions including the loss of aircraft and air crew, guilt, and boredom. I suggest that as well as relying on superstition and ritual, as part of the hierarchy of the RAF, personnel coped with the stresses of performing their duty during wartime because they were supported by emotional communities that were largely constructed around their trade groups.

Several years ago I worked in an old aircraft hangar that was being used as a warehouse. Having experienced the conditions of two winters there, I became curious about the lives of the people who worked on similar sites, but in far worse circumstances over seventy years ago. In particular I became interested in how ground personnel's negative emotional responses to their experiences were treated by the RAF. The final important theme of the thesis is a consideration of mental health issues, and the relative resilience of ground personnel in comparison to both civilians and air crew. Building on the focus of the earlier chapters on social and cultural

history, the final chapters consider the medical treatment of ground personnel and how personnel suspected or diagnosed with neuroses and mental health issues were perceived and treated by the RAF authorities and the RAF medical profession.

Chapter five concentrates on the role of the RAF medical officer. It considers the social construction of mental health in popular culture. It engages further with the trope of stoic endurance, with diagnoses of hysteria and anxiety, and it examines the wartime belief that certain people were more predisposed to neuropsychiatric illness. It considers the problem of malingerers, and the medical officers' conflict of duty: to do what was best for the individual patient, or for the needs of the RAF and the war effort. In doing so it highlights the perceived difference between male and female patients, and the medical legitimisation of the RAF hierarchy. The final chapter focuses on the role of RAF neuropsychiatric specialists at 'Not Yet Diagnosed Neuropsychiatric' (NYDN) centres in RAF hospitals. The chapter discusses the merits of treatments and disposal of personnel, and the pensions awarded to personnel invalided from the service for neuropsychiatric illnesses.

Each chapter returns to themes of the social and cultural construction of hierarchy and identity within RAF Bomber Command through discourses important in the context of the Second World War. The thesis is informed by, and engages with, the history of the RAF, the history of medicine and psychiatry, the history of emotions, and the social and cultural history of the war. By examining how different discourses socially and culturally constructed the gendered hierarchical structure within Bomber Command, in particular this thesis informs areas of debate around mental health, and the wartime construction of gender and identity.

Ground personnel ‘were accustomed to playing eighth fiddle’ during the war,⁸⁹ From necessity, the discourses of the heroism and supremacy of the flyer were created during the war by propaganda; they have been perpetuated and strengthened in the decades after 1945. Since then, the veterans of Bomber Command have struggled for official recognition and acceptance of their role in the war, and attention has continued to be focussed on the air crew. This thesis contributes to the historiography of the RAF and the Second World War by bringing a significant but neglected group of the wartime population into focus. Located within popular culture somewhere between the stoic civilian population and the heroic fighting man, this thesis gives them a voice. In doing so, this thesis is important in adjusting our understanding of RAF Bomber Command and our picture of wartime experience, work and citizenship.

⁸⁹ M. Tripp, *Faith is a Windssock*, (London, Corgi, 1970), p. 35.

RAF CULTURE AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF RAF GROUND PERSONNEL

I sometimes think that, after the air crews and maintenance crews, it is the common A.C.2 who deserves the thanks of the country for showing “devotion to duty” in trying circumstances, and I for one never cease to admire their eternal cheerfulness. Many joined the R.A.F. to fly, but for one reason or another failed to pass the necessary tests and have had to be content with a back seat on the ground floor.¹

Squadron leader A. J. Brown, the author of *Ground Staff*, from which this quote was taken, served as an intelligence officer in Bomber Command. As an example of wartime propaganda, his book reveals the inherent hierarchy within RAF Bomber Command. Maintenance crews followed the air crew in the hierarchy, and it is implicit that, having ‘failed’ to become air crew, low ranking ground personnel were marginalised. Equal to a private in the Army, an AC2, or aircraftman, second-class, was the lowest rank in the RAF.

This chapter examines popular wartime representations of RAF ground personnel, the culture peculiar to those within the Air Force itself, and the unspoken hierarchy of Bomber Command. Texts including films, popular novels, humorous books, the press and recruitment material will be used as sources to examine the RAF in popular culture, while official RAF publications, Mass-Observation archives,

¹ A. J. Brown, *Ground Staff*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1943), p. 61.

diaries, oral history and published and unpublished memoirs will be utilised in the study of the internal workings of the RAF. The RAF's distinctive vernacular is particularly useful in revealing hidden power structures, and the Erk and WAAF's position in the Air Force.

As Michael Roper argues, there are two distinct methodologies that can be used to examine identity, gender and emotions; to look at cultural norms through discourse and texts, and to examine individual's lives and how they negotiate their identity on a psychological level.² While chapter four utilises the second methodology and considers how individuals negotiated their own emotions and identities, this chapter examines how RAF and WAAF ground personnel were constructed in the popular media and in the culture of Bomber Command, and it considers the discourses that framed this construction. Through the examination of both male and female ground personnel, this chapter will engage with recent historiography, in particular the work of Martin Francis and Tessa Stone. In *The Flyer*, Francis examines the place of the RAF airman in British popular culture during the war but only briefly considers ground personnel.³ From a feminist perspective, Stone examines the gendered identity of women in the WAAF, but her study, using oral testimony, does not include male perspectives.⁴ She admits that a

² M. Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History' *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), pp. 57-59. M. Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950' *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2, (2005), pp. 343-362. See also J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 19.

³ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008).

⁴ See: T. J. Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War.' PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1999) and Stone, T. 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War' *Women's History Review*, 8, 4, (1999), pp. 605- 624.

study of the experiences male ground personnel is overdue.⁵ Both Francis and Stone's work will be re-examined by placing them in the wider context of the rest of the Air Force.

Cultural Representations

By the 1930s, 'the cult of the air fighter' had been created. RAF flyers were regarded as a technically minded and heroic elite, who offered an alternative to the brutal slaughter of trench warfare.⁶ After war was declared, this public image of the RAF was reinforced by the Air Ministry and by official propaganda; several authors and poets were employed by the Air Ministry in their public relations department.⁷ By 1941, the RAF was the service 'most admired' by the public.⁸ Literature was produced for both service and civilian audiences by authors such as David Masters and the cartoonist Bill Hooper under his pseudonym 'Raff',⁹ and films became an important source of the construction of the RAF, and especially the flyer, in popular imagination.¹⁰

The British propaganda machine deliberately and of necessity attempted to construct the perception of national identity and unity which, for the consideration of

⁵ Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', p. 234, 275.

⁶ M. Paris, 'The Rise of the Airmen: The Origins of Air Force Elitism, c. 1890-1918' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28, 1, (1993), p. 124.

⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.157.

⁸ A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London, Pimlico, 1994), 249.

⁹ D. Masters, 'So Few': *The Immortal Record of the Royal Air Force*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1941), and Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941). Other sources include: Air Ministry, *Bomber Command: The Air Ministry Account of Bomber Command's Offensive Against the Axis September, 1939-July, 1941*, (London, HMSO, 1941), Air Ministry, *Bomber Command Continues: The Air Ministry Account of Bomber Command's Offensive Against Germany July 1941 - June 1942*, (London, HMSO, 1942), Ministry of Information, *We Speak from the Air: Broadcasts by the RAF*, (London, HMSO, 1942), D. G. Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, (London, Rich & Cowan, 1943), W. Buchan, *The Royal Air Force at War*, (Letchworth, John Murray and The Pilot Press, 1941), and C. H Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All: Some short stories of the Royal Air Force*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944).

¹⁰ Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 30. See for example: M. Powell. B. D. Hurst, A. Brunel, *The Lion has Wings*, (London Film Productions, 1939), L. Howard, *The first of the Few*, (Leslie Howard Production, 1942), and M. Powell, and E. Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (Archers, 1942).

Bomber Command, has two important aspects. The British were depicted as stoic underdogs, fighting a ‘good war’ against Nazi aggression and their tactics of ‘Blitzkrieg’, indiscriminate bombing and terror.¹¹ In order to win, sacrifices and changes needed to be made. The concept of ‘fair play’ and the inefficient ‘Colonel Blimps’ who were responsible for early British setbacks and defeats had to make way for ruthlessly efficient modern warfare.¹² Bomber Command fits more closely with the more problematic narrative of the need for ruthless efficiency, while, fitting firmly into the narrative of the ‘good war’, Fighter Command and the ‘Battle of Britain’ has achieved dominance in public memory. The RAF depicted by the popular media was frequently the fighters of the Battle of Britain, public school boys of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR), epitomised by Richard Hillary in his book *The Last Enemy*.¹³ After the success of Fighter Command in the late summer of 1940, both the Spitfire and the fighter pilot became synecdoches for the RAF. Most trainee air crew wanted to fly fighters; Bomber Command and Coastal Command pilots were regarded as second rate ‘bus drivers’.¹⁴ However, bomber air crew were also utilised by official propaganda throughout the war. The teamwork of

¹¹ S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1. See also: L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91*, (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 11.

¹² See for example: Anon, ‘Train Britons to be Tough’ *The Daily Mail*, 5 September 1942, p. 3, and M. Powell, E. and Pressburger, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Archers, 1943).

¹³ Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, pp. 320-321. R. Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, (London, Macmillan, 1942).

¹⁴ C. H. Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake or RAF Slang Made Easy*, (1945), p. 18. See also J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: New & Enlarged Edition*, (London, Amalgamated Press, 1943), p. 37. The RAF was divided into separate commands during the war. Three commands were operational; Bomber Command was the offensive arm, Fighter Command largely played a defensive role, while Coastal Command was responsible for anti submarine and shipping patrols. Transport Command delivered aircraft, materiel and personnel to all theatres of war; Maintenance Command repaired and serviced aircraft, and Balloon Command was responsible for the balloon barrage defence. Flying Training Command trained air crew in places as far afield as Canada and South Africa as well as in the United Kingdom, while Technical Training Command trained recruits for a multitude of different air and ground trades. Bomber Command also included Operational Training Units (OTU) and Heavy Conversion Units (HCU) which prepared newly qualified air crew for operations in specific aircraft types.

men from different backgrounds who made up bomber crews became a metaphor for a united war effort.¹⁵ For many, however inaccurate their bombing may have been, Bomber Command was the only way to take the war to the Germans.¹⁶ Although they were performing similar functions, people convinced themselves that Bomber Command were heroes, but that the Luftwaffe were villains deliberately targeting civilians. Bomber Command was presented to the public in newspaper reports, radio interviews and films such as *The Lion Has Wings*, or *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, but understandably the focus was on the flyers.

In the Air Force itself, training passed on idiosyncrasies of the service's culture, and publications peculiar to the RAF such as *Tee Emm*, *Slipstream* and the *RAF Journal* reinforced them. Both public perception of the RAF and the culture of the service itself evolved as the war progressed, but as part of the war effort, the role of the man or woman on the ground was marginalised. Flyers, whether of fighter or bomber aircraft, were prioritised in public discourse. As will be discussed below, RAF ground personnel are rare in popular wartime texts and frequently conform to certain two-dimensional stereotypes. Comparing the RAF to other services, Francis comments on its 'relatively lax discipline, rampant individualism, ostensible cosmopolitanism, regular access to women and families, and its proportionately high death rates.'¹⁷ However, this was only ever the case for a minority of the air force. Even among flyers the culture of the RAF was fractured, and ground personnel had a very different experience.

¹⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.41. See also: Bishop, *Bomber Boys*, p. xxxi.

¹⁶ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.20. See also Overy, *The Bombing War*, p.11, 632, and Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p. 39.

¹⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.13.

RAF Culture

Angus Calder discusses that, within the Army, ‘some forms of life were much lower than others’; in particular the personnel in the Pioneer Corps included too many ‘pacifists and aliens.’¹⁸ The RAF was a distinct hierarchy; to some extent all those without ‘wings’ on their uniform were marginalised.¹⁹ As Peter Gray recently quipped when summing up Churchill and the Air Ministry’s policy towards medal allocation, it has been commonly felt that ‘ground crew suck.’²⁰ As he highlights, Churchill expressed his disdain for RAF ground personnel ‘who he saw as cosseted and little different from ordinary members of the domestic population.’²¹ As the ‘apex of the station pyramid’,²² air crew were the ‘visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity’.²³ However, consisting of career air crew who had joined in the 1930s, members of Auxiliary Air Force, and the RAFVR, air crew were heterogeneous group even at the start of the war. As the war continued, air crew also included increasing numbers of volunteer air crew from the Dominions, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Rhodesia. Small numbers of black West Indians became air crew, and as well as differences of race, the creation of the new air crew position of flight engineer and the heavy attrition of air gunners led to a broadening of the class spectrum of flying personnel. It was widely understood that there were distinctions between the importance and quality of men who filled air crew positions. These functioned in parallel with class and rank. Pilots, navigators and bomb-aimers were

¹⁸ Calder, *People’s War*, p.249.

¹⁹ M. K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Air crew Experience in the Second World War*, (London, 1995), p. 149.

²⁰ P. Gray ‘A Culture of Official Squeamishness: the Air Ministry and the Bomber Offensive’ Workshop: Air Power and Archives, paper given at the RAF Museum London, 22 March 2013.

²¹ P. Gray, ‘A Culture of Official Squeamishness? Britain’s Air Ministry and the Strategic Air Offensive against Germany’ *The Journal of Military History*, 77, 4, (2013), p. 1377.

²² D. Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, (Victoria, Hudson, 1991), p. 114.

²³ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), p.77.

held in higher esteem than flight engineers and air-gunners.²⁴ By the middle of the war, flyers were more likely to be grammar school boys or volunteers from the Dominions than public school boys, members of university squadrons, and the RAFVR of 1939 and 1940. Francis argues that, partially created by the social differences and the ‘service’s pre-war tripartite division’, there were three ‘distinctive cultures’ within RAF flyers before the war.²⁵ There was also a distinct difference between officers and sergeant pilots, and as John James comments, during the twentieth century the two groups were identifiable by their own ‘traditional patterns of social intercourse’, their recreational pastimes (especially drinking) and by their unique speech patterns.²⁶

However, neither James nor Francis considers similar divisions among ground personnel. According to Brown, ‘the élite of the ground staff’ were the mechanics, fitters and riggers of the ground crew who worked on the aircraft. Then there were those who had ‘nothing directly to do with aeroplanes’, ‘thousands of A.C.2.s and A.C.W.s who sweep the floor, type the letters and fill up the forms’.²⁷ Ground personnel were also divided by their rank and the trades they were assigned to, and, as the service expanded, those recruited or conscripted for the duration of the war outnumbered ‘Trenchard’s brats’ and career personnel.²⁸ They included people

²⁴ D. Stafford-Clark, Private Papers, Correspondence file 1941-1969, Letter from Wing Commander Lawson to David Stafford-Clark 14 August 1945. Wellcome Library (WL), PP/DSC/E/1. See also: W. A. S. Falla, ‘Fear Factors in Flying Personnel’ *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 93, (1947), p. 43–54.

²⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.43.

²⁶ J. James, *The Paladins: A Social History of the RAF up to the outbreak of World War II*, (London, Macdonald and Co, 1990), p. 135.

²⁷ Brown, *Ground Staff*, p. 59-61.

²⁸ The Aircraft apprentice scheme was established at RAF Halton in the 1920s by Chief of Air Staff, Hugh Trenchard ‘the father of the RAF.’ The scheme trained 15 and 16 year old boys to fill the technical ground trades of the future RAF. They were known as ‘Trenchard’s brats’ (or ‘little bastards’).

from a wide variety of nationalities, social backgrounds, and abilities. By 1943, over 180,000 of those serving were female.

An RAF station was its own community separate from wider society. RAF personnel developed their own ‘peculiar verbal idiom’,²⁹ that revolved around euphemisms, black humour and making light of danger. Ambulances and fire tenders were referred to as the ‘heat and meat wagons’ for example.³⁰ The Force’s colloquialisms or ‘slanguage’ were sufficiently unusual to provide the content for an article in the *Royal Air Force Journal*, a short humorous book explaining the meaning and derivation of words and phrases to the civilian population and for Mass-Observation correspondents to comment on.³¹ Civilians looked up to the RAF and began to emulate its culture and speech patterns. It was the language of the flyer that filtered down through the ranks, many phrases made their way into everyday parlance and some are still in common use today, or at least are still understood. As part of a sign system, the language of a particular culture reflects or refracts the culture, its dynamics and the construction and maintenance of its power structures.³² As the RAF rapidly expanded and the first generations of air crew were killed, the culture and the language changed; by 1943, few in the RAF would have used expressions such as ‘what ho?’ ‘pip pip’ or ‘old boy’.³³ However, throughout the war, the linguistic reinforcement of a hierarchy was also evident in the RAF patois. Perhaps because of their brown uniforms, and in combat they were frequently

²⁹ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.11, 36.

³⁰ P. Gray, *Ghosts of Targets*, p. 35.

³¹ E. H. Partridge, ‘Slanguage’ in R. Raymond, & D. Langdon, (eds) *Slipstream: A Royal Air Force Anthology*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946). See also, Ward-Jackson, *It’s a Piece of Cake*, and ‘WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942)’ Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), SxMOA1/2/32/3/2. See also ‘Reports and letters from LAC Papineau’, (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G.

³² A. Mangan, *‘Manufactured’ Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism*, (London, Routledge, 2012), p. 145.

³³ Gray, P. *Ghosts of Targets*, p. 70. Gray was a Canadian from a middle class background.

unwashed and muddy, the Army were referred to as ‘pongos’ after the African apes.³⁴ Even amongst air crew the position of pilot was the most revered. Observers were called ‘flying arseholes’ or ‘feathered arseholes’ because of the ‘O’ on their wing.³⁵ High-ranking officers were ‘scrambled eggs’ because of the gold braid on their uniforms and a large number of medal ribbons were referred to as ‘fruit salad.’³⁶ WAAFs in Balloon Command in particular were punningly called the ‘Spare service’, and as well as ‘penguins’ and ‘wingless wonders’, desk bound ground personnel were also occasionally referred to as ‘the chair force’.³⁷

Hierarchy of trades

It is accepted that masculine identity and occupation are connected,³⁸ and that to play an active role in society during the war, both men and women felt the need to be in uniform, but within the service there was an appreciation that some trades were of more value than others. As Stone discovered with her examination of WAAFs, some trades which might be expected to be coded as highly masculine, were regarded rather disparagingly on operational bomber stations, even by those whose duty it was to perform them. In the case of the WAAF, as Stone suggests, it was the supposed importance of a particular trade to the war effort that was crucial to its positioning in

³⁴ Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 49, R. Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall: An Ordinary Airman's War*, (Vancouver, Grey Stone Books, 1986), p. 86. (According to the OED the word ‘pong’ has its origin in Australian slang from the First World War. The derogatory term for the infantry may also have connotations to their smell.)

³⁵ E. Partridge, & P. Beale (ed) *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (8th edition)*, (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 414. As a flight crew position the observer was replaced in 1942 by Navigators and Bomb-aimers.

³⁶ Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 54, 31.

³⁷ D. Lindo, *A WAAF at War: Wartime Jottings of a WAAF Driver 1941 – 1946*, (Fontwell, Woodfield, 1992), p. 38. See also: Beck, P. *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, Crecy, 2004), p. 81.

³⁸ Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, p.13.

the culture of the service.³⁹ Complex stratification and hierarchies of power are created in societies through intertwined discourses.⁴⁰ Gender, rank, social class, trade (and its prestige and pay scale), together with the length of service and whether personnel were pre-war ‘old boys’, or war-time recruits, were all important factors in determining the complex and interlinked hierarchy of the RAF. The importance of rank and pay scale are more nuanced than might be expected, and will be discussed below, together with the implications of class and gender. This section will examine the more obscure implications of trade to the hierarchy within Bomber Command. This hierarchy may be considered by exploring how the Air Ministry defined certain trades, and by how personnel on operational stations perceived them.

While personnel of all ranks worked in all trades, the RAF pay scale, recruitment, training and trade selection processes effectively prioritised some trades over others. Trades were divided into six groups each with its own rates of pay across all ranks.⁴¹ Group 1 included aircraft trades such as engine and airframe fitters and armourers, those in Group 2 were also often involved with aircraft and included mechanics and other skilled craftsmen. Group 3 included cooks and butchers, Group 4 largely consisted of clerks, while Group 5 was for general duty aircrew, ground gunners, barbers and batmen. The final group, Group M was for medical orderlies and similar roles. For example, skilled technicians, such as welders or radio mechanics were in pay Group 1, armourers specialising in bombs were in Group 2, while motor transport drivers were in Group 5.⁴² For AC2s, the difference between

³⁹ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, pp. 232-236.

⁴⁰ K. A. Cerulo, ‘Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions’ *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1997), 23, pp. 390-392.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Ground Gen*, p. 8. See Appendix D and E.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-40.

pay groups could be as much as one shilling and nine pence a day.⁴³ Pay for an AC2 in Group 5 started at 2 shillings a day while an AC2 fitter in Group 1 received 3s.9d per day. A leading aircraftman in Group 1 with over three years service earned six shillings a day.⁴⁴ As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, psychometric intelligence tests were introduced to the RAF in 1941, for the suitability of personnel for different ground trades.⁴⁵ Using ‘a battery of three intelligence tests’ it was thought possible quantitatively to assess the likelihood that a candidate would pass or fail a trade training course.⁴⁶ Although the tests did not necessarily take into account different levels of education or social and cultural differences,⁴⁷ they effectively placed different trades in a hierarchy of the amount of intelligence required to pass the training. ‘Radio Wireless Mechanic’ or ‘R.D.F. Wireless Mechanic’ were considered ‘high-grade trades’ that required an average score of 80 on the combined tests to be ‘assured success’, while at the bottom of the scale it was expected that candidates for ‘Ground Gunner’, ‘Cook and Butcher’, ‘Batman’ or ‘Aircrafthand General Duties’ would only fail their training if their scores were below 15.⁴⁸

Such distinctions were clearly made by new recruits as they progressed through training and on to their first postings. An observer for Mass-Observation was of the opinion that there was a connection between WAAF’s social class and the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p.12. See also Appendix D.

⁴⁵ P. E. Vernon, & J. B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces*, (London, University of London Press, 1949), pp. 67-71. For a list of trades open to RAF and WAAF personnel see Appendix B.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 278-279.

⁴⁷ N, Thalassis, ‘The Uses of Intelligence Testing in the Recruitment of ‘Other Ranks’ in the Armed Forces during the Second World War’ *History and Philosophy of Psychology*, 5, 1, (2003), p. 20.

⁴⁸ Vernon, & Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces*, pp. 279-280. See also: Operational Record Book: Central Trade Test Board, West Drayton, UK. (1941-1945) and CTTB Operation Record Book, ‘Instructions on the use of GVK Intelligence Test Results by C.T.T.BD. Interviewers’ (1942), The National Archives (TNA), AIR 29/710.

trades they were assigned to. Working-class girls became ‘cooks, sparking plug testers, general duty hands’, middle-class girls were ‘orderlies, teleprinters,[sic]’ and ‘clerks’ while those who were ‘middle-middle class and above’ became ‘administrative workers, radio-operators,’ and ‘plotters’.⁴⁹ Stone found in her interviews that there were ‘ding dong battle[s]’ and ‘feuds’ between WAAFs of different trades,⁵⁰ and at training establishments and on operational stations, ‘cliques’ of girls were formed based loosely on social class and on their trade training.⁵¹ At all levels in the hierarchy ‘group solidarities’ were created, and as a form of resistance to the hegemonic military values, a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ was formed.⁵² WAAF typist, Doreen May tried to resist the authority of one particular WAAF administration officer by burying her paperwork in her ‘in tray’ for several days, and by trying to persuade others not to sign out when they went to a dance in the station gym. She thought they would not be able to punish all of them.⁵³ Different trade groups can be thought of as ‘status groups’ and, as will be discussed in chapters three and four, group unity was constructed around common qualities.⁵⁴ Ronald Hall served with 115 squadron as an engine fitter; he believed that on the flights there was ‘a greater feeling of involvement than any other ground trade.’⁵⁵ The hierarchy of trades was evident in the culture of the wartime RAF and has also been maintained

⁴⁹ ‘WAAF: Reports from an Observer’, (1941-1942). MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2. See also: ‘Interview with Doreen May’, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 12205 (1991).

Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 126.

⁵⁰ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, pp. 614-615.

⁵¹ ‘WAAF: Reports from an Observer’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁵² D. Morgan, ‘Theatre of War: Combat, the military and masculinity’ in: H. Brod, & M. Kaufman, (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, (London, Sage Publications, 1994), p. 175. See also: J. Sommerfield, *The Survivors*, (London, John Lehman, 1947), p. 18, and Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 4.

⁵³ ‘Interview with Doreen May’, IWM, 12205 (1991).

⁵⁴ M. Weber, ‘Class, Status, Party’ in: Lemert, C. (ed) *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings, Third Edition*, (Oxford, Westview Press, 2004), pp. 115-125.

⁵⁵ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (R. Hall), RAF Museum Hendon (RAFMH), AC96/5.

by personal narratives recorded and published after the war. It can even be identified in wartime propaganda, when it was acknowledged in a book exalting women's wartime roles, that most women 'preferred the garage atmosphere of the hangar to the kitchen-front life of the cook-house.'⁵⁶ Ian C----s and his fellow armourers regarded drivers and other personnel who worked 'beyond the perimeter tracks' with 'little more than indifference'.⁵⁷ After the war, aircraftsman Robert Collins recalled similar divisions. During the war he worked on the 'flight lines', and although he did not consider himself to be technically minded, he rationalised it as being 'necessary war work and... better than being *demoted* to kitchen helper.'⁵⁸ Kitchen and domestic tasks were regarded as one of the lowest trades and certain chores, such as cleaning, 'spud bashing' or refuse collection, which were an everyday part of some personnel's working day were used as 'jankers', punishments for minor misdemeanours.⁵⁹ As an AC2, Collins could not be demoted in rank; he could only be demoted by a lowering in prestige of his role, and by a lowering of trade group. He regarded working with Lancasters to be the pinnacle of his service.⁶⁰ As an airframe mechanic, Collins was in pay Group 2. Cook was a Grade 3 trade, while an untrained aircraft hand was in Group 5. The difference in pay between the groups was one shilling and sixpence a day.⁶¹ Women held similar perceptions of trade status; despite cooks being in a higher pay group than clerks, together with general duty aircraftwomen and kitchen staff, they were felt to be at the bottom of the 'social

⁵⁶ Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, p. 77.

⁵⁷ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (I. C----s), RAFMH, AC96/5, (C----s asked for his name to be anonymised).

⁵⁸ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 65. (My emphasis.)

⁵⁹ V. Holden 'Like Jankers Every Day' in: B. R. Williams, (ed) *As We Were: Recollections of life in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 82.

⁶¹ See Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, pp.12-13

scale' by clerks.⁶² Another WAAF felt that working with radar had more prestige than being commissioned as an officer.⁶³

Although they had weapons, because they had the least to do with operations and little or no contact with air crew or aircraft, ground defence personnel were at the bottom of the Bomber Command hierarchy. Theoretically ground defence could have been coded as a highly important, masculine position; it potentially involved firing weapons in a combat role and, because of this, it was closed to women. However, after the threat of invasion diminished, their duty was often repetitive and boring. A comic strip published during the war depicts an Erk being challenged by an airman standing guard duty complete with helmet, webbing and fixed bayonet. The Erk quickly outwits the guard and relieves him of his weapon and torch.⁶⁴ Ground defence was one of the few trades open to the least intelligent, or those who did poorly on the aptitude tests. Little education was required to become a ground gunner, and in Group 5, it was one of the lowest paid trades.⁶⁵ In 1942 the psychiatrist Group Captain Robert Gillespie thought that the trade of ground gunner had been 'classified in such a low category' that it risked becoming 'a receptacle for a considerable proportion of the near-defectives recruited into the service.'⁶⁶ Ground defence personnel invariably had to do more parades and drill with the corresponding amount of 'bull' and attention to boots, buttons and uniforms that was avoided whenever possible by air crew and other trades. In the culture of the RAF, ground defence was a position uncomfortably close to the 'pongos' of the Army. Aircraft

⁶² Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', p. 126.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶⁴ D. Langdon, *All Buttoned Up, A Scrapbook of RAF Cartoons*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), pp. 16-17.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *Ground Gen for Airmen (and Airwomen)* RAF service police were in the same pay scale.

⁶⁶ Medical (Code B, 48): Psychological examinations of recruits and other personnel by industrial psychologists, (1942-1945). R. D. Gillespie 'Report on visits to RAF stations Innsworth, Cardington, Penarth, Padgate and Edinburgh'. TNA, AIR 2/6400.

fitter, leading aircraftman (LAC) Roderic Papineau thought that ground defence was done by ‘a few almost “unemployable” aircraft hands’,⁶⁷ and medical officer, David Stafford-Clark held an equally poor impression of them.⁶⁸ He also thought that men in some trades were perhaps deliberately avoiding danger and their duty. In his diary, he wrote that the mess secretary was ‘young enough to make a far more active contribution – dim though he be.’⁶⁹ In the patois of the RAF, undesirable trades far removed from air crew were given derogatory epithets, drill instructors were known as ‘gravel crushers’,⁷⁰ the service police were known as the ‘Gestapo’ or ‘snoops’,⁷¹ and any aircraftman was belittlingly known as an ‘Erk’ or ‘Plonk.’⁷²

The Erk

The airman is an uncommon figure in popular wartime culture, but when he is visible, as an Erk or airman Plonk, he was frequently a figure of fun. The character of AC2 ‘Joe Mullings’ created by Ward-Jackson, in *No Bombs At All*, almost exactly describes the Erks ‘AC2 Joe’ and ‘Joe Soap’ drawn by David Langdon.⁷³ (See Fig.

1.1) It is worthwhile quoting this description at length.

Joe was a little fellow. About twenty-five, with shoulders not very broad nor back very upright, he was five feet four when he had his medical. His simple, pallid face usually wore a slightly inane grin beneath the steel-rimmed,

⁶⁷ ‘Reports and letters from LAC Papineau’, (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G .

⁶⁸ D. Stafford-Clark, Diary 1940-1945. 2 January 1941, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁰ Ward-Jackson, *It's A Piece of Cake*, p.34.

⁷¹ Papineau, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G.

⁷² Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 26, and Partridge, ‘Slanguage’, p. 62. See also: Francis, *The Flyer*, p.52. Both Ward-Jackson and Partridge discuss the etymology of ‘erk’.

⁷³ C. H. Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All: Some short stories of the Royal Air Force*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), pp. 39-48, D. Langdon, *All Buttoned Up! A Scrapbook of RAF Cartoons*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), pp. 31-38, and D. Langdon, ‘The Erk’, in: Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake* p. 30. He is also very similar in appearance to an erk drawn by C. F. Greatbach in Boothroyd, B. *Are Sergeants Human?* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1944), p. 15. See also character sketches on pp. 23-31.

Service-issue spectacles with the bit of tape wound around the bridge of the nose. He had a sturdy body with short arms and legs, and he seemed to be nearer the ground than he should have been. His working blue tunic was hung up in the drying room and he slaved in his shirt, sleeves rolled up, cloth belt at waist supporting trousers. His soft collar wrinkled at the points and his black tie was frayed with knotting and revealed down one edge a slip of white lining. On an untidy head his cap with a fag stuck in it was jammed askew. Across his chin was a wipe of grease. That was Joe. A bit of a swede, the other chaps said.⁷⁴

Apart from a few details of uniform and the absence of a cigarette, Ward-Jackson's 'Joe' and Langdon's 'AC2 Joe' and 'Joe Soap' are one and the same. Both can be seen in stark contrast to the glamorous and heroic pilots and air crew. Having broken his glasses, it is clear that he is clumsy; he is scruffy and down-at-heel rather than displaying the debonair, casual untidiness of the flyer.⁷⁵ Joe Soap is short, fat and unheroic; wearing glasses and with a hand in his pocket, he appears babyish and innocent. A 'swede' was understood to be 'a raw recruit – i.e., one just from the country; or an airman with a rural, countrified manner.'⁷⁶ Rooted 'nearer the ground than he should have been', Joe is seen in stark contrast to the heroism and glamour of the flyer, and it is obvious that neither will ever fly. As Francis comments, Ward-Jackson's 'apparent celebration of an ordinary aircraftsman is undermined by a condescending tone which predominates throughout the narrative.'⁷⁷ Joe, the

⁷⁴ Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All*, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.23.

⁷⁶ Ward-Jackson *It's a Piece of Cake*, p.58. See also: 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (R. Hall), RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁷⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.52.

‘mythical idiot’,⁷⁸ is happy in his role peeling potatoes, shovelling coal or sweeping the hangar.⁷⁹



FIG 1.1. D Langdon, ‘The Erk’, in: C.H. Ward-Jackson, *It’s a Piece of Cake or RAF Slang Made Easy*, (Milton Keynes, Lightning Source, 2010), p. 30. (First published in 1943.)⁸⁰

⁷⁸ S. Rew, ‘They also Served: The Story of an Ordinary Aircraftsman’ RAFMH, B3692, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All*, pp. 41-43.

⁸⁰ For more examples of ‘Joe’ see: D. Langdon, *All Buttoned Up! A Scrapbook of RAF Cartoons*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944).

However, Joe is also a likable character; in the forward to a collection of Langdon's cartoons, the author Hector Bolitho pointed out 'Langdon's "Erk" is twice as noble as he looks and half as foolish as he seems.'⁸¹ In one of Langdon's four panel cartoon strips, Joe eschews a dance, the cinema, and a darts match with free beer in order to work on the plot of the station's gardening scheme, and unable to hear the news on NAAFI radio in another strip, he fetches a flying helmet in order to use its headphones.⁸² Despite his little victories against RAF authority and service life, as an example to others, it is clear that Joe is a conscientious worker and content with his place near the bottom of the service hierarchy. As will be discussed below, Joe can be seen to be the personification of the unassuming but quietly capable 'little man' identified by Sonya Rose and others.⁸³

When ground personnel are present in other popular representations of the RAF, dialects and unflattering adjectives are frequently used to construct two-dimensional character stereotypes.⁸⁴ Ground personnel are reduced to 'willing hands'⁸⁵ or are 'plodding ground crew' who 'slave joyously – to see their patent handiwork leap skywards in such master hands.'⁸⁶ In *Cloud Cover*, D. G. Barnes' collection of short stories, other airmen play less of a part in the war effort. A mess waiter was a 'cheerful, downright, chubby north countryman... One could well

⁸¹ H. Bolitho forward in D. Langdon, *All Buttoned Up! A Scrapbook of RAF Cartoons*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), p. 3. Bolitho was born in 1897 and served in the RAFVR. He edited the *RAF Journal* until 1942.

⁸² Langdon, *All Buttoned Up*, p. 33, 35. The NAAFI was the Navy, Army, and Air Force Institute.

⁸³ Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 153. See also Calder, *The People's War*, p. 138.

⁸⁴ For propaganda depicting ground personnel and WAAF's see: B. Boothroyd, *Adastral Bodies*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942), B. Boothroyd, *Are Sergeants Human?* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1944), Brown, *Ground Staff*, K. Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, (London, Hutchinson, 1943), J. Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1944), V. Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me*, (London, Hurricane Books, 1943), and L. Taylor, *Ground Gen for Airmen (and Airwomen): A Brief Guide for airmen and airwomen of all trades and grades to the interior economy of life in the Royal Air Force*, (London, Pitman and sons, 1941). For examples of representations of dialect see: Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 57, 107, 138.

⁸⁵ I. Williams, 'In Very great Strength' in Raymond, & Langdon, *Slipstream*, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 93.

imagine him as a sturdy farmer',⁸⁷ while in *The Stories of Flying Officer X*, by H. E. Bates, Erks are referred to as 'stooges' who shelter from the rain under the wings of aircraft and smoke.⁸⁸ However, in light-hearted, popular literature that explains what new recruits could expect from their first days in the service, the humble Erk is constructed differently. In *Behind the Spitfires*, under his pseudonym 'Raff', the cartoonist Bill Hooper, who created the character of Flying Officer Prune for the RAF's *Tee Emm* magazine, described the character of aircraftsman 'Plonk' through the authoritative narrative voice of an intelligence officer. It must be remembered that this is a piece of deliberate propaganda, but by closely associating the Erk with the fighter aircraft of the 'few', giving them a more masculine sartorial elegance and describing how they continue to work during an air raid, Hooper allowed the Erk to share some of the fighter pilot's heroism and glamour.⁸⁹

How those in the Air Force negotiated their identity will be discussed in following chapters, but there is evidence that the Forces were concerned about the morale of all ranks, especially that of lowly AC2s. Welfare Committees composed of senior officers were established on some stations after 1942,⁹⁰ and early in the war, a lecture on morale was to be given to all home stations.⁹¹ It is clear that the RAF were concerned about motivating personnel during 'slack periods' when airmen could

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 57. Barnes was an intelligence officer.

⁸⁸ H. E. Bates, *The Stories of Flying Officer X*, (Mayflower, 1976), p.63. (Bates was commissioned in the RAF to write stories as propaganda- they were published in the *News Chronicle* and later in collections under the pseudonym Flying Officer X.) A 'stooge' is defined by Ward-Jackson as 'a second-rater, one of no importance'. See: Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 57.

⁸⁹ Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941), introduction, 37-38, 56-57, 85-90. Focussing on the fighter pilot was a deliberate ploy to entice recruits. After training, personnel had no say which command they were posted to.

⁹⁰ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.122. They 'composed of the station commander, chaplain, catering officer, education officer, entertainments officer, a senior WAAF officer, and the physical-fitness officer.'

⁹¹ RAF: miscellaneous official circulars, (1940-1945), 'Morale', WL, PP/RMK/D.1: Box 7. Although undated, the lecture was probably written during the 'phony war' as it references the First World War and the Finish/ Russian War. In places it has been annotated.

‘indulge in “wishful thinking”, sit back, do nothing and hope that everything will come right of its own accord.’⁹² However, although the lecture was ostensibly intended for ‘everyone – however great or however small *his* responsibility’ it is clear that the target audience was male and more likely to be from the ranks rather than an officer or NCO.⁹³ It was explained to personnel that, due to the rapid expansion of the RAF, promotion could be a matter of luck rather than ability, but that if airmen had pride in the service they would remain loyal to their superiors despite not receiving due recognition for their work.⁹⁴ Those who had joined up for the war were also given particular attention in order to motivate them after the sometimes disappointing realities of the service had lowered their morale.⁹⁵ In the forward to the Air Ministry’s publication *The Airman’s Welfare: Notes for Officers*, officers were informed that for new recruits it was inevitable that the ‘violent interruption of the normal ways of life’ would create anxiety and cause ‘personal problems’. They were reminded that, for many, adapting to the restrictions of military service was not easy and required conscious effort.⁹⁶ Both physical and psychological influences on morale were stressed. RAF officers were reminded of the importance of ‘good and adequate food’, letters from home, leave, and recreational activities on the morale of those in their command.⁹⁷

It is evident that the Air Ministry and the upper echelons of the RAF were aware of the importance of psychology on the welfare and morale of the lowest ranks, especially new recruits and conscripts in for the duration; that there were

⁹² Ibid., p. 4.

⁹³ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁶ Air Ministry, *The Airman’s Welfare: Notes for Officers*, (Air Ministry, 1941), p.4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-13.

measures put in place to influence morale suggests that the morale of ground personnel was, at least at times, regarded as a problem. The Erk was expected to be lacking in self discipline and motivation. During the war, the psychological treatment of such personnel was informed by discourses that culturally constructed wartime society, and in particular, the beliefs and cultural assumptions about bravery and stoicism.

As Penny Summerfield has discussed, women were either ‘heroic or ‘stoic’.⁹⁸ However, as Sonya Rose argues, these two alternative discourses constructed the courage of the nation. One saw the nation as unassuming and ‘quietly... heroic people’ while the other depicted a ‘nation of quintessentially reasonable citizens who willingly and with good humour sacrificed their private and personal interests and desires for the common good.’⁹⁹ Risking their lives in combat, fighter pilots and bomber crews epitomised cool heroism of the first group, while for those on the ground, the second more stoic mould was more apt; the RAF’s ‘press on’ attitude and wider society’s ‘stiff upper lip’ stoicism was evoked. Airmen and women were urged not to worry about the disappointing ‘realities’, ‘discomforts’ and ‘boredom’ of the service. They were told that morale was dependent on both external and internal factors, by uncontrollable external events such as the weather, but also by the individual’s health and ‘state of mind’. They were reminded that if their state of mind was ‘sound’ then their morale would ‘stand the worst physical conditions.’¹⁰⁰ Such rhetoric of self sacrifice for the common good, Rose argues, was central to the

⁹⁸ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 78-105.

⁹⁹ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Morale’ WL, PP/RMK/D.1, p. 8.

concept of ‘Britishness’ and citizenship,¹⁰¹ as, during the war there was a paradigm shift away from prioritising ‘individual liberty’ towards ‘emphasizing the common good.’¹⁰²

The ethos that men must not ‘blub’ and must keep control of their emotions was taught to males early in their life.¹⁰³ However, during the war such ‘emotional reticence’ was also a desirable female attribute,¹⁰⁴ and can be seen in popular culture.¹⁰⁵ In the film *The Gentle Sex*, Anne Lawrence (Joyce Howard), an Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) artillery-woman, continues to work through the night on an ambulance even after learning that her fiancé had been posted as missing presumed killed.¹⁰⁶ As Leslie Howard narrates, she ‘won’t forget’ and ‘won’t go under.’ Similarly, in Neville Shute’s novel *Pastoral*, after her lover’s aircraft is late returning from an operation, WAAF signal officer, Gervase Stephenson, also carries on with her duties.

This was what training was for, she thought. This was what discipline was for, to enable you to pigeon-hole your feelings and carry on and do the job you had to do. Discipline, she thought sadly, meant the difference between a grown-up and a child. A child would cry.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 105.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰³ P. Lewis’ ‘Mummy Matron and the Maids: Feminine presence and absence in male institutions 1934-63’ in: Roper, and Tosh, (eds) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 177, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 157.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2. For examples in the popular press see for example: Anon, ‘Our Women Do Not Weep!’ *The Daily Mail*, 22 July 1941, p.2, or Anon, ‘Train Britons to be Tough’ *The Daily Mail*, 5 September 1942, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ L. Howard, *The Gentle Sex*, (Two Cities Film, 1943). See also Thorpe, R. *Cry Havoc*, (MGM, 1943).

¹⁰⁷ N. Shute, *Pastoral*, (London, Pan, 1964), p. 202.

Air crew were discouraged from ‘figuring the odds.’¹⁰⁸ The use of euphemism in the RAF’s own distinctive idiom disguised what air crew were probably most anxious about. Two things could end a flying career, ‘coffins or crackers’;¹⁰⁹ air crew could be killed or lose their sanity. Operational air crew were afraid of displaying symptoms of LMF,¹¹⁰ and to be killed was to have ‘bought it’ or to have ‘gone for a Burton.’¹¹¹ For those still training as air crew, it was almost as worrying to be given a ‘bowler hat’¹¹² and return to civilian life. If flyers were not able to admit to their fears, in the culture of laconic understatement in the RAF, they were also discouraged from ‘shooting a line’, or publicly admitting their bravery and skills.¹¹³

Ground personnel struggled to measure up to the kind of courage air crew seemed to display daily and placed the ‘gallant company’ of air crew on a pinnacle.¹¹⁴ However, the fears of ground personnel were more akin to those of civilians and the majority had less dangerous trials to endure. Highlighting harrowing experiences in his humorous account of the life of a new recruit, Basil Boothroyd described men being detailed to wait ‘outside a derelict slaughter-house’. Not knowing that they were queuing to have their photographs taken for their identity

¹⁰⁸ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁹ Dearnaley, E. J. and Warr, P. B. *Aircrew Stress in Wartime Operations*, (London, Academic Press, 1979), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ E. Jones, ‘LMF’: The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War’ *The Journal of Military History*, 70, (2006), pp. 439-458.

¹¹¹ Ward-Jackson, *It’s a Piece of Cake*, p. 15, 32.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 32. See also: Partridge, & Beale, (ed) *A Dictionary of Slang*, p. 125. Francis, *The Flyer*, p.107.

¹¹³ The best ‘lines’, deliberate exaggerations or what were deemed unacceptable statements of fact, were recorded in books in the mess and some were published in *Tee Emm*, the RAF’s official air crew magazine. See: T. Hamilton, *The Life and Times of Pilot Officer Prune: The Official story of Tee Emm*, (London, HMSO, 1991).pp. 48-49. See also: Ward-Jackson, *It’s a Piece of Cake* p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 8. Barnes was 41 in 1939 and served as a flying officer.

cards, the new recruits ‘suspected the worse’ and their fear is palpable in the accompanying illustration.¹¹⁵ (See Fig 1.2.)



Fig. 1.2. ‘1425371’ by C. F. Greatbach in: B. Boothroyd, *Adastral Bodies*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942), p. 26.

The new recruit, not yet even an aircraftsman, is once again a figure of fun, but while these childish fears may have been intended to humorously strike a chord with an audience of servicemen or future intake, the men stoically await their fate. Airmen

¹¹⁵ B. Boothroyd, *Adastral Bodies*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942), p. 24. *Adastral Bodies* was first published in *Punch*. Boothroyd worked for *Punch* before the war but became a Police sergeant instructor in the RAF. He was commissioned in 1943. See: Obituary: Mr Basil Boothroyd. *The Times* March 01, 1988, p. 14.

(and airwomen) were trained to accept their lot passively, and this characteristic is also evident in the language of the RAF. When asking for things they were entitled to, but that were unavailable, it was common for them to be told: 'You've had it!'¹¹⁶ Similarly, in RAF parlance 'Joe Soap' and to 'carry the can' signified the lowly unfortunate scapegoat who was left with the most unpleasant duties and responsibilities.¹¹⁷ (See FIG.1.1)

After a hit and run attack by a Messerschmitt 109, it seems that Ward-Jackson's character, 'Joe Mullings,' battles heroically to extinguish the resultant fire in the tail of an aircraft hit by incendiary bullets. However, this was not because he was a heroic character, but rather because he was unintelligent and lacked imagination. He is not clever enough to recognise the danger he is in. He and a rigger were slow to take cover, and when he did realise what was happening, Joe was not concerned about saving the burning aircraft, but his favourite broom which was inside it.¹¹⁸ In the RAF and in wider society, it was accepted that there was a relationship between the need for bravery and intelligence. A Canadian AC2 airframe mechanic realised:

without better education or being in aircrew, we would never attain their rank, with its better clothes, better food, better pay, and its salutes from the lower classes. We were the poor in the low-rent district; they were the upper class.¹¹⁹

Clearly not officer material, Erks were also firmly positioned in discourses of class.

¹¹⁶ See: Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All*, p. 64. Anon, 'You've Had It!' *The Times* Wednesday, Aug 19, 1942, p. 5, See also 'Reports and letters from LAC Papineau', (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G. and 'WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942)', MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

¹¹⁷ Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 18 & 40. 'Joe' was also a slang term for a 'sucker' or a 'mug'. 'Reports and letters from LAC Papineau', (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G.

¹¹⁸ Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All*, pp. 46-48.

¹¹⁹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 106.

Race and Class

Despite there being a predominant narrative of national community,¹²⁰ during the war, the RAF was divided by race, class, and gender as well as by military rank.¹²¹ Rose argues that ‘active citizenship’ was linked to ‘social responsibility’,¹²² and that representations of national identity in wartime either subsumed or denied the significance of other identities.¹²³ However, while those serving in the military were playing an active part in society, some roles seemed to be more crucial to the war effort than others. In the RAF identities were therefore largely constructed around the numerous and varied trades personnel were assigned to. It must also be remembered that people can simultaneously have several identities. As Angus Calder discusses in *The Myth of the Blitz*, British propaganda created the mythical image of British national identity through a series of binary oppositions creating the Germans as the other.¹²⁴ Although many RAF personnel were British subjects, personnel came from the Dominions and from all over the world. Many saw England as the ‘Mother country’, while others, such as the Poles, came to Britain to continue their war against Germany. There were deliberate attempts to create a shared national identity around an idyllic and mythical rural England depicted in films such as *Went the Day Well?* and *A Canterbury Tale*,¹²⁵ but, living on isolated, bleak and windswept bomber stations in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, this may not have been particularly successful. Such propaganda had even less resonance with those from the Dominions

¹²⁰ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 2.

¹²¹ Francis, *The Flyer*, pp.46-48.

¹²² Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 19.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²⁴ Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*, pp.195-196. See also: K. A. Cerulo, ‘Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions’ *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1997), 23, p. 390.

¹²⁵ Rose, *Which People's War?* pp. 203, 286-287. A. Calvacanti, *Went the Day Well?* (Ealing Studios, 1942). M. Powell, and E. Pressburger, *A Canterbury Tale*, (Archers, 1944).

who were used to a warmer climate, and for them there was an added confusion as to whether they were serving a nation or an empire.¹²⁶

The RAF was a multinational service. More than two fifths of air crew came from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Africa,¹²⁷ and over 5500 coloured personnel from the West Indies were recruited and served in the RAF in the United Kingdom in the latter half of the war.¹²⁸ Although, as Neil Wynn argues, the British population was less prejudiced than American troops who were stationed in Britain, and there was no official colour bar,¹²⁹ there is evidence of racial discrimination in the RAF.¹³⁰ Trades that involved intimate physical contact with others, such as masseur, mental nursing orderly or dental clerk orderly, were closed to West Indians.¹³¹ As elements of the RAF had effectively served as a colonial police force in the interwar period, the concept of colonial racial superiority remained ingrained in some officers. Beliefs in stereotypical racial traits such as that ‘non-whites [were] both morally inferior and more childlike than whites’ persisted during the war and helped to legitimise colonial rule.¹³² Intelligence officer Hector Bolitho noted that the RAF was a multinational force with ‘a mixture of blood and race’. Visiting a desolate bomber station, he ‘saw an alert little airman from Barbados, darting about under a bomber that had just landed.’¹³³ Ground personnel were frequently marginalised in popular representations, but there is an added racial

¹²⁶ Rose, *Which People's War?* pp. 237-238.

¹²⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.43.

¹²⁸ M. Sherwood, *Many Struggles: West Indian Workers and Service Personnel in Britain 1939- 1945* (London, Karia Press, 1985), p.38. See also: N. A. Wynn, ‘‘Race War’’: Black American GIs and West Indians in Britain During The Second World War’ *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24, 3, (2006), p. 341.

¹²⁹ Wynn, ‘Race War’, p. 329.

¹³⁰ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.61.

¹³¹ TRAINING (Code B, 74): ‘West Indian recruits: training 1943 – 1946’, Minute 101, 8 January 1945, TNA, AIR 2/8278.

¹³² Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 76.

¹³³ H. Bolitho, *A Penguin In The Eyrie: An R.A.F. Diary, 1939 -1945*, (London, Hutchinson, 1955), p. 77.

dimension in the condescending tone with which Bolitho describes this West Indian airman. Prejudices continued right up to the end of the war, On VE day, a WAAF radio mechanic was dancing with one of the four West Indian NCOs on her station when she was told ‘you really shouldn’t be mixing with those niggers you know.’¹³⁴ Reporting to a new posting, Jamaican general duties clerk, E. Martin Noble, overheard a WAAF clerk discussing him with a flight lieutenant. They were curious as to whether he could read.¹³⁵

In his diary published after the war, Bolitho made similar assumptions about class. Discussing RAF language, he makes the distinction between air crew officers who insist on calling their aeroplanes ‘aircraft’ while the fitters and riggers he describes admit: ‘You sort of become attached to the *kite* on which you are working, just like a groom with his horse.’¹³⁶ Calling the aircraft a kite probably originated from the ‘box-kite’ appearance of the earliest aircraft,¹³⁷ but because a kite is controlled from the ground, it effectively gives the riggers and fitters a suggestion of increased importance (or at least diminishes that of the air crew). However, the language Bolitho’s characters use reveals more about the author, his imagined reader and his prejudices. While ground crew undoubtedly did become attached to the aircraft they worked on, and did call them ‘kites’, it is unlikely that men (and women) drawn from a wide social background would have chosen this particular simile to describe their relationship. Bolitho’s class assumptions are evident in the simile of a groom and his horse.

¹³⁴ ‘Interview with Patricia Lockett’, Reel 4, (2004), Imperial War Museum (IWM), 27207.

¹³⁵ E. M. Noble, *Jamaica Airman: A Black Airman in Britain 1943 and After*, (London, New Beacon, 1984), p. 44.

¹³⁶ Bolitho, *A Penguin In The Eyrie*, p. 36. (original emphasis.)

¹³⁷ Ward-Jackson, *It’s a Piece of Cake* p. 40.

Before the war, a commission could be purchased by ‘laying out a fair sum of money’;¹³⁸ consequently many senior officers were from affluent families and had received private school educations.¹³⁹ One Canadian airman felt that the Air Forces’ ‘caste system, like a sliver under the thumbnail, was always there,’¹⁴⁰ and an observer for Mass-Observation reported a physical training instructor had confided that the social order and ‘unfair inequalities of treatment’ were ‘not quite dependant on stripes.’¹⁴¹ Francis admits that although the RAF appeared to be an informal meritocracy, it was deeply scarred by social divisions.¹⁴² Rose argues that despite the rhetoric of ‘national cross-class unity’, ‘the issue of class inequality was central to the wartime nation.’¹⁴³ The RAF then, was a microcosm of wider society. After the Ministry of Information’s disastrous early attempts at propaganda, such as the poster ‘*Your courage, Your cheerfulness, Your resolution, will bring Us victory, which seemed to imply that the efforts of the people would be for the benefit of the ruling elite,*’¹⁴⁴ Rose highlights that the government propaganda machine deliberately framed the war through the discourse of ‘the equality of sacrifice.’¹⁴⁵ Consequently, there was a swell of public support for the Beveridge report that the government could not ignore.¹⁴⁶ Rose maintains that many saw social reform as a priority after the war. Rather than ‘interpreting cynicism as a sign of apathy,’ she argues ‘that it

¹³⁸ James, *The Paladins*, p. 139.

¹³⁹ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.15.

¹⁴⁰ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 106.

¹⁴¹ Assorted Material: ‘Reports from Individual Members of the Forces (1939 – 43)’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/J.

¹⁴² Francis, *The Flyer*, p.5, 15, 47-49.

¹⁴³ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 29, 67.

¹⁴⁴ J. Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-45*, (London, Tauris, 2000), p. 18.

¹⁴⁵ Rose, *Which People’s War?* pp. 29-71.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

was a symptom of the fear of unfulfilled desire.’¹⁴⁷ While certain high ranking RAF officers favoured conservative politics,¹⁴⁸ representative of their class and education, among bomber crew the dominant political outlook was ‘a mildly sceptical socialism and belief in social justice.’¹⁴⁹ Mass-Observation found that 92 per cent of the population had heard of the Beveridge report and that 88 per cent thought it should be implemented.¹⁵⁰ For ground personnel, as well as the perennial struggle against the RAF authority,¹⁵¹ many leaned towards the left politically.¹⁵² As well as class and political divisions, the importance of gender should also be considered. David Morgan calls for ‘a much more detailed, finely nuanced, and systematic comparative analysis of the constructions of masculinities around the sites of war, combat, and military life.’¹⁵³ Such a study of the wartime RAF is further problematised because men and women served together in the Air Force.

Gender and WAAF ‘dilution’

The war pushed the boundaries of traditional gender roles. Many women were taught to drive and to carry out what had been considered masculine tasks. By the end of 1940, more trades including instrument mechanic and radio operator were open to women. There were 70 shared trades and 19 WAAF only trades including charging board operator, instrument mechanic and sparking plug tester.¹⁵⁴ In 1939, the only trades open to women were roles in ‘administration, as cooks, mess and kitchen

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁴⁸ D. Bennett, *Pathfinder: A War Autobiography*, (1958) (Manchester, Crecy, 1998), pp. 9-11.

¹⁴⁹ Bishop *Bomber Boys*, p. xxxv.

¹⁵⁰ Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, p. 582.

¹⁵¹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 4.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵³ Morgan, ‘Theatre of War’, p. 181.

¹⁵⁴ Air Ministry *Air Publication 3234*, pp. 132-133.

orderlies, clerks, equipment assistants, motor transport drivers and fabric workers.’¹⁵⁵

In 1941, Group I trades of radio and wireless mechanics were opened to women, and in clerical positions 1:1 substitution had reached 43 per cent by 1945.¹⁵⁶

With a specific focus on the idiosyncratic culture of bomber stations, this section will examine both masculinity and femininity within the RAF. The importance of gender on the negotiation of ‘subjective identity’ will be discussed in chapter four.¹⁵⁷ It must be remembered that genders are constructed in opposition to each other, and that meanings and cultural assumptions are fluid rather than fixed.¹⁵⁸ During the war, hegemonic masculinity was especially unstable because, as Rose argues, the successful enactment of masculinity depended on being in one of the three services.¹⁵⁹ However, the RAF differed from the other services in that only a minority wore the ultimate symbol of masculinity, the air crew brevet, and also because women served alongside men and undertook the same work in the same trades. Unlike other women’s auxiliaries, the WAAF was fully integrated into the parent service’s organisation and administration.¹⁶⁰ They wore almost identical uniforms, and in certain trades they achieved parity in rank and ability, if not in pay. Men and women had separate living quarters, ablutions and messes, and disciplinary procedures were in place to enforce a curfew and segregation of the sexes; the punishment for a man being found in women’s quarters was strict.¹⁶¹ The model of ‘separate spheres’, between male and female, public and private, is now regarded as

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 84

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁵⁷ J. Tosh, ‘What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain’ *History Workshop Journal*, 38, (1994), p. 194.

¹⁵⁸ Croft, ‘Emotional Women and Frail Men’, p. 111.

¹⁵⁹ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 153, 160.

¹⁶⁰ T. Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War’ *Women’s History Review*, 8, 4, (1999), p. 606.

¹⁶¹ Beck, *Keeping Watch* p. 97. See also M. Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue: Experiences in the WAAF*, (Stroud, Tempus Publishing, 2006), p. 107.

an over simplification,¹⁶² and as Michael Roper pointed out, even in an all male environment such as in the trenches during the First World War, women played a role in the creation of masculinity.¹⁶³ In the RAF however, domestic ‘normality’ was available on the other side of the boundary fence and on the station men and women mixed daily. As the war progressed and the numbers of WAAF increased, the mess arrangements were integrated on many stations.¹⁶⁴ The two spheres model is especially problematic when applied to an RAF station where the domestic and military worlds were frequently blurred.¹⁶⁵ As Francis states, unlike other more traditionally patriarchal services, the presence of women on operational stations ‘allowed the possibility of heterosexual romantic attachments developing on the base itself.’¹⁶⁶ While he admits that male and female roles were ‘complementary and interrelated’, Francis has only room to examine the masculine role of the airman; he recommends that *The Flyer* should be read together with studies of women’s wartime roles.¹⁶⁷ However, as well as considering how women’s roles within the RAF were constructed, the implications of their presence on male ground personnel are also important. Women performed what had previously been considered male roles, and made it necessary for some men, already emasculated in comparison to air crew, to renegotiate their masculinity.

The replacement of men by women in industry and the military was known by the term ‘dilution’ which effectively ‘reinforced their secondary status, and often

¹⁶² Tosh, ‘What Should Historians do with Masculinity’ p. 187. M. Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity’ *The Historical Journal*, 45, 3 (2002), p. 638.

¹⁶³ M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹⁶⁴ A. Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, (Braunton, Merlin Books, 1985), p. 139.

¹⁶⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.98.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.5.

their low pay relative to men.¹⁶⁸ While in some trades there was a one to one substitution, in the Air Force it was understood that a WAAF was equal to two-thirds of an airman.¹⁶⁹ This stems from the pay scale, which for women in 1945 remained two thirds of the male rate for corresponding ranks.¹⁷⁰ For example, AC2 radio telephone operators received three shillings and three pence per day, while WAAF ACW2s in the same occupation received two shillings and two pence.¹⁷¹ It was discovered that it took longer to train airwomen than airmen in certain trades such as electrician, and proportionately more women failed the seven-week driving course.¹⁷² This was of course due to earlier gender specific expectations and education rather than any intrinsic characteristics; however these gender differences were reinforced by the RAF.

As Rose and others have argued, men resented the intrusion of women into the workspace.¹⁷³ Within the RAF, some felt that work that WAFs were doing ‘were immediately classed as “cissy” jobs.’¹⁷⁴ If the same tasks were being performed by women, men could no longer establish and maintain their masculinity through a display of their technical knowledge, skills, strength and mechanical understanding. Using oral testimony, Tessa Stone tested Higonet and Higonet’s ‘double helix’ model of continued female subordination, against the experiences of

¹⁶⁸ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p. 110.

¹⁶⁹ Joubert de la Ferte, *The Forgotten Ones*, pp. 150, 174-175. This was standard in civilian society too. See: Calder, *People’s War*, p. 402.

¹⁷⁰ F. H. Sandford to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay 5. May 1945, ‘Substitution of WAAF for RAF personnel: reports and policy, (1942- 1945)’, TNA, AIR 14/1009. See also: Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 54. Women were paid two thirds of the male wage in civilian industry too. See: Calder, *People’s War*, p.402.

¹⁷¹ L. Taylor, *Ground Gen for Airmen (and Airwomen)*, (London, Pitman and Sons, 1941, pp.13, 34-40. An ACW2 was an aircraftwoman, second class.

¹⁷² K. Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, (London, Hutchinson, 1943), pp. 113-114.

¹⁷³ Rose, *Which People’s War?* p.188.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Male Attitudes to Women in the Forces (1941)’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/F.

women in WAAF during the war.¹⁷⁵ Higonnet and Higonnet suggested that although women may be seen to make what appear to be advances in status, the ‘gender-linked structure of subordination’ remains constant. During wartime, roles undertaken by women were ‘temporarily reclassified as appropriate for women, but the gendered hierarchy was maintained by an equal advance in status of the men they replaced.’¹⁷⁶

Stone contends that the double helix model cannot be applied to the RAF and the WAAF. She found that airwomen did not necessarily feel inferior to airmen, but that in many instances ‘WAAF trade status functioned *in parallel* to RAF status’.¹⁷⁷ Women in prestigious trades felt superior to both men and women working in other trades. Stone concludes that an airwoman’s identity as a member of the WAAF was constructed, not in relation to the potential ‘glamour’ of her situation, but was premised on a notion of service and duty and on a clear sense of direct participation in, and active contribution to, the war effort.¹⁷⁸ She suggests that men were emasculated by women doing their trade and were ‘doubly undermined... by the implicit contrast of their own role with that of “real” men’ who were theoretically released to fly.¹⁷⁹ Considering ground forces, David Morgan argues that there is ‘a dynamic and fluid distinction’ between combat and non-combat, ‘and individuals may move between these military positions according to circumstances.’¹⁸⁰ However, apart from a minority of ground personnel who volunteered and were accepted as air crew, this was not often the case in the RAF and certainly not in the WAAF. Over

¹⁷⁵ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’ pp. 605-624.

¹⁷⁶ M. R. Higonnet & P. L-R. Higonnet (1987) ‘The Double Helix’ in: M. R. Higonnet, J. Jenson, S. Michel, and M. C. Weitz, (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the two World Wars*, (London, Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 34-35.

¹⁷⁷ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, p. 615. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 236.

¹⁷⁸ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, p. 620. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 127-128.

¹⁷⁹ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 117.

¹⁸⁰ Morgan, ‘Theatre of War’, p.176.

900 men released from the balloon trade of ‘operator driver’ by WAAF replacements were to be directly remustered as ‘driver M.T. Group V.’¹⁸¹ Stone highlights that ‘definitions of both feminine *and* masculine roles in the RAF were contested and shifting’,¹⁸² and within the RAF, the majority of the men working in trades ‘diluted’ by women did not then go on to become air crew. For many their status was severely undermined,¹⁸³ and there was an ‘implicit suggestion that they were not real men because they were not air crew.’¹⁸⁴

Although a plotter interviewed by Stone regarded balloons as a ‘back up trade’,¹⁸⁵ Stone focussed much of her study on WAAFs in Balloon Command because of its ‘dangerous and combat-oriented nature.’¹⁸⁶ Despite being physically taxing and having the potential to bring down enemy aircraft and therefore a masculine role, Stone was surprised to find that Balloon Command was not a prestigious posting for women.¹⁸⁷ She concluded that combat was not gender specific, but specific to air crew,¹⁸⁸ and that the most important factor in any particular trades’ perceived importance was ‘its proximity to operations’.¹⁸⁹ Stone is right to consider WAAF identity in a military context as well as from a feminist perspective, however, by focussing entirely on women, by considering balloons

¹⁸¹ Operational Record Book: Central Trade Test Board, West Drayton, UK. (1941-1945), 24 May 1942, TNA, AIR 29/710.

¹⁸² Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’ p. 612. (emphasis in the original.)

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 611-612. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 611.

¹⁸⁵ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 235. ‘Plotters’ tracked aircraft on the large table maps in operations rooms. Although they have been made famous tracking incoming German bombers during the Battle of Britain, they also plotted RAF aircraft.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁸⁷ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, pp. 612-613. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 127.

¹⁸⁸ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 234.

¹⁸⁹ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, p. 613. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, pp. 213-239.

almost a combat role, and by failing to differentiate between operational and non operational commands, she over simplifies the complexity of the RAF hierarchy.

Even before WAAF dilution replaced the majority of male personnel in Balloon Command, working with balloon trades were not considered prestigious. Stafford-Clark was bitter that he was posted to balloons in July 1940 after serving with operational squadrons in France. He wrote in his diary:

These middle aged men, trying so painfully and perpetually to be skittish because they were in R.A.F. uniforms made me feel again sick of the dead beat atmosphere of the B[alloon] B[arrage], utterly restless, and frustrated in being returned to balloons after a brief period in the real Air Force.¹⁹⁰

Like ground defence, throughout the war, balloons were thought to be unglamorous, unimportant postings by RAF personnel. By 1943, Balloon Command was being reduced in scale and balloon WAAFs were remustered to new trades. Largely because their trades required physically strong women who could endure harsh living and working conditions, ex balloon WAAFs were considered unfeminine.¹⁹¹

Stone believes that, in all the home forces, 'women generally replaced men at a ratio of one for one in *all* trades except balloon operators, cooks, and, under particular conditions, flight mechanics and motor transport drivers.'¹⁹² This tended to be the case in many trades where work was routine, indeed while still applying gendered assumptions about male and female capabilities, women were found to be better than men in some in some trades. Female code and cipher officers were thought to be

¹⁹⁰ D. Stafford-Clark, Diary 1940-1945, 25 July 1940, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2.

¹⁹¹ 'Private Papers of K M Cove', (1992), IWM, Documents. 1947.

¹⁹² Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', p. 103. (Emphasis in the original). See also: Stone, 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity', pp. 608-609.

superior to men,¹⁹³ as were lower ranks telephonists and radio-telephone operators.¹⁹⁴

However, in Bomber Command, WAAFs were thought to be 'slightly inferior to men... [at] all trades technical and other trades which involve fitting equipment to aircraft, fault finding, and heavy work.' Specific trades included 'aircrafthand, M.T. mechanic and M.T. driver (heavy vehicles only).'¹⁹⁵ Although a limited number of women were trained as fitters and mechanics, trades such as charging board operator, instrument mechanic and sparking plug tester became WAAF trades rather than a small part of a male mechanic or fitter's responsibility. This was justified because:

Much of the mechanical work was done at benches in workshops, and only required an adaption of skill in the descendants of generations of patient delicate fingered females who had devoted long hours to cross-stitch, petit point or invisible mending.¹⁹⁶

Gendered assumptions of women's capabilities continued to dictate which trades were open to them. Women mechanics and fitters only worked directly on aircraft at training establishments. Regardless of their gender, it was of course also more economical to train someone with little mechanical knowledge to perform one isolated but important task rather than to teach them all the skills and knowledge required to be a highly skilled craftsperson or engineer. It was accepted that 'most women prefer one-process to multiple jobs in mechanical trades' and that they 'raised no objection to a soothing repetition of work.'¹⁹⁷ Still conforming to a model of physical strength and technical expertise, it was only at more passive, sedentary,

¹⁹³ 'Substitution of WAAF for RAF personnel: reports and policy, (1942- 1945)', Appendix A. Officers, TNA, AIR 14/1009.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Attachment 7B, 21 March 1945. See also: Brown, *Ground Staff*, p. 40.

¹⁹⁵ Attachment 7B, 21 March 1945, TNA, AIR 14/1009. 'MT' is the abbreviation for motor transport.

¹⁹⁶ K. Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, (London, Hutchinson, 1943), p. 112.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

and repetitive trades that WAAFs were superior to men. Competence at trades and skills which were coded as feminine did not challenge patriarchy.¹⁹⁸ Like roles in the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) service, roles in the Air Force were gendered; women's roles were restricted to seemingly more passive roles in order to enable men to play an active role in citizenship.¹⁹⁹ For men in some trades, any slight to their masculinity was tempered by the knowledge that WAAFs received less pay, and because the substitution was rarely on a one to one basis. In common with dilution in civilian industry, skilled trades were divided into smaller jobs, women received less training and there was no parity in the work they carried out.²⁰⁰ While male instrument repairers were trained to repair all aircraft instruments, because it was believed that women found repetitive work 'soothing' rather than monotonous, women might only ever work on oil gauges.²⁰¹ New trades such as sparking plug tester were created especially for the WAAFs and it was found that, for such roles, only a month's training was required.²⁰² This was a new trade in 1941. The main requirement was 'reliability' and 'the job consist[ed] of stripping down spark plugs taken from aircraft, cleaning them, re-assembling them and adjusting the spark plug gap.'²⁰³ Conforming to the double helix model, after the creation of this role, a male aircraft engine mechanic would remove the spark plugs from an engine but regard cleaning them beneath him. It is likely that any crisis of masculinity caused by

¹⁹⁸ Penny Summerfield discusses two examples of women who felt superior to men in the same trade, 'plotters' whose role was coded as feminine, and an aircraft fitter who thought men cut corners and were lazy. See: Summerfield, P. *Reconstructing Women's Lives*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁹⁹ L. Noakes, "'Serve to Save': Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937—41" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47, 4, (2012), p. 752.

²⁰⁰ L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91*, (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 51.

²⁰¹ Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, p. 112.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰³ Recruitment literature for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) (1939-1945), 'Women can help in the WAAF' Air Ministry leaflet, (1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/G/5.

dilution was experienced predominantly by airmen who were already in trades (such as kitchen hands and general duty airmen who carried out domestic duties) that were already far from the heroic masculine ideal.

Britain in the 1940s was a largely patriarchal society,²⁰⁴ and despite the increase in numbers of female personnel, the armed forces remained patriarchal establishments. As part of patriarchal class structure, the codes and concepts of hegemonic masculinity propagated throughout society.²⁰⁵ Masculine norms were reinforced wherever and whenever males gathered together, at work or when socialising in clubs, societies, or the public house.²⁰⁶ Boys who became air crew in the RAF were inculcated in the Edwardian values of sportsmanship and the emotional control of ‘stiff upper lip’ through their education in public schools and grammar schools.²⁰⁷ Those lower in the social scale were introduced to an ethos of physical fitness, service and patriotism similar to ‘public-school manliness’ by movements such as the boy scouts,²⁰⁸ and ‘muscular Christianity’.²⁰⁹ For the working classes, masculinity was constructed in the culture of the work environment; work that could be dangerous and physically demanding required skills that could only be attained by what amounted to a rite of passage. Belonging to the group was reinforced by an ‘occupational culture’ of language, humour and obligations to each other.²¹⁰ Already ‘institutionalised and taught from childhood by socialisation’,²¹¹ gender roles were further reinforced by the RAF during training. Despite the rapid

²⁰⁴ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 152.

²⁰⁵ Tosh, ‘What Should Historians do with Masculinity’ p. 190.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

²⁰⁷ See for example, Mangan, *‘Manufactured’ Masculinity*.

²⁰⁸ Tosh, ‘What Should Historians do with Masculinity’, p. 190.

²⁰⁹ Mangan, *‘Manufactured’ Masculinity*, pp. 78-98. Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 165.

²¹⁰ A. Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, (London, Routledge, 1988) p.59.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

expansion of the service, personnel were taught how to behave and perform their roles in the service by a core of NCO instructors who were ‘old sweats.’

Rose argues that the traditional model of heroic, military manliness was challenged after the First World War, and that a more ‘homely’ calm and thoughtful male also became an acceptable face of masculinity.²¹² The British male in the late 1930s and early 1940s was constructed in opposition to the ‘hyper-masculine’ male of Nazi Germany.²¹³ Within the RAF, as Francis discusses, it was acceptable for the flyer to exhibit his manliness in seemingly contrasting ways, displaying either uncultured militaristic aggression or a sympathy for the arts.²¹⁴ Ideals of manliness were equally nuanced for ground personnel. AC2 Joe and the character of Carter in *A Matter of Life and Death* epitomise these alternative masculinities.²¹⁵ In the lecture on morale mentioned previously, the perceived differences between the British and the German character and masculine ideals were compared. German hyper-masculinity, extremes of physical fitness and harsh discipline were ultimately regarded as a weakness.²¹⁶

As David Morgan shows, military organizations ‘produce a complex range of masculinities’,²¹⁷ and it is useful here to consider masculinity using the model proposed by Raewyn Connell. She proposes masculinity can be thought to operate through the dynamics of power, through the division of labour, and through ‘cathexis’, which she defines as the rules of desire and emotional attachment.²¹⁸ In

²¹² Rose, *Which People's War?* pp. 156-157.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 195. See also: Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 41. As Noakes argues, internal divisions in the construction of a national identity were largely countered by the existence of the ‘external enemy “other” in Nazi Germany.’

²¹⁴ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.179.

²¹⁵ M. Powell, and E. Pressburger, *A Matter of Life and Death*, (Archers, 1946).

²¹⁶ ‘Morale’ WL, PP/RMK/D.1, p. 6.

²¹⁷ Morgan, ‘Theatre of War’, p. 175.

²¹⁸ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), pp. 73-74

Bomber Command, pilots and air crew represented the hegemonic masculine ideal against which femininity and other forms of masculinity were measured, 'marginalised and subordinated.'²¹⁹ Despite wearing the same uniform, different trades in the RAF were effectively regarded as more or less masculine than others. As the personification of hegemonic masculinity, at the top of Bomber Command hierarchy, air crew wore the coveted symbolic flying brevet, and were entitled to all the privileges that accompanied it. They took risks every time they flew, they had the power of military rank, better pay, and were idolised by women. Air crew and officers were secure in their masculinity in terms of power, production and cathexis; they had the authority due to their rank and they flew in the aircraft that were the focus of the RAF. Men in trades closely associated with aircraft also were able to construct their masculinity in relation to production and cathexis. Aircraft mechanics and fitters were disparagingly called 'grease monkeys' by the flyers (and by those in lesser trades who were envious of their skill and prestige),²²⁰ but they were second only to air crew in the hierarchy. Their masculinity was constructed through their training, their work with aircraft, their technical skill and their mechanical knowledge.²²¹ As will be highlighted in chapter three, men working on the aircraft also had to stoically endure long hours and harsh working conditions. Men further down the hierarchical scale could make fewer claims about their bravery, their skills, or the importance of their trade. In a similar way that male office clerks experienced a crisis in masculinity due to the influx of female clerks during the late Victorian

²¹⁹ F. J. Barrett, 'The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: The case of the U.S. Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3, 3, (1996), p. 131.

²²⁰ Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake*, p. 34.

²²¹ WAAF mechanics and fitters did not work on operational stations although limited numbers did work on aircraft on training units.

period,²²² the ‘dilution’ of men’s trades by WAAF personnel undermined the status of previously all male trades.²²³ In the military, male traits are thought to include discipline, stoicism, rationality and lack of emotion, while the feminine other is undisciplined, emotional, and unreliable.²²⁴ However, disenfranchised from authority and feminised by doing ‘cissy jobs’ that were also undertaken by WAAs,²²⁵ men at the bottom of the hierarchy could only rely on aggressive sexuality and ‘othering’ of women for their masculinity. In the parlance of the RAF, a woman could be referred to as a ‘bint, pig, piece of rope, bit, or old boot.’²²⁶ One airman admitted that throughout his service it was ‘not only acceptable but *mandatory*’ to boast about what were often fictitious sexual conquests.²²⁷ When male ground personnel at RAF Marston in Kent were asked by an observer for Mass-Observation what they missed most from peacetime, several replied ‘cunt’ and one replied he missed ‘fuck all’ but then added ‘tarts’ and laughed.²²⁸ It is likely that these blustering answers were given by younger men, who may or may not actually have been sexually active before (or during) their service in the RAF. Slightly less than half of those asked replied that they missed their home life and comforts, three mentioned their wives and family, and one a ‘fireplace and easy chair.’²²⁹ For older men, masculinity could be constructed around the responsibility for a family.²³⁰ Francis argues that for flyers, notions of love and male/female relationships were ‘informed by a popular late

²²² G. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks in: Roper, and Tosh, (eds) Manful Assertions*, p. 19.

²²³ Stone, ‘Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity’, p. 612. See also: Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service, p.117.

²²⁴ Barrett, ‘The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity’, pp. 140-141.

²²⁵ ‘Male Attitudes to Women in the Forces, (1941)’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/F.

²²⁶ ‘Reports and letters from LAC Papineau, (1941)’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G.

²²⁷ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 34. (Emphasis in the original.) See also: Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, p.43

²²⁸ ‘Interviews with 54 Ground Defence men, Fire Staff, Police, Cooks, Drivers and Orderlies, (1941)’, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/4/A/2.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, p.55.

romanticism', by popular music, and especially by film.²³¹ However, when films were shown on RAF stations, romantic scenes were met with whistles, cat-calls and sarcastic commentary.²³² RAF audiences were 'less tolerant and more demonstrative' than civilian cinema audiences, they were critical of 'mushiness' overly sentimental scenes were 'howled down.'²³³ At a subjective level, these love scenes may have shown the audience how to behave, but such public events were an opportunity for men to publicly perform and display their masculinity to their peers.

Only the flyers were regularly called upon to risk their lives in the RAF, for others in the service, technical skill and stoicism provided alternative masculine performances to that of the military hero. People joined the services to fulfil their obligation to society, to win the war, and then return to civilian life. Despite this, it was understood that those that flew and risked their lives gave more to society than those who remained at home or on the ground. 'There was always the suggestion, albeit implicit, that those men without their pilot's wings could be doing more.'²³⁴ Representing hegemonic masculinity, pilots and air crew remained at the top of the hierarchy of the RAF.

Throughout the war, the importance of the home was emphasised and 'women were reminded that their primary roles were as mothers and wives.'²³⁵ Those who joined the auxiliary services were regarded with suspicion. Even propaganda supposed to assuage fears about women in the WAAF reinforced patriarchal

²³¹ Francis, *The Flyer*, pp.68-69.

²³² 'WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942)', MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Stone, 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity' p. 612.

²³⁵ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 136. See also: Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 65, 74.

assumptions and gender stereotypes.²³⁶ It was accepted that women's roles in the military were for the duration only; after the war it was assumed that they would return to their more traditional roles as wives and mothers.²³⁷ Women in the services could not be active combatants. As Rose argues, it was only acceptable for women to be in a position of danger if 'like children, they were victims.'²³⁸ Women were still often considered by society in the terms of the virgin or the whore.²³⁹ Purity and passivity were positive feminine attributes while negative female traits included 'disobedience and sensuality.'²⁴⁰ Images of WAAFs in popular culture conformed to one of these stereotypes. (See FIG 1.3 and 1.4.) David Wright's 'Lovelies' first appeared in the *The Sketch*, in 1941 and became popular additions to barrack room walls.²⁴¹ Although the title of the pin up poster suggests that the woman is changing her attire, it is not clear whether she has just taken her uniform off or if she is just about to put it on. Maintaining eye contact with the viewer, Wright's WAAF is seductive and sexually confident. In some ways she resembles the highly sexualised, predatory femme fatale in government posters that warned the public to 'keep mum she's not so dumb.'²⁴²

²³⁶ See for example Noble, *Girls You Amaze me*, p. 20, and Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', pp.179-180.

²³⁷ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 186.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²³⁹ M. E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001), p.98.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.93

²⁴¹ D. Roach, 'The Best Artist You Don't Know: Revealing the work of unknown artist genius David Wright', *Comic Book Artist*, 18, (2002), p. 9. See also: University of Kent British Cartoon Archive, David Wright Biography, <http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/artists/davidwright/biography> (accessed 22 January 2015).

²⁴² H. Forster, 'Keep Mum - She's Not so Dumb! - Careless Talk Costs Lives' (1941), IWM, Art.IWM PST 13911.



FIG 1.3. David Wright 'Off' with the old on with the new' *The Sketch* 30 April 1941. T. Parker, *Sirens: The Pin-Up Art of David Wright*, (London, Titan Books, 2013), p. 21.



FIG 1.4. J. Foss, 'Serve in the WAAF with the men who fly' Imperial War Museum Art.IWM PST 3096 (1941).

In contrast, in Figure 1.4, the WAAF Foss presents embodies the virtuous ideal. She and the pilot may work together, but their relationship appears purely professional. They are not making eye contact, but are both looking towards a shared ‘abstract goal’.²⁴³ The image of the WAAF was superimposed on the existing image of the pilot which may suggest the lack of permanence of her role. As Penny Summerfield discusses, the WAAF in the photograph Foss selected for this poster ‘exuded considerable feminine charm,’²⁴⁴ but, rather than being sexually threatening, by association she shares the heroic and saintly symbolism of the pilot. The RAF roundel behind the pilot’s head was deliberately placed where a halo would be in a traditional painting,²⁴⁵ and I would also suggest that the stylised clouds may also be taken for angelic wings or the RAF brevet.

WAAF recruitment advertisements and propaganda enticed young women to imagine themselves patriotically playing an important part in the war effort, supporting the flyers. In 1941, a recruitment leaflet used a similar image. It depicted a WAAF standing in front of a Blenheim bomber below the words ‘Join the W.A.A.F.- help the R.A.F.’ It continued:

The days have passed when women could only wait anxiously for the success of our forces... [the WAAF’s] object is to replace airmen by airwomen in certain ground appointments and trades. Day by day the magnificent deeds of the R.A.F. thrill our hearts. Will you join the W.A.A.F. and work with the R.A.F. to help win the war?²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*, p. 81.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Recruitment literature for the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) (1939-1945). *Join the W.A.A.F.- help the R.A.F.* (1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/G/5.

The leaflet went on to detail many of the trades that were open to women aged between 17 ½ and 43 and their rates of pay.²⁴⁷ Another recruitment leaflet appealed to women's patriotism while also conforming to the paradigm of women's subordinate status: 'You are enrolled to replace airmen on ground occupations, and anywhere where airmen are working you may be needed. Do not fail them!'²⁴⁸ Rose argues that such recruitment materials intended to reassure people that traditional gender roles would be preserved.²⁴⁹ However, some targeted advertisements certainly alluded to the possibility of social change. An advert in *Health and Beauty* magazine stressed that the women's services gave an 'equal chance for... every woman [and] any woman and the sky's the limit!'²⁵⁰ Mentioning the suffragettes, the advertisement also hinted at gender equality. For some the presence of women working alongside men in the forces threatened disturbing social change.²⁵¹ Women were performing the same tasks as men for less pay while attempting to maintain an acceptable face of femininity.²⁵²

In popular literature, WAAFs were marginalised and their skills were frequently downplayed. For example, a WAAF driver was 'unskilled' and 'crunched the gears' of the vehicle she was driving,²⁵³ while a WAAF corporal was condescendingly described as being:

nothing to look at, although her complexion was good. A little bit of a thing, she had rather fine, mousey hair combed back into an unpretentious bun, a

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 128.

²⁵⁰ Recruitment literature for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) (1939-1945). 'An Equal Chance' *Woman and Beauty*, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/G/5.

²⁵¹ Rose, *Which People's War?* pp. 123-124.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 287.

²⁵³ Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All* p. 86.

small mouth and tightish lips, and a slightly tilted nose. Her eyes were the noticeable feature, behind a forbidding pair of spectacles.²⁵⁴

WAAFs were often objectified and described using diminutive adjectives. It is open to interpretation whether her small stature has the effect of increasing the reader's appreciation of her stoicism or whether it empowers the male, but the narrative voice also hints at the character's hidden sexual potential while at the same time 'forbidding' it. Female characters in popular wartime films and novels were frequently two dimensional stereotypes, whose roles were the romantic love interest for the heroic male characters.²⁵⁵ They conform to the expectation that women in the auxiliary services would become 'officer's ground sheets'.²⁵⁶ In the early days of the war the press painted the picture of women's auxiliary services as either 'the worst kind of domestic service administered by uniformed amazons' or ran stories about servicewomen's lack of morals.²⁵⁷ Public concerns about the morality of the women's' auxiliary service were sufficient to persuade the government to take action. The 58 page 'Markham Report' was the result of a committee of enquiry into

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 117. (My emphasis).

²⁵⁵ See for example: Shute, *Pastoral and Knight, This Above All*, A. Litvak, *This Above All*, (Twentieth-century Fox, 1942), N. Coward, and D. Lean, *In Which We Serve*, (Two Cities Film, 1942), and Powell, and Pressburger, *A Matter of Life and Death*.

²⁵⁶ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p. 138. V. Nicholson, *Millions Like Us: Women's Lives in War and Peace 1939- 1949*, (London, Penguin Viking, 2011), p. 147. Members of the WAAF in particular were referred to as 'pilot's cockpits.' See also: 'Male Attitudes to Women in the Forces' (1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/F. WAAFs who predominantly went out with officers were sometimes also referred to as 'officers' messes'. See: Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, p. 187.

²⁵⁷ J. Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1944), p. 7-8. See also: B. E. Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue: The story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, (Wellingborough, Patrick Stephens, 1989), p. 114. For more on the fear of 'Moral laxity' see: S. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain' *The American Historical Review*, 103, (1998), pp. 1147-1176. The collective noun for a group of WAAFs was said to be 'a mattress.' See Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', fn. 171, p.197-198.

the conditions in women's services and the 'accusations about drink and immorality.'²⁵⁸

WAAF discipline was different to that of men. The Air Force Act was ruled not to apply to women. Therefore officers lacked the authority to punish women other than by confining them to base, and this was perceived to be especially problematic after conscription swelled the size of the WAAF and the numbers of 'black sheep' increased.²⁵⁹ Within the RAF, from the upper echelons to the lowest Erk, male personnel also saw WAFs as belonging to the 'virgin or whore' stereotypes. Air Chief Marshall Joubert de la Ferte, an Inspector General to the RAF in 1943, was of the opinion that the vast majority of the WAAF were 'gallant, hardworking and responsible', but that amongst the 'decent women' were approximately one in ten women who were 'Borstal girls, trollops and thieves'. Among them illegitimate pregnancy, 'desertion and other major crimes were common'.²⁶⁰ Asked questions about male attitudes to women in the forces, AC2 G. W. Kelly, a Mass-Observation correspondent answered: 'the men feel the women members of the auxiliary service are either spinsters or prospective old maids "last stands" or "hot mamas" out for a good time.'²⁶¹ Within the service WAFs were regarded as sexual objects. Describing an attempt to form a concert party to put on a stage show, D. G. Barnes writes:

I had collected six really attractive WAFs- with something of a stage presence, and such legs that the boys wouldn't give a damn whether they

²⁵⁸ V. Markham, T. Cazalet, W. Elliot, J. Milner, D. Munro, J. L. Stocks, E. Summerskill, F. Sykes, 'Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women's Services' (1942), TNA, CAB 66/27/41.

²⁵⁹ P. Joubert de la Ferte, *The Forgotten Ones*, (London, Hutchinson, 1961), p. 151. See also: Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue*, p. 103.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁶¹ 'Male Attitudes to Women in the Forces' (1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/F.

sang or danced or stood there and knitted, so long as they stayed there long enough.²⁶²

Although the women are objectified by a largely male audience, for the women who took part, concert parties may have provided some women the opportunity to feel feminine and to wear glamorous civilian clothes rather than uniform. Rose argues that because women in the services were performing what had previously been thought of as male roles and were unable to express themselves through fashion, the female body was sexualised.²⁶³ There was a concern that if women looked too masculine in uniform they would ‘emasculate the men... and defeminise themselves’, while an overtly feminine appearance suggested ‘sexual impropriety.’²⁶⁴ Femininity was expressed by minor infringements to the dress code, details of hair and makeup and subtle individual alterations to uniform.²⁶⁵ WAAF issue knickers were known as ‘blackouts’, ‘passion killers’ or ‘finger nippers’.²⁶⁶ Women preferred to maintain their individuality and feminine identity by a ‘lavish use’ of makeup,²⁶⁷ and by wearing civilian underwear under their uniforms.²⁶⁸ However, Rose argues that ‘if taken too far, sexualised femininity might become “libidinal femininity” - the “other” to good citizenship’.²⁶⁹ Sexually promiscuous women could not also be good citizens.²⁷⁰ Despite this image of servicewomen, the pregnancy rate for civilians from

²⁶² Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 61. See also: Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All*, p. 119.

²⁶³ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 135.

²⁶⁴ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 155.

²⁶⁵ Beck, *Keeping Watch* p. 41. Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p.196.

²⁶⁶ Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, p. 187. See also: ‘WAAF: Reports from an Observer’, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

²⁶⁷ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* p. 91.

²⁶⁸ ‘WAAF: Reports from an Observer’, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2. See also Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 195.

²⁶⁹ Rose, *Which People's War?* p. 135.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

the same age groups was higher than for WAAFs throughout the war.²⁷¹ Pregnant WAAFs were discharged from the service, but no more than 1.5 per cent were discharged each year, and only around one in twenty of those were unmarried.²⁷² After informing their commanding officer they had got a girl 'into trouble', men were quickly posted away with no further repercussions.²⁷³ For WAAFs, promiscuity was punishable in other ways too. Many WAAFs entered into relationships with air crew members and were broken hearted when they failed to return from operations. However, it was not seen as an unlucky coincidence when a woman was unfortunate enough to have lost several successive boyfriends. Rumours would spread that any air crew who associated with her would be for the 'chop' and the woman would be labelled a 'chop girl.'²⁷⁴ It was thought to be bad luck even to accept a drink from such a pariah and often the WAAF would be posted to a non-operational station.²⁷⁵

Conclusion

The culture of the RAF influenced, and was influenced by, wider society. Like the wider civilian society, the Air Force can be regarded as a patriarchal hegemony. In popular culture the glamour of air crew was prioritised, male ground personnel were regularly disregarded and WAAFs were often constructed as sexual objects. When ground personnel were visible they were frequently figures of fun; Erks, WAAFs and West Indian personnel were all described using diminutive adjectives and language. Several discourses framed the cultural construction of the identity of ground

²⁷¹ S.C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume I Administration*, (London, HMSO, 1954), p. 466.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 474.

²⁷³ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.83.

²⁷⁴ M. Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger: a flight of recollection and discovery*, (London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1969).

²⁷⁵ G. Dean, *The Touchstone: A Doctor's Story*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2002), p.35.

personnel. These included discourses of race, class and gender, but also medical theories, and beliefs about heroic behaviour and the popular concept of stoicism and the 'stiff upper lip'. Heroism and stoicism was constructed in such a way that while air crew could be regarded as heroes, ground personnel could only stoically accept their misfortunes.

Examining gender within the culture of the RAF, it has been shown that the model of separate spheres cannot be applied but that Higonnet and Higonnet's double helix model, while problematic, fits better than Stone suggests. However, as Stone proposed, in the hierarchy of the RAF, the trades that ground personnel were assigned to were more important than their gender. The RAF had a distinct hierarchical structure with the air crew firmly placed at the top, but rather than being based entirely on patriarchy and gender, it was constructed partly by particular trades' perceived importance to the war effort and especially its proximity to air crew and aircraft. Regardless of gender, the further removed a trade was from aircraft and air crew, the *raison d'être* of the Air Force, the less prestigious it was. For men and women at the lower reaches of this hierarchy constructing individual identity was problematic. Unable to frame their masculine identity in terms of heroic deeds, some male ground personnel saw themselves in relation to the feminine other; they objectified women and attempted to persuade each other of their sexual prowess as *Lotharios* or *Casanovas*. Others conformed more to the masculine stereotype of the homely male. WAAFs had to negotiate their feminine identity as 'dilutees' in a masculine environment. This process began during RAF and WAAF recruitment and training as the next chapter will discuss.

RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND TRAINING

God, this is awful. Hesitating for two hours up and down a filthy street, lips and hands and knees tremulously out of control, my heart pounding in fear of that little door through which I must go to join up.¹

This chapter concentrates on the experiences of those who joined the RAF and WAAF during the war. The experience of RAF recruits trained during the pre-war period is eloquently documented by T. E. Lawrence in *The Mint*.² Pre-war entrants and ‘Trenchard’s brats’ of the aircraft apprentice scheme, provided the force with an important backbone of experienced professionals who helped train the far larger numbers of recruits and conscripts who joined for the duration of the war. In the six years of war the RAF grew from what has been likened to ‘a private flying club’,³ to a force that was capable of performing a wide range of tactical and strategic roles. In September 1939, Bomber Command consisted of 33 operational squadrons based at 13 stations; it could field an average of only 280 aircraft and crews.⁴ Shortly before the end of war in Europe, Bomber Command’s order of battle included 94 operational squadrons at 69 stations, and a daily average of over 1600 bombers were

¹ T. E. Lawrence, *The Mint*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), 35.

² Ibid.

³ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (W. E. Wilkinson), RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁴ RAF War room Summaries, daily strength returns September 1939, TNA, AIR 22/1. This included the Advanced Striking Force then in France, and in 1939 many aircraft were types that were already considered obsolete.

serviceable and could be crewed-up.⁵ The foundations for the expansion of the RAF were laid down in the 1930s. Expansion schemes were drawn up between 1933 and 1938 but were only completed after several years of the war.⁶ As well as recruiting and training personnel, the schemes saw the building of new airfields, and the expansion and modernisation of existing stations. Between 1940 and 1942, over 300 sites for new airfields had been acquired by the Air Ministry.⁷ It was also during the interwar period that the design of the twin engine Hampden, Whitley and Wellington, and the heavier, four engine Halifax and Stirling bombers were commissioned.⁸

All air crew personnel were volunteers, but a combination of volunteers and conscripts served as ground personnel. The RAF was forced to recruit and train large numbers of personnel very quickly, and training was divided into a brief period of initial training, common to all recruits, followed by weeks or months of trade training. In order to assign recruits to a trade as efficiently as possible, a system of psychological testing was developed. As will be discussed below, tests which quantified intelligence were established, and experiments were carried out in an attempt to discern individuals' predisposition to neurosis and psychosis. This chapter will discuss experiences during initial training including their accommodation, inspections, medicals, drill, lectures and tests. Recruits were under social pressure to

⁵ RAF War room Summaries, daily strength returns Jan –April 1945, TNA, AIR 22/49. In 1945 three quarters of the force were Lancaster bombers. See also: C. Webster, and N. Frankland, *History of the Second World War: The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945 Volume IV: Annexes and Appendices*, (London, HMSO, 1961), pp. 400- 428.

⁶ C. Webster, and N. Frankland, *History of the Second World War: The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany 1939-1945 Volume I: Preparation*, (London, HMSO, 1961), pp.65-85. See also J. Terraine *The Right of the Line*, (London, Wordsworth Editions, 1997), pp. 25- 92.

⁷ For a description of the construction of airfields see D. J. Smith, *Britain's Military Airfields 1939-45*, (Wellingborough, Patrick Stephens, 1989). See Appendix A.

⁸ See: Terraine, *Right of the Line*, 34, and Webster and Frankland, *Strategic Air Offensive, Vol. 1*. p.71, 75.

accept military discipline and practices. Training was intense and consequently left a lasting impression on recruits. As well as examining their motives for joining the RAF or WAAF, this chapter will examine the emotional responses of recruits to events they shared and how they renegotiated their identity to conform to service life.

The historiography on the expansion of the RAF and Bomber Command often focuses on political decisions and the materiel rather than personnel required. The training of personnel was divided into Flying Training Command and Technical Training Command in May 1940,⁹ and by 1943 there were more flying training establishments than operational squadrons in Bomber Command. As well as their complement of experienced instructors, each aircraft had to be maintained and serviced, and each unit needed ancillary personnel.¹⁰ John Terraine acknowledges that the skilled fitters and mechanics essential to the RAF did not ‘sprout from the bushes’, but he then discusses the training of air crew.¹¹ The majority of pilots, navigators and bomb-aimers were trained in Canada and the dominions, and there is a comprehensive historiography of flying training and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.¹² Dating from the war itself, other studies examine the

⁹ Terraine, *Right of the Line*, 257- 258.

¹⁰ Webster and Frankland, *History of the Second World War, Annexes*, pp. 408-414.

¹¹ Terraine, *Right of the Line*, 257.

¹² See for example: P. Conrad, *Training for Victory: The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the West*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989. J. McCarthy, *A Last Call of Empire: Australian Aircrew, Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme*. Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1988. P. Marshall, ‘The British Commonwealth Training Plan’ *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* (2000), 89, 354, pp.267-278. F. J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Canadian Department of National Defence, 1983). http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/docs/Aerodrome_e.pdf (accessed 22 January 2015). S. J. Evans, *Empire Air Training: Identity, Empire and Memory* University of Melbourne 2010 PhD thesis, A. D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939 – 1945*, (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). The scheme was also known as the Empire Air Training Scheme.

psychological profiling and selection of air crew candidates.¹³ Little work has been done on the recruitment and training of ground personnel however.

Between 1940 and 1942, the total numbers of RAF and WAAF personnel serving in the home commands more than doubled from 370,000 to over 800,000. The total number of RAF and WAAF recruits in 5 years of war was 1,201,106.¹⁴ By far the largest majority of these personnel served on the ground. The increase in personnel was achieved by a massive expansion of the recruiting programme. Bomber Command was the largest operational command, expanding from around 15,000 personnel in 1939, to over 225,000 men and women at its largest in the summer of 1944.¹⁵ By the middle of 1943 however, there was a shortage of skilled technicians, especially aircraft fitters, and, as Richard Overy points out, the expansion of the Bomber Command was restricted by the need for ‘specialized ground personnel’.¹⁶ Technical Training Command was responsible for the supply of trained personnel to the front line units. With over 180,000 staff, instructors, ancillary staff and trainee personnel, it was the largest command between 1941 and 1943. In September 1941, more than 130,000 other ranks ground personnel were

¹³ See for example: C. P. Symonds and D. J. Williams, ‘Assessment of Temperament in connection with Selection of Air Crews: The Psychiatric Method Employed’ in: Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, (London, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1947), pp. 205-224. R. D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier*, (London, Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1942), pp. 166-208. P. E. Vernon, and J. B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces*, (London, University of London Press, 1949), pp. 67-82. R. N. Ironside, and I. R. C. Batchelor, *Aviation Neuro-psychiatry*, (Edinburgh, E S Livingstone Ltd, 1945), pp. 10-16. For more recent work see: M. K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War*, (London, Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 4-26. English, *The Cream of the Crop*, pp. 17-40.

¹⁴ Royal Air Force: General (Code 67/1): RAF recruiting: policy, (1939-1953). ‘Recruiting for the Royal Air Force During the War Period 3rd September 1939 to 2nd September 1944’ p. 2, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

¹⁵ S. C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, (London, 1955), p. 18. See also: Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945*, (London, Allen Lane, 2013), p. 314.

¹⁶ Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 313.

undergoing training,¹⁷ and by the end of the year over 600,000 men and 60,000 women had been 'attested' by the Central Trade Test Board (CTTB).¹⁸

Initial training and trade training were standardised. With the exception of a few roles such as balloon trades, specific trade training was common to all commands. Once qualified, personnel were posted as individuals, and it was common to serve in several commands. It varied during the war, but male recruits initially spent up to five days at a reception centre (such as Cardington in Bedfordshire) where they were enrolled and issued with uniforms, and between four and eight weeks basic training and drill at a training camp (often at seaside resorts, such as Skegness or Scarborough), before undergoing a more specific trade training at another establishment. Similarly, from 1941, women were sent to the receiving centre at Innsworth in Gloucestershire before being sent to Morecambe for their initial training. After 1943, Wilmslow in Cheshire became the only WAAF training centre.¹⁹ WAAF initial training lasted an average of three weeks.²⁰

Recruitment and Conscription: Volunteers and the National Service Act

In 1939, it was declared by the government that, apart from those in reserved occupations, all men between the ages of 18 and 41 may be required to serve in the military. The first intake was of men aged between 20 and 23. National service conscripts were called up to a recruiting unit where they were medically graded. If they expressed a preference for the RAF they were interviewed by an RAF officer. If they were found to be unsuitable for the RAF they were consequently called up for

¹⁷ Air Ministry, *Royal Air Force Personnel Statistics*, p. 140.

¹⁸ Central Trade Test Board ORB: West Drayton, 31 December 1941, TNA, AIR 29/710.

¹⁹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234: The Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, (Air Historical Branch, 1953). p. 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66. The length of time at initial training depots varied with the exigencies of war between two and four weeks.

an interview by the Army.²¹ Volunteers were interviewed at a recruitment centre and either enlisted or signed up for deferred service. Men joined the RAFVR for the duration of the 'present emergency.'²² They would be accepted providing they met the age requirement for the trade, had relevant civilian experience, were not a reservist for the Army or Navy, were adequately fit and they were either not in a reserved occupation or had dispensation from the Ministry of Labour.²³ The lower limit of the age requirement was 18; the upper limit varied from 38 to 50 depending on the trade applied for. Eventually the upper age limit was removed, provided the candidate met the medical requirements for a particular trade.²⁴ To join as an aircrafthand, recruits had to be aged between 18 and 38 and of at least grade two fitness; no special qualifications were required.²⁵ Conscription of women was not introduced until December 1941, but the Air Ministry advertised the WAAF and the trades open to women in the press, women's magazines, parades and even loud speaker vans.²⁶ As part of a recruiting drive in July 1940, WAAFs from RAF Coltishall in Norfolk interrupted the programme at a cinema in Haymarket. In an attempt to persuade young women to volunteer they gave a display, handed out leaflets and talked to members of the public.²⁷ The success of these campaigns can be measured by the fact that during the war more than 183,000 women served in the

²¹ Royal Air Force: General (Code 67/1): RAF recruiting: policy, (1939-1953). 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force During the War Period 3rd September 1939 to 2nd September 1944'. pp. 6-7, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

²² L. Taylor, *Ground Gen for Airmen (and Airwomen): A Brief Guide for airmen and airwomen of all trades and grades to the interior economy of life in the Royal Air Force*, (London, Pitman and sons, 1941), p. 9.

²³ J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: New & Enlarged Edition*, (London, Amalgamated Press, 1943), p. 12.

²⁴ 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force' p. 5, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

²⁵ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, pp. 14-15. On a par with a private in the army, Aircrafthand was the lowest rank in the RAF.

²⁶ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 60. See also 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force' p. 7, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

²⁷ Log of events submitted by W.A.A.F. detachments at various R.A.F. Stations, (1940), ACW2 J. Thomson, TNA, AIR 24/1641.

WAAF as volunteers while less than 34,000 were conscripted in the two years following the 1941 National Service Act. (See FIG. 2.1.)

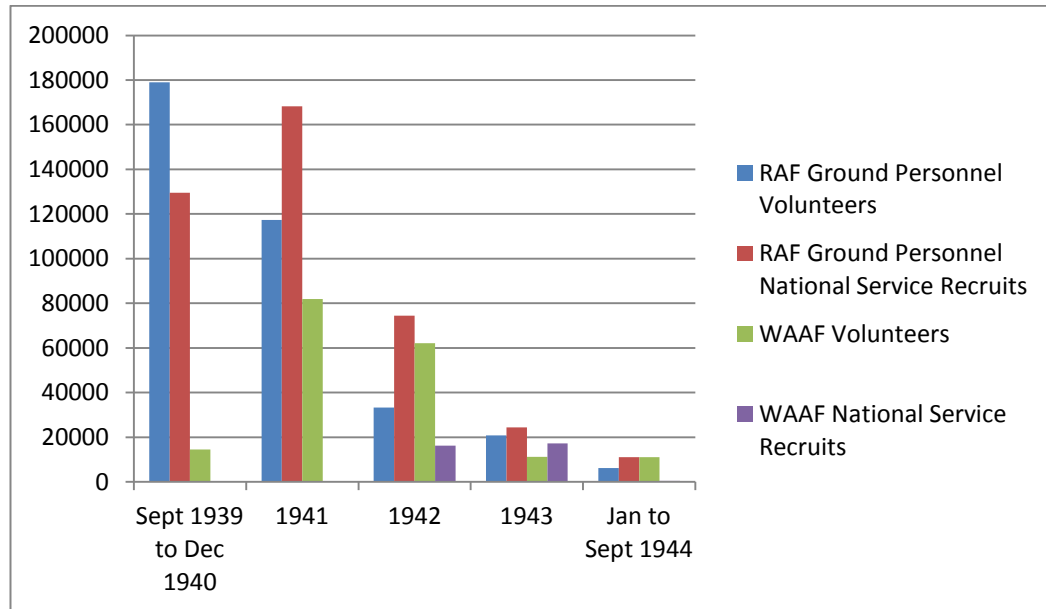


FIG. 2.1. 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force During the War Period 3rd September 1939 to 2nd September 1944' pp. 8, 13, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

The National Service Act of 1941 made the conscription of almost all single women aged between 20 and 30 compulsory, and in December 1941 it was announced that the first draft of women would be those born in 1920-1921. As a consequence, in December 1941, WAAF recruiting offices were 'inundated' with applications from volunteers. Over 7000 application forms were received in one week.²⁸ Influenced by advertising and the glamour of the Air Force, women volunteered for the WAAF to avoid being conscripted for service in less appealing roles.²⁹ In May 1943, the Ministry of Labour closed the WAAF to further entrants,³⁰ but by then 182,000

²⁸ 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force', p. 11, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

²⁹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234* pp. 60-61. See Also: B. E. Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue: The story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, (Wellingborough, 1989), p. 106.

³⁰ 'Recruiting for the Royal Air Force', p.11, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

women were in the WAAF. Growing from a force of less than 2000, by the end of the war over a quarter of a million women had served in the WAAF.³¹ Perhaps in part due to its extensive advertising, for many women service in the WAAF was more attractive than the other services, the 'land army' or industrial work.

The benefits of service in the WAAF were frequently mentioned in advertisements and propaganda. These included 'free medical and dental treatment, free clothing, food and accommodation, as well as two free railway warrants per year when proceeding on leave – not to mention the free entertainments, cinemas sport, etc.'³² Rates of pay and family benefits were also stressed. Women joined the WAAF for a number of reasons. After conscription was announced, one WAAF discerned a rush of 'reluctant females dashing to join the WAAF in preference to entering munitions factories'.³³ Many highlight the particular appeal of the WAAF uniform as a 'key factor'.³⁴ Gwen Arnold had wanted to be a WREN (the women's branch of the Royal Navy), but when she volunteered she was told there were only vacancies in the WAAF and the ATS. She decided on the WAAF because RAF blue was 'more flattering than khaki'.³⁵ Other factors were important too however. Interviewed for Mass-Observation in 1940, a 25 year old woman from a working class family in London did think the WAAF uniform was more appealing than the ATS, but the service did not pay as well as a bus conductor.³⁶ Joan Rice joined for four reasons: to do her bit, to get away from home and gain her independence, for the adventure, and

³¹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. v.

³² Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p. 56.

³³ S. Pickering, *Tales of a Bomber Command WAAF (& her horse)*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2002), p. 16

³⁴ V. Nicholson, *Millions Like Us: Women's Lives in War and Peace 1939- 1949*, (London, Penguin Viking, 2011), p. 146

³⁵ G. Arnold, *Radar Days*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2000), p. 85.

³⁶ Observations of women in uniform, July-Aug 1940 'Conversation between Ob. and working class family' 29 July 1940, SxMOA1/2/32/1/E.

to ‘swank around in a uniform.’³⁷ Motives were both personal and patriotic. It was not a decision to be taken lightly however. The appeal of a uniform had to be weighed against remaining at home and contributing to the war effort by working in industry. In a letter to a friend in October 1942, Miss P. Wilmott aged twenty, wrote: ‘P.S. I’ve sent my papers in too – But I’m terribly scared – I haven’t yet told my people because I can’t bear the thought of upsetting them too soon.’³⁸ She was called for her medical in January 1943, but was still undecided which service she would join. She was called up to report to RAF Innsworth in March 1943.³⁹ Before the war, young men from working-class backgrounds joined the RAF as after leaving school it seemed to be a better prospect than ‘a suffocatingly boring job’ or unemployment.⁴⁰ Fred Hitchcock remained in the service from a ‘combination of self and national interest’.⁴¹ West Indian recruitment adverts stressed importance of trade training and future peacetime employment prospects rather than duty and loyalty.⁴² Jamaican E. Martin Noble joined the RAF for patriotic reasons,⁴³ but the Guyanese born Cy Grant admitted he joined the RAF as air crew for the adventure and to escape a dull future in a British colony.⁴⁴ Ted Sadler joined the RAF in 1941 hoping to become a flight mechanic. He joined the RAF to avoid the Army ‘bullshit’ which he thought was below his intelligence.⁴⁵ It was the appeal of flying and the modernity of the service that persuaded many men to join the RAF. Many men joined in the

³⁷ J. Rice, *Sand in my Shoes: Wartime Diaries of a WAAF*, (London, Harper Collins, 2006), pp. 3-4

³⁸ Private Papers of Miss P Wilmott (1996), IWM, Documents, 7199.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ F. Hitchcock, *A Shillingsworth of Promises: An RAF Airman’s experiences During World War Two and Beyond*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2001), pp. 47-52.

⁴¹ Ibid., 54

⁴² West Indies: enlistment of aircraft-hands and ground staff for RAF, (1944), TNA, CO 968/132/2.

⁴³ E. M. Noble, *Jamaica Airman: A Black Airman in Britain 1943 and After*, (London, New Beacon, 1984), p. 18

⁴⁴ C. Grant, *A Member of the RAF of Indeterminate Race: Wartime experiences of a West Indian Officer in the RAF*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2006), p. 23.

⁴⁵ ‘Private Papers of E. Sadler’, (2006), p. 2, IWM, Documents, 14842.

hope they would fly Spitfires; the government, the media, and the Air Ministry drew heavily upon the appeal of the fighter pilot in propaganda and advertisements for the RAF. Although he volunteered to fly, Noble was employed as a clerk, perhaps because of his colour, but also because he did not reach England until late in the war when the attrition of air crew was at least matched by the numbers of graduates from the overseas training schemes.⁴⁶ Regardless of their final trade, many recruits shared similar experiences at recruitment and initial training centres.

Recruitment and Initial Training Centres

The majority of primary sources, whether contemporary letters, diaries and Mass-Observation reports, or memoirs and oral history interviews mediated by the passing of time, appear formulaic when studied in quantity. They tend to vary only in degrees of eloquence; the same episodes occur repeatedly and follow a similar chronology. These events and experiences are especially emphasised in sources concerning WAAFs. Contemporary narratives may have been influenced by wartime propaganda and recruitment material explaining what to expect on arrival in receiving centres and later narratives may be influenced by official and public histories, including other published memoirs, but it is clear that for many there was a shared experience.

The huts looked GRIM, but at least the bed (one of about 20) is a niche I can call my own... Every bed has a weird hairy mattress which is divided into three, each piece is called a biscuit, and during the day they are piled neatly on top of each other, with our three hairy blankets and two coarse sheets on top – leaving the bare springs showing. The corporal in charge shrieks at us if

⁴⁶ Noble, *Jamaica Airman*, 43.

they are piled half an inch out of line. We each have a pillow which looks like a sausage and feels like concrete.⁴⁷

The majority of WAAF recruits recalled the iron bed frames and mattress made from three separate 'biscuits' and the pot bellied stoves in the huts.⁴⁸ Other descriptions of the first weeks in the service often highlight queuing to be issued with ill-fitting uniforms, the unfamiliarity of drill and discipline, the indignity of collective medical inspections and inoculations and the problems of communal living. Many sources tell of the shame of an unfortunate girl who was discovered to have head lice, and for women the loss of individuality enforced by a lack of privacy and the WAAF uniform was hard to come to terms with. Homesickness, humour and the importance of forming friendships are also frequently stressed. Reacting to the changing needs of the service and the events of the war, the RAF improvised and constantly altered the structure of its recruitment and training programmes. The main variations were the location and duration of their reception and training. Of necessity the size and location of recruitment and training centres and the length of the courses they ran was fluid during the war.⁴⁹ Individuals' experiences were similar because to a great extent all recruits were treated the same by the RAF and WAAF. Recruits had to be given their uniforms and kit, they had to be medically examined, inoculated and given instruction in drill. The economies of scale dictated how and where they could be accommodated and trained.

⁴⁷ M. Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake: The Diary of a Wartime WAAF 1940-1942*, (Bangor, University of Wales, 2005), p. 5.

⁴⁸ B. R. Williams, (ed) *As We Were: Recollections of life in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), p. 3.

⁴⁹ Royal Air Force Personnel (Code B, 68): Requirements for various trades, (1942-1943), Technical training Command, Changes in Technical Courses, TNA, AIR 2/4821.

The emotional experience for recruits, whether conscripts or volunteers began at the recruiting centre. As she entered a room at the London recruiting office, Diana Lindo ‘felt like a prize animal at a show,’⁵⁰ and when Nina Chessall was told by letter to report to Gloucester, she felt the same apprehension she did at the start of an air raid.⁵¹ Told to report to Hendon after volunteering in 1939, Joan Rice had ‘the same sick and “wish I hadn’t done it” feeling in my tummy that was there on going back to the convent (boarding school) evenings’⁵² and a middle aged man joining as an intelligence officer originally felt as insecure as he had been when he first went to public school.⁵³ Reporting in London for the transport to the reception centre in Harrogate, Muriel Gane-Pushman remembered:

the collection of apprehensive females in the corner, of which I would soon be one, appeared awkward and in the way. They looked pretty wretched, and I wondered how many were having second thoughts. I banished my own, with a bracing talk from my “inner friend”, and imaginary companion I had created for comfort when I first went away to school. The gist of our unilateral conversation was to pull myself together, that everyone else was in the same boat, and for heaven’s sake to stop snivelling.⁵⁴

The metaphor of public school was useful for those who had already spent time away from home. Such people often went on to become officers, but many recruits lacked any comparable experience and were totally unprepared for what they found. Joining

⁵⁰ D. Lindo, *A WAAF at War: Wartime Jottings of a WAAF Driver 1941 – 1946*, (Fontwell, Woodfield, 1992), p. 8.

⁵¹ J. Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic: A World War II Love Story*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), p. 53

⁵² Rice, *Sand in my Shoes*, p. 4.

⁵³ D. G. Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, (London, Rich & Cowan, 1943), p. 14

⁵⁴ M. Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue: Experiences in the WAAF*, (Stroud, Tempus Publishing, 2006), p. 22.

aged twenty, Gwen Arnold had seldom spent nights away from home.⁵⁵ In April 1941, Air Marshall William Welsh, then the head of Technical Training Command, acknowledged the physical and emotional effect of what was then an intensive two week course for WAAF recruits. He admitted that:

Many of these women came from homes they have never left before; they find themselves in a strange and possibly “hard” atmosphere with communal [sic] living and feeding and a number of them are naturally homesick at first.⁵⁶

On her first night in the WAAF at Innsworth, Gwen Arnold found herself sharing a hut with:

forty-eight oddly assorted strangers... Not only the ‘long and the short and the tall’ we had the ‘posh and the common’, the ‘tearful and the giggly’, the ‘I feel sick’, the chatterboxes’, the ‘know it alls’, and the ‘where are the men?’⁵⁷

Joan Rice immediately clashed with one of the other girls who ‘smelled’ and was ‘loud, man-mad and crude’.⁵⁸ One WAAF found living with 29 other girls from all over the empire surprisingly easy although her first days at Innsworth were ‘hell’ as they ‘were herded’ from one place to another and perpetually kept ‘waiting and hanging around.’⁵⁹ Innsworth was a receiving centre only; at its peak it processed and kitted out 2,700 women a week who were then sent to places such as Morecambe for training.⁶⁰ Seaside resorts were chosen as training centres because there was plentiful accommodation in the form of hotels, holiday camps and guest houses, and

⁵⁵ G. Arnold, *Radar Days*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2000), p. 85.

⁵⁶ Air Ministry, Appendices, (1940-1941), W. L. Welsh, letter to Air Member for Personnel, 17 April 1941, TNA, AIR 24/1644.

⁵⁷ Arnold, *Radar Days*, 89.

⁵⁸ Rice, *Sand in my Shoes*, pp. 8, 12.

⁵⁹ ‘Private Papers of Miss P. Willmott’, Letter to ‘Peg’, IWM, Documents, 7199. See also Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic*, p.53.

⁶⁰ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 65.

their transport links, amenities and services could cope with large numbers involved. During the fastest expansion of the service, accommodation for over 40,000 personnel had to be found.⁶¹ The accommodation at Morecambe was in billets in small hotels and guest houses and it was felt that women who had just started to get used to communal living and the force's discipline at reception centres were disrupted by the change.⁶² The Markham report into the conditions in the women's services was greatly concerned with the varying quality of billets, their comfort, the standard of their food and their toilet and bathroom facilities.⁶³ Its authors recommended that reception centres and basic training should be combined and that communal huttled accommodation was preferable to billets.⁶⁴ From 1943 onwards, when numbers allowed, WAAF recruits' reception and initial training was combined at Wilmslow. Huttled accommodation was easier to supervise and maintain standards. One WAAF liked billets at Morecambe because although she had to share the house with 11 other women she had access to a bathroom and a dressing table.⁶⁵ In contrast, a landlady at Blackpool would let her tenants boil a kettle to make a hot drink in the evening, but not for their hot water bottles.⁶⁶ Mona Clowes felt the private billets she stayed in at Blackpool were 'poor' and did not provide enough food.⁶⁷ Together with the personalities of their fellow roommates, the quality of the accommodation had an important effect on how new recruits perceived service life. Gwen Arnold believed

⁶¹ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, pp. 577-578.

⁶² Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, pp. 65-66.

⁶³ V. Markham, T. Cazalet, W. Elliot, J. Milner, D. Munro, J. L. Stocks, E. Summerskill, F. Sykes, 'Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women's Services' (1942), p. 23, TNA, CAB 66/27/41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38

⁶⁵ P. L. Butler, *Searching in the Dark: the story of a radar operator from 1942 – 1946*, (Chichester, HPC Publishing, 1995), p.18.

⁶⁶ P. Daniels in Williams, *As We Were*, p. 100

⁶⁷ M. Clowes in: N. Small, *Spit, Polish and Tears: Stories of W.A.A.F.s in World War Two*, (Bishop Auckland, Pentland Press, 1995), p. 47.

that the kindness of landladies and comfortable billets helped to overcome the homesickness that many had felt on first joining the service.⁶⁸

Majorie Bevan-Jones was fortunate enough to undergo her training along with an old friend,⁶⁹ however others felt Gloucester was ‘cold dark and miserable.’ Sheila Orrell felt homesick and heard ‘muffled cries under the old grey blankets from other new recruits.’⁷⁰ Writing for Mass-Observation, Richard Picton admitted he felt miserable because he was parted from his girlfriend. He lost contact with most of his friends and was ‘thrust in with a mob of unsympathetic people.’⁷¹ Recruits were not allowed to give their address during the first week of their service and subsequently could not receive any letters.⁷² As soon as she was posted to Morecambe, Gwen Arnold was quick to send a note home and consequently was one of the first recruits to receive a ‘much needed letter from home’.⁷³ Getting a letter from home could make the postal delivery the best part of the day.⁷⁴ Of course, contact from home could also make people feel worse. Gwen Arnold’s family did not have a telephone, but she recalls watching girls queuing to use a telephone box. She could read the lips of the girls as they said ‘hello mum’ and then wasted part of their three minutes by crying.⁷⁵ Kathleen Brassington was upset because her mother cried as she waved her off on the train to Gloucester.⁷⁶ In the book, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye* Jenny Nicholson, a WAAF public relations officer, attempted to downplay melancholic

⁶⁸ Arnold, *Radar Days*, p.105.

⁶⁹ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 11.

⁷⁰ S. Orrell in: Small, *Spit, Polish and Tears*, p. 78. See also: A. Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, (Braunton, Merlin Books, 1985), p. 15.

⁷¹ Account, Observations and Correspondence, R. Picton, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

⁷² P. Willmott, Letter to ‘Peg’, IWM, Documents 7199.

⁷³ Arnold, *Radar Days*, p. 101.

⁷⁴ P. Willmott, Letter to ‘Peg’, IWM, Documents, 7199.

⁷⁵ Arnold *Radar Days*, p. 96. See also J. Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1944), p. 47.

⁷⁶ K. Brassington in: Small, *Spit Polish and Tears*, p. 63.

letters home. The book's gentle propaganda explained what women could expect in the forces and attempted to convince readers that many wrote 'unhappy letters home' to discover how much they were missed by their family rather than because they were genuinely unhappy. Parents of new recruits were informed that their daughters expected cheerful letters from home telling them about family life and 'local gossip' and that overly sympathetic letters led to outbursts of emotion.⁷⁷ Recruits were given a lecture on 'How to be Happy in the WAAF',⁷⁸ and told 'if you can stand the first fortnight in the WAAF you will enjoy it.'⁷⁹ For both men and women, the first few days in the RAF was bewildering and, like the services in general, consisted of periods of frantic activity interspersed by long periods of waiting and queuing.

Symbolically the change from civilian to service life was established by the force's discipline and drill, but also by the lack of contact from the outside world and by the issue of uniforms. There was little time to keep in touch with the outside world through the media, and during their first week in service, although recruits were interested to hear news about the RAF, as they made the transition from civilian to servicemen their interest in the news 'progressively declined'.⁸⁰ A Mass-Observation correspondent felt that many men in the NAAFI would have liked to listen to Lord Haw Haw on the radio 'but bowed to the social pressure... [of] the loud opinion expressed by the few.'⁸¹ In common with T. E. Lawrence's experiences in the inter-war RAF, recruits had to submit to the omnipotent military authority of a

⁷⁷ Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁸ Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic*, p. 53.

⁷⁹ E. Murray in Williams: *As We Were*, p.16

⁸⁰ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 12.

⁸¹ Reports from A/C 2 Pepper, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/F.

total institution, as defined by Erving Goffman.⁸² However, the pressure to conform came from the recruits themselves as well as from the authority of the RAF. In one hut a confident 'top drawer girl' who 'undressed right down to the altogether' when she changed clothes was clapped and given 'cat calls. From then on she too learnt to dress in such a fashion so as not to bare her all.'⁸³ In common with First World War conscripts, the military was a 'bureaucratic maze' to be passively endured.⁸⁴ Recruits were informed by propaganda and by their instructors how important it was for them to conform to authority and practices in each establishment they found themselves.⁸⁵ Richard Picton quickly realised the RAF wanted 'absolute uniformity' and strongly felt he was caught up in a 'machine'.⁸⁶ Once confident in their own abilities as civilians, but now daunted by the intricacies of saluting, WAAFs began to feel 'terrified of meeting an officer'.⁸⁷ Picton realised he eventually lost some of his ability to act without orders,⁸⁸ but for some the conformity of the service was a positive experience. The absence of responsibilities appealed to Joan Rice. She liked the security of service life and 'not having to worry about clothes and food and money'.⁸⁹ On joining up as an intelligence officer 41 year old Derek Barnes found himself 'suddenly freed from responsibility.'⁹⁰ At training establishments recruits lives were 'constricted by endless and infuriating petty restrictions and... Bullshit.'⁹¹

⁸² E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, (London, Penguin, 1991), p.17.

⁸³ Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ I. Bet-El, *Conscripts: Lost Legions in the Great War*, (Stroud, Sutton, 1999), pp. 27-30.

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Ground Gen*, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Account, Observations and Correspondence, R. Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H. See also: M. F. Base, *Get Some in! My wartime experiences with RAF Bomb Disposal*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 1999), p. 12.

⁸⁷ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

⁸⁹ Rice, *Sand in my Shoes*, p.12.

⁹⁰ Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 13.

⁹¹ Correspondence, J. Sommerfield, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I. As Paul Fussell

A trainee reported to Mass-Observation that he had overheard a man say: ‘My one ambition from now on is to be an ex serviceman.’⁹² While the RAF broke the spirit of some, the force’s discipline also had the effect of creating cohesion among the recruits, even if, as David Morgan argues, such solidarity was sometimes counter hegemonic and constructed in opposition to the official ethos of the service.⁹³ By the end of their first evening, recruits at a Canadian reception centre were already becoming ‘united against It and Them’: the RAF ‘system’ and the NCOs.⁹⁴ As Ilana Bet-El highlighted in her study of conscripts in the previous war, even by the end of their basic training, many conscripts still saw themselves as civilians in uniform rather than military personnel.⁹⁵ Trainees quickly learned to play the system. Told to polish a floor in a secluded room, WAAF Barbara Mills ‘looked busy’ when someone was nearby, but did not really do any work.⁹⁶ A Mass-Observation reporter overheard another recruit declaring:

when I just joined... I was like some helpless thing grabbing at anything and anybody who did not look as if he would bite my head off; shaken by every grim jibe & pessimistic tale. But now I have passed all that... I have grown my hide.⁹⁷

Similar sentiment was expressed by others Picton observed. Successful recruits endured the ‘bullshit’ and grew their ‘hide.’ In the WAAF, Joan Rice learnt to accept

discusses, known as ‘chickenshit’ in the American military, ‘bullshit’ was common across all services. See: P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 79-96. See also: Calder, *The People’s War*, p.248.

⁹² Sommerfield, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I.

⁹³ D. Morgan, ‘Theatre of War: Combat, the military and masculinity’ in: Brod, H & Kaufman, M (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, (London, Sage Publications, 1994), p175.

⁹⁴ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 4. See also J. Sommerfield, *The Survivors*, (London, John Lehman, 1947), p. 18.

⁹⁵ Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p. 63.

⁹⁶ P. Howard- Dobson, (ed) *A WAAF at the Wheel: The Wartime Diary of Barbara Mills 31st October 1941 to 8th October 1942*, (Ipswich, Gresham, 2008), 1 December, 1941, p. 29.

⁹⁷ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

unpleasantries ‘without regret or protest.’ She attempted to stop herself from ‘indulging in memories’, take ‘each unpleasant day as it comes’ and focus on the positive that she was doing something positive that contributed to the war effort.⁹⁸ Others were able to resist authority in their own small way. Armourer Ian C----s recalled a man who annoyed the instructors by giving ‘Tarzan calls’ over the noise of the workshop. It was a ‘puerile school boy’s jape, but scoring over authority in a training camp was always satisfying.’⁹⁹

Being thrown together with people from different backgrounds was a bewildering experience for many. Patricia Lockitt remembered:

it was a shock to have to share a room with so many other people... I didn’t realise what a sheltered existence I’d had... I didn’t really appreciate what a prostitute was until I had one in the bed next to me... in the other bed was someone... who’d never had to do anything for herself. It was a great shock to her.¹⁰⁰

Cliques formed in some huts, as, even after the issue of uniforms, women could not disguise their class or ‘caste’.¹⁰¹ Friendships formed and split as people fell out or helped each other and shared their skills and knowledge,¹⁰² but all felt pressure to conform to what was expected by the majority and what was dictated to them by tradition and the example of the corporal in charge of their hut. Pip Beck quickly lost

⁹⁸ Rice, *Sand in my Shoes*, pp. 145-146

⁹⁹ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (I. C----s), RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Patricia Lockitt, IWM, 27207.

¹⁰¹ Nicholson *Millions Like Us*, p. 158.

¹⁰² Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue*, pp. 32-34. See also: Hitchcock, *Shillingsworth of Promises*, p. 68.

her ‘snooty’ attitude towards RAF slang and was soon ‘speaking the language fluently.’¹⁰³

Richard Picton disliked ‘the absence of privacy in the sleeping accommodation’,¹⁰⁴ but for Fred Hitchcock, the key to successful service life was for recruits to lose their inhibitions and enjoy the ‘bawdy, cryptic or black humour’. Farting and masturbation were typical sources of comedy and conversation; Hitchcock once told the man in the next bed to either stop his bed from rattling or ‘join Wankers Anonymous’.¹⁰⁵ In huts and billets, much of the conversation was on ‘shop’ but there was also often ‘intimate talk, generally dealing with sexual matters, adventures with women, constipation etc.’¹⁰⁶ Male recruits bragged that on an evening’s leave in Blackpool they were going looking for ‘crumpet’.¹⁰⁷ Men were able to display and perform their masculine identity and stoic indifference to the vicissitudes of service life. For older men being able to play a part in the war in uniform as part of the armed services was important.¹⁰⁸

At Cardington recruits were in ‘complete isolation from [the] outside world’.¹⁰⁹ For many, the first contact recruits made with home was when they sent their civilian clothes home in a brown paper parcel. It was also an act that created a distance between themselves and their previous lives.¹¹⁰ Training was problematic for some because the constraints of the service, the uniform and loss of freedom caused them to question their identity. Majorie Bevan-Jones felt: ‘I’m no longer ME... I am a cog in a wheel with lots of other cogs. We are all feeling rather

¹⁰³ P. Beck, *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, Crecy, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

¹⁰⁵ Hitchcock, *Shillingsworth of Promises*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰⁶ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

¹¹⁰ Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue*, p.32.

gloomy; we don't want to be Cogs all the time.'¹¹¹ Another WAAF found the lack of privacy one the hardest things to cope with:

we were locked into a system where we were numbers and did as we were told: our human likes, dislikes, fads, or even temperaments were not a matter for consideration. Furthermore, we were always together. Ever since childhood, I had loved to tuck myself away in my room for moments of necessary isolation. In that first day, I was to discover that solitude was an almost unattainable paradise, and those rare moments when it beckoned were to be cherished.¹¹²

In joining the service, recruits sacrificed their liberty and had to renegotiate their identity and self image. Their service number was one of the first things that recruits were given by the Air Force and most sources make a point of its importance; although many only served for a few years before being demobbed, even decades afterwards it is described as unforgettable. Even though it was imposed on them by the military, each individual's service number became a symbol of their individuality. Most importantly their service number enabled them to be paid, which in turn gave them an opportunity to regain some autonomy on leave and evenings off. Together with their uniform it became the first part of their new identity.

The change into uniform and the 'consequent loss of identity' led to an increase in recruits' perception 'of unity and solidarity.'¹¹³ Once in uniform, however ill fitting it was at first, recruits felt part of the armed services. After sending her 'civvies' home, one WAAF felt 'now all I have left that is ME are my nighties and

¹¹¹ Bevan Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, pp.10-11

¹¹² Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue* p. 32.

¹¹³ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

undies.¹¹⁴ After uniforms were issued, people Picton had begun to recognise ‘disappeared’.¹¹⁵ Badly fitting clothes were common; as a source of humour they were one of a number of shared experiences that began to bring the recruits together.¹¹⁶ The uniform was of special importance to women in the WAAF as it strongly symbolised the change in their identity and for some conflicted with their feminine self image. Patricia Lockitt was prepared to go into uniform and ‘knew what it looked like anyway’ but like most women, she was ‘not impressed with the ‘blackouts’ (navy blue knee length knickers), or the ‘dreadful’ pink brassieres.¹¹⁷ Another WAAF was unaware that the uniform would be ‘from the skin out.’¹¹⁸ They soon found that the issue bra ‘would only produce two flat bulky blobs under a manly shirt.’¹¹⁹ By retaining their own underwear women could preserve some of their femininity and individualism, but regulations dictated how they could wear their hair and makeup. Some girls had trouble tying their ties and with the uniform collars and studs. They also found it strange to wear ‘clothes which fastened from left to right rather than the usual ladies way.’¹²⁰ WAAFs trained in some trades were issued with trousers or overalls and were pleased with their more practical and masculine appearance. Posted to Hednesford for their trade training as a flight mechanics, WAAFs were ‘proud’ to be issued with trousers as they denoted a technical trade.¹²¹ The appearance of their uniform also signified their status in the forces. The casual attire of the archetypal fighter pilot who could wear their top

¹¹⁴ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 14. see also: IWM, Documents. 1947. Private Papers of K M Cove, (1992).

¹¹⁵ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

¹¹⁶ Raff, *Spitfires*, pp. 14-15. See also: Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Patricia Lockitt, IWM, 27207. See also: Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue*, p. 29. Civilian or ‘mufti’ knickers were referred to as ‘knockouts.’

¹¹⁸ Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Smith, *Why Did We Join?* p. 23.

¹²⁰ Private Papers of K M Cove, (1992), IWM, Documents 1947.

¹²¹ Ibid.

button undone was the desired ideal. As part of the newest and most technical service, unlike the traditions of the Army or Navy, oil stained and well worn uniforms denoted competence and time served seniority. Consequently it was important for new recruits to quickly lose the appearance of new issue uniforms. With time the blue of their uniforms faded, their footwear was broken in and, after hours of polishing, uniform buttons and badges began to lose their sharply defined edges. Recruits wanted to be taken for old hands or at least look less ‘sproggy.’¹²² WAAFs spent time pressing pleats into the straight skirt,¹²³ and altering the length of their coats.¹²⁴ Both male and female recruits tried to make their hats look fashionably worn. Eileen Smith learnt the trick of wetting her hat and pressing it flat, bending the peak and filling the sharp edges of the cap badge with a nail file to make it look older.¹²⁵ A WAAF tried to get worn looking ‘tapes’ to sew on her uniform when she was promoted so she would look like she had more seniority,¹²⁶ and another WAAF ensured she retained her old badges and buttons when exchanging worn out clothing to ensure that she looked like she had ‘got some in’ rather than appearing as a new recruit.¹²⁷ Stone argues that, rather than attempting to retain their femininity, WAAFs altered their uniforms in order to conform to military identity. Their uniforms symbolised competence and belonging, while the impression of long service faded

¹²² B. Boothroyd, *Adastral Bodies*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1942), pp. 55-56.

¹²³ Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, p. 24.

¹²⁴ Howard- Dobson, *A WAAF at the Wheel*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, pp. 24-25 see also N. E. Older, in: Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*, c1993. RAF Museum Hendon, AC96.5.1

¹²⁶ Private Papers of Mrs S Watts, (1996), IWM, Documents 5652.

¹²⁷ Pickering, *More tales*, p. 11-12. ‘Some’ referred to experience or time served. See: ‘Reports and letters from LAC Papineau’, (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G. See also: Base, *Get Some in!*, G. L. Rottman, *SNAFU: Sailor, Airman, and Soldier Slang of World War Two*, (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2013), p. 164. A. Davies, *Conrad’s War*, (London, Hippo Books, 1978), 57.

buttons and a battered hat gave, were also concessions to their vanity and individuality.¹²⁸

Initial Training

For WAAFs, initial training was mainly disciplinary and was aimed at getting recruits used to communal life. Until the end of 1941, the training lasted for two weeks. This was later increased to four weeks, but in 1942, when numbers of new recruits grew again, it was reduced to three weeks. It was three weeks for much of the war from then on. Recruits were given their kit and a medical, both of which were time consuming, and they were told of their rights and duties. A typical training programme in 1941 consisted of 14 hours of organisation and administration (including four lectures on hygiene), 15 hours of anti-gas and station-defence instruction and exercises, 6 hours of physical training and 12 hours of drill.¹²⁹ The tedious job of marking up all their kit took place in their own time,¹³⁰ as did polishing boots and buttons, and cleaning the huts. In 1940, at the Reception Centre at West Kirby, male recruits underwent four and later five weeks training. Their 42 hour week was carefully timetabled. (See FIG. 2.2.) It can be seen that a great emphasis was placed on drill, physical fitness and infantry skills. Drill, organised games and physical training were supposed to instil discipline and fighting spirit, and turn civilians into military personnel as quickly as possible.¹³¹ The regime was intense and physically draining. Despite being a vet used to the Yorkshire dales, Alf

¹²⁸ Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service', pp. 195, 206-207.

¹²⁹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 66. For a breakdown of the hours during the first week see Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, pp. 85-87.

¹³⁰ E. Smith, *Why Did We Join? A former WAAF remembers service life in World War II*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2003), p. 24. See also Williams *As We Were*, p. 5.

¹³¹ Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p.57.

Wight (James Herriot) was not as fit as he thought he was and struggled with physical training (PT).¹³²

	Week 1 (42 hours)	Week 2 (42 hours)	Week 3 (42 hours)	Week 4 (42 hours)	Week 5 (28hours)
Drill	16	18	8	11	9
Physical Training	6	6	6	6	4
Musketry	-	3	15	13	7
Lectures on service subjects	5	4	-	-	2
Anti Gas	5	3	-	-	-
Fitting and cleaning	1	-	-	-	1
Medical officer's lecture	1	1	-	-	-
Inoculations	6	-	-	-	-
Inspections	1	2	2	3	2
Cinema	-	1	-	-	-
Padre's lecture	-	1	-	-	-
Organised Games	-	2	3	3	-
Pay parade	1	-	1	-	1
Bayonet Fighting	-	1	5	5	2
Fire fighting	-	-	2	-	-

FIG. 2.2. Initial Training at West Kirby September 1940. No.5 Recruit Centre, West Kirby (1940-1948), September 1940. Appendix A, TNA, AIR 29/501.

¹³² J. Herriot, *Vets Might Fly*, (London, Pan Books, 1977), p. 7, 15.

Arthur Batten remembered that some of the PT exercises were painful even though he was fit and hardened by labouring in previous occupation.¹³³ Musketry (target practice with rifles and other firearms), was a great concern in 1940 because of the threat of invasion and the expected need for airmen to defend airfields. Infantry skills were thought to be even more important after the German invasion of Crete in 1941, because of the perceived vulnerability of RAF airfields to an attack by parachute troops. Airmen were expected to be able to handle weapons and have some knowledge of infantry fighting as ‘backers up’ even after the creation of the RAF regiment in 1942. However, as the threat of invasion diminished as the war continued, fewer hours were spent on rifle practice. By joining the RAF rather than the Army, men like Ted Sadler had hoped to avoid the ‘square bashing’ and the ‘spit and polish’ of the Army.¹³⁴ The RAF they imagined was a modern force and they had not joined to practice bayonet fighting and to stand guard duty, but to work with aircraft. At the training centre at West Kirby in Merseyside an appendix to the ORB shows that someone was trying to either lighten the mood of recruits or cultivate their aggression towards the enemy. (See FIG. 2.3.) The caricatures by AC2 Plummer depict Mussolini, Himmler, Hitler, Hess and Goering, and are not typical. Recruits usually had to attack shapeless, faceless sacks during bayonet practice. The photograph also shows the quality of the brick built huts in a purpose built permanent training camp. These huts were luxurious in comparison to the tented accommodation some had to endure. The hours of drill also had a mixed reception from amongst new recruits. Once they were proficient and they had broken in their shoes, many WAAFs enjoyed marching along the seafront of seaside towns and were

¹³³ Interview with Arthur Batten (2005), Reel 4, IWM, 27802.

¹³⁴ Private Papers of E. Sadler, ‘My War’ p. 5, IWM, 14842.

proud of their appearance. Pat Lockett thought the male drill sergeants were rude but ‘never insulting’ and noted that there was ‘very little swearing in front of the girls’,¹³⁵ but many male recruits had a different experience. For RAF recruits there was ‘loads of bullshit’.¹³⁶



FIG. 2.3. RAF Recruit Centres, (1940-1948). Recruit Centre, West Kirby, Appendix B, TNA, AIR 29/501.

Trained before the war, Fred Hitchcock felt he was constantly singled out during drill for not swinging his arms high enough and marching like a ‘handcuffed hunchback’; after trying hard on one occasion he felt like a ‘wanked out windmill’.¹³⁷ Little changed after war was declared; Ronald Hall thought that the ‘bull’ and ‘square-bashing’ was ‘rigorous and unnecessary’,¹³⁸ and Ted Sadler ‘objected’ to it.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Interview with Patricia Lockett, IWM, 27207.

¹³⁶ R. J. Bull, letter to ‘Ron’, RAFMH, X002.5774.004.

¹³⁷ Hitchcock, *Shillingsworth of Promises*, p. 61.

¹³⁸ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (R. J. Hall), RAFMH, AC96/5.

Whether on the parade ground or ‘foot slogging’ on the promenade in Blackpool,¹⁴⁰ the drill instructors often became a human face for all that was disliked about the RAF by new recruits. Wartime propaganda accepted this and tried to explain that it was not their fault.

Accompanied by an unflattering cartoon of their ‘apoplectic drill instructor’ in Raff’s *Behind the Spitfires*, the character of a new recruit explains to his audience that:

We do not like this man, but then, he doesn’t like us. There is nothing personal in it, he explained once in bitter tones; but whereas when we have had a month of it we shall move to perhaps a different occupation he will stay on and start all over again with another set of just as “dim sprogs”.¹⁴¹

A ‘sprog’ was the RAF’s equivalent to the Army’s ‘rookie’.¹⁴² Many who progressed from their initial training to perform quite technical roles during their time in the RAF remember the NCO instructors as unnecessarily insensitive, unimaginative and ‘moronic’.¹⁴³ At Cardington a musician and motor transport driver thought there was ‘too much bull’ and that the instructors had ‘too much power’ and were often ‘of low intelligence’.¹⁴⁴ When it came to asserting their authority, the instructors were not without a sense of humour however. On the first day at a training course at Cardington a sergeant was heard to confront an airman and ask: ‘What kind of

¹³⁹ Sadler ‘My War’ p. 5, IWM, 14842.

¹⁴⁰ Batten, Reel 4, IWM, 27802.

¹⁴¹ Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941), p. 19.

¹⁴² R. Raymond, & D. Langdon, (eds) *Slipstream: A Royal Air Force Anthology*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946), p. 61.

¹⁴³ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (B. Edmond), RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (C. Manning), RAFMH, AC96/5.

moustache is that? Grow a full one by morning.’¹⁴⁵ As well as drill, other parts of the training programme had a profound effect on recruits.

Health and Hygiene: ‘FFI’s, Lectures and Inoculations

The Free from Infection Inspection was known by the acronym FFI, and by some WAAFs as the ‘find flea examination’.¹⁴⁶ Canadian recruits came to know the medical inspection as the ‘short- arm inspection’ after the force’s euphemism for the penis.¹⁴⁷ The inspection was intended to find recruits with visible signs of illness or infection. Sometimes thousands of recruits had to be processed as quickly as possible so a mass examination technique was employed. In church halls and aircraft hangars personnel were paraded, told to strip, and were examined by a medical officer.¹⁴⁸

Robert Collins remembers:

You lined up with your fellows by the score... and held your private parts at the ready. As you rounded in front of the medical officer... you presented your penis... the MO checked for chancre, discharge, rash, or other evidence of... disease.¹⁴⁹

FFIs were also part of routine; all personnel were supposed to have one when they reported to a new posting. As well as head lice infestations and sexually transmitted diseases, the FFI sometimes picked up problems such as sebaceous cysts and hernias.¹⁵⁰ The FFI was one of the first things that the RAF subjected recruits to. For

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/E.

¹⁴⁷ R. Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall: An Ordinary Airman’s War*, (Vancouver, Grey Stone Books, 1986), p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Rexford-Welch, *The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, p. 580.

¹⁴⁹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ G. A. Bell, *To Live Among Heroes: A Medical Officer’s Insight into the Life of 609 Squadron in NW Europe 1944-45*, (London, Grub Street, 2001), p. 7. For the Army, especially when on active service the main purpose of the FFI was identify those infected with lice and scabies. See: M. Harrison,

many baring their all in front of hundreds of strangers was quite traumatic. Robert Collins found it ‘shocking and humiliating’.¹⁵¹ However, men quickly became ‘blasé’ about the inspection, exposing themselves to the medical officer ‘like practised flashers’¹⁵² and WAAFS gradually showed ‘less and less modesty’.¹⁵³ For some unfortunate women the most humiliating thing that could happen during their FFI was the discovery of head lice. Studies found that during the war a quarter of the civilian population of comparable age groups were infested with head lice. In the services this was reduced to two per cent. The incidence in new recruits was found to be higher in ‘certain reception centres’,¹⁵⁴ and it was believed that head lice thrived in women who had tried to keep their ‘dearly bought’ perm ‘undisturbed’.¹⁵⁵ The official treatment was with the insecticide,¹⁵⁶ however, a girl with hair so long she could sit on it had her head shaved when the FFI found head lice,¹⁵⁷ and Gwen Arnold remembers witnessing a ‘poor girl sobbing her heart out, so great was the shame of the discovery.’¹⁵⁸ Those who had been found to be infected were isolated from the rest of the group. They made excuses and blamed pillows or railway carriage headrests, while the remainder of the girls were provided with a topic of conversation and gossip that began to draw them together.

Inoculations and the lecture on sexual health and hygiene provided further shared experience for new recruits and are frequent topics in the sources. As Claire Langhamer has highlighted, men were warned about the dangers of venereal disease,

Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 48.

¹⁵¹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 19.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁵³ Arnold *Radar Days*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁴ Markham, (et. al), ‘Conditions in the Three Women’s Services’, p. 29, TNA, CAB 66/27/41.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁶ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁷ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 4, 7

¹⁵⁸ Arnold, *Radar Days*, p. 107.

while women were exhorted to avoid sexual intercourse because of the stigma of unwanted pregnancy.¹⁵⁹ The medical officer's sex education lectures were usually accompanied by a description of the perils of sexually transmitted diseases. Male recruits were dissuaded from consorting with prostitutes by being shown pictures of the symptoms of syphilis and gonorrhoea.¹⁶⁰ Angus Rob remembers that 'some of the slides were quite horrific'¹⁶¹ Prostitutes were thought to be the main source of infection, and while the 'gruesome' lecture was probably effective at dissuading some young men from 'going with... loose ladies',¹⁶² married women and virginal WAAFs were thought of as safer sexual partners. WAAFs were taught less about diseases, but there was an emphasis on the risk of pregnancy; they were discouraged from having sex outside marriage. Despite a Ministry of Information campaign about the risks of VD,¹⁶³ some WAAFs admitted they had no knowledge of some diseases,¹⁶⁴ and found the lecture on sex both embarrassing and enlightening. One WAAF remembered 'we all shuffled out of the cinema with pink cheeks and furtive looks at each other.'¹⁶⁵ However, another WAAF thought that the sex lectures had little effect on some women. She reported to Mass-Observation that 'if a girl wants to do wrong, she'll do it... and blow the regulations.'¹⁶⁶ The war caused dislocations across society, and there were similarities between civilian and the military experiences. In civilian life, young girls moved away from home to work in factories

¹⁵⁹ C. Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 142.

¹⁶⁰ Batten, Reel 4, IWM, 27802. See also: Interview with F. J. McGovern, IWM, 17825.

¹⁶¹ A. Rob, 'RAF days: My life and times in the Royal Air Force' RAFMH, 001.3517/001.

¹⁶² Interview with F. J. McGovern, IWM, 7825.

¹⁶³ S. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain' *The American Historical Review*, 103, (1998), p. 1150. See also: A. Bingham, 'The British Popular Press and Venereal Disease During The Second World War' *The Historical Journal*, 48, 4, (2005), pp. 1055-1076.

¹⁶⁴ Arnold, *Radar Days*, 107.

¹⁶⁵ Private Papers of O. J. Noble, IWM, Documents 685.

¹⁶⁶ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/E.

and live in hostels; as Angus Calder highlights, this led to ‘increasing enlightenment in sexual matters’.¹⁶⁷ Courtship rituals changed; the war offered young men and women pay and periods of leave, it gave them the experience of long distance travel and the opportunities provided by the blackout, and freedom from parental supervision.¹⁶⁸ As Sonya Rose argues, for young single women, celibacy was regarded as a part of ‘good citizenship,¹⁶⁹ while ‘libidinal femininity’ was constructed as an unpatriotic ‘internal other’.¹⁷⁰ The RAF sexual education lectures effectively reinforced national hegemonic patriarchy.

Recruits were given an anti-tetanus injection and an inoculation that gave flu-like symptoms. ‘Some men fainted immediately before or after’.¹⁷¹ All were given a day of light duty afterwards and those with an adverse reaction were admitted to sick quarters. Diana Lindo felt fine immediately afterwards but the following morning she ‘couldn’t have got up for the King himself.’ She felt nauseous, her head and body ached and her arm ‘had swelled up like a balloon’.¹⁷² The jab made their eyes smart and it was several days before the dull ache in their arms abated.¹⁷³ Richard Picton reported he felt depressed after his inoculations.¹⁷⁴ A WAAF felt ‘so terribly fed up’ and ‘groggy’ she longed to be back at home.’¹⁷⁵ For an unfortunate few, who were badly affected by the combination of homesickness and a bad reaction to their

¹⁶⁷ Calder, *The People’s War*, p.313.

¹⁶⁸ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p.117.

¹⁶⁹ Rose, ‘Sex, Citizenship and the Nation’, pp.1166-1168.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1176.

¹⁷¹ Picton, MOA, TC29/2/H. See also: Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic*, p. 53.

¹⁷² D. Lindo, *A WAAF at War: Wartime Jottings of a WAAF Driver 1941 – 1946*, (Fontwell, Woodfield, 1992), p. 14.

¹⁷³ Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁴ Picton, MOA, TC29/2/H.

¹⁷⁵ P. Willmott, Letter to ‘Peg’, IWM, 7199. Another WAAF felt ‘frowsty’. See: Howard- Dobson, (ed) *A WAAF at the Wheel*, Sunday 23 November 1941, p. 21.

vaccinations, the first week of their initial training was an unpleasant ordeal. In an official publication officers were reminded:

It is not surprising that this violent interruption of the normal ways of life should have produced many personal problems and created many anxieties.

Moreover, the very change from civil to military life with its novel conditions and unfamiliar restrictions demand a conscious effort of adaption.

For many men the process will be difficult and for some painful.¹⁷⁶

It was expected that this transition would be more difficult and painful for women.

With typical patriarchal condescension, in *Girls You Amaze Me*, a wartime book intended to publicise the role women played in the auxiliary services, Vernon Noble wrote:

To bring a girl into line with Service requirements and keep her there is a tribute to anybody who can manage it; and having got her into that co-operative frame of mind and then maintain her mental as well as physical happiness strikes me as being a bit of a miracle.¹⁷⁷

At first 'wastage' - the numbers of girls who left the WAAF during or shortly after their training - was considerable. In May 1940, over a quarter of recruits left the service, while in some domestic trades the wastage was almost half. In the early days of the WAAF this was seen as 'an effective selection process.'¹⁷⁸ Failures were seen as weak, and propaganda gave the credit for success of the WAAF training programme to the service and its instructors rather than emphasise the successful recruit's flexibility and stoicism. However, it was understood that the RAF and the

¹⁷⁶ Air Ministry, *The Airman's Welfare*, p.4.

¹⁷⁷ V. Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me*, (London, Hurricane Books, 1943), p. 20.

¹⁷⁸ Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue*, pp. 102-103.

Navy got the ‘first pick of the recruits’.¹⁷⁹ Given the supposed quality of the material a high proportion of wastage was unacceptable. One cause of the problem was thought to be misemployment; recruits were being placed in trades they were unsuitable for. Although there was a wide range of trades, recruits were frequently offered only a limited choice depending on the needs of the RAF at the time. There were often vacancies for cooks, clerks, nursing orderlies and MT drivers.¹⁸⁰ In the parlance of the time, square pegs were forced into round holes, and it was officially recognised that recruits often had little ‘interest or aptitude’ for the trades they were assigned to.¹⁸¹ It was admitted that errors were unavoidable, but medical boards attempted to categorise recruits’ ‘physical, constitutional and psychological’ fitness.¹⁸² Psychometric tests were introduced to the RAF in 1940 to assist in the selection of air crew, and the following year, in an attempt to assign recruits more efficiently, a series of ground trade selection tests were introduced.¹⁸³

‘GVK’ tests and Psychological Profiling

As yet there has been no comprehensive study of the selection process of RAF ground personnel. Mark Wells and Allan English have briefly considered the psychological selection of RAF air crew,¹⁸⁴ while Ben Shephard and Nafsika Thalassis have examined the development of the selection procedure in the British

¹⁷⁹ Stafford Cripps, R. Alexander, A. V. Grigg, P. J. Sinclair A. H. M. ‘The Use of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services.’ (1942), p. 3, TNA, CAB 66/27/10.

¹⁸⁰ Rexford-Welch, *The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, p. 565.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

¹⁸² Lord Horder, Curran, D. Rees, J. R. Gillespie, R. D. Fairlie, W. M. Craigie, H. B. Hadfield, J. A. Reynell W. R. ‘Discussion of Functional Nervous States in Relation to Service in the Armed Forces’ *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 36, 5, (1943), p 253.

¹⁸³ Vernon, and Parry, *Personnel Selection*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁴ M. K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War*, (London, Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 4-26. A. D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939 – 1945*, (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), pp. 17-40.

Army.¹⁸⁵ At the start of the war, air crew selection was based on a medical and an interview to discern the ‘essential characteristic’ of a likely candidate, evident through their intelligence and education.¹⁸⁶ At first, ability was linked to heredity and ‘Social Darwinism’,¹⁸⁷ but psychophysical tests of reflexes and coordination were introduced by 1942.¹⁸⁸ The screening of recruits in all services was thought to be necessary because of the numbers of neurotics discharged in the first years of the war,¹⁸⁹ and intelligence tests were seen as the most practical method of establishing who was likely to breakdown and who would make the best candidates for different trades.¹⁹⁰ Mathew Thomson highlights the understanding of the difference between shell shock and mental deficiency that developed in the inter-war period;¹⁹¹ the unintelligent were thought to be more ‘likely to contract disease, suffer a nervous breakdown and commit military offences.’¹⁹² To facilitate trade selection in the Army, mathematics and mechanical comprehension tests together with written and verbal tests were used from 1943 onwards.¹⁹³ Recruits were graded in ‘progressive

¹⁸⁵ N. Thalassis, ‘The Uses of Intelligence Testing in the Recruitment of ‘Other Ranks’ in the Armed Forces during the Second World War’ *History and Philosophy of Psychology*, 5, 1, (2003), pp. 17-29. N. Thalassis, ‘Treating and preventing trauma: British military psychiatry during the Second World War’, PhD thesis, (University of Salford, 2004). B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4 (1999), pp. 419-524. See also: B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, 2000), pp. 188-189, and M. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 125-126.

¹⁸⁶ English, *The Cream of the Crop*, p. 28. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸⁷ English, *The Cream of the Crop*, pp. 18, 24.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, p.13, 21.

¹⁸⁹ B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4 (1999), p. 512. See also: B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, 2000), p189.

¹⁹⁰ Thalassis, ‘Treating and preventing trauma’, p. 119.

¹⁹¹ M. Thomson, ‘Status, Manpower, and Mental Deficiency in the First World War’, in R. Cooter, M. Harrison, and S. Sturdy (eds.), *War, Medicine and Modernity* (Stroud, Sutton Press, 1999), pp. 149-66. B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4 (1999), p. 502.

¹⁹² Thalassis, ‘The Uses of Intelligence Testing’, p. 20. Thalassis, ‘*Treating and preventing trauma*’, p. 112.

¹⁹³ Thalassis, ‘Treating and preventing trauma’, p. 109.

matrices.’ Apart from the top and bottom 10 per cent, each group represented 20 per cent of the population,¹⁹⁴ and a similar system was developed in the RAF for ground personnel. As Thalassis argues, intelligence tests ‘favoured the better educated and... served to biologise the perceived superiority of the upper classes.’¹⁹⁵ While maintaining the hierarchical class and social divisions within the services, such tests also legitimised the role of military psychologists. In the RAF, psychiatrists also attempted to develop screening processes for both air crew and ground personnel to reduce the numbers discharged from the service.

The psychological profiling of RAF recruits was discussed in a meeting at the Air Ministry in July 1941.¹⁹⁶ Following the advice of the Oxford psychologist, Dr. William Stephenson, a three-month trial of the effectiveness of psychometric tests on recruits was carried out at reception centres.¹⁹⁷ Stephenson acted as a personnel advisor to the Central Trade Test Board until 1943, and established a battery of three tests for the trade selection of ground personnel known as the GVK tests. The tests were adopted, and after training CTTB personnel to administer them, they became standard in the six main recruiting centres in January 1942.¹⁹⁸ The combination of scores from the separate intelligence tests gave an indication of ‘general ability’ and whether recruits were more suited to practical or theoretical work.¹⁹⁹ The tests were strictly timed ‘group paper and pencil tests’, and included both written and verbal

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

¹⁹⁵ Thalassis, ‘The Uses of Intelligence Testing’, p. 20. Thalassis, ‘Treating and preventing trauma’, p. 110.

¹⁹⁶ Directorate, WAAF: Air Ministry, Appendices, (1941-1942), Meeting to discuss Psychological tests 5 July 1941 at Adastral House, TNA, AIR 24/1645.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Cardington and Blackpool were chosen for the men and Gloucester and Bridgnorth for WAAFs.

¹⁹⁸ Operation Record Book: Central Trade Test Board, West Drayton, 12 January 1942, TNA, AIR 29/710.

¹⁹⁹ Vernon and Parry, *Personnel Selection*, p. 70.

instructions.²⁰⁰ They were run by specially trained administration staff; large numbers could be tested at once and the three tests took around an hour to complete.²⁰¹ G tests measured ‘general analytical intelligence’, V ‘verbal intelligence’ and K ‘practical mindedness’.²⁰² In Ministry of Information propaganda aimed at an American audience it was explained that:

When you join up in either service you are put under the psychological microscope by specially trained airwomen. The tests are rapidly paying a 100 per cent dividend. There are three main tests – G. V. and K. The G. test records the ‘patient’s’ capacity for detail, facts and general intelligence. The V. test shows quickness of uptake, a gift for learning parrot-wise and for verbal agility. The K. test is mechanical and highly practical in application.²⁰³

General knowledge questions included the age of the King or the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Verbal tests had questions such as ‘What is the opposite of “moist”?’²⁰⁴ In the 1990s, one WAAF remembered a ‘simple maths’ section, a ‘general knowledge quiz’ and likened the K test to television’s ‘Krypton factor’ test with shapes to fit into a pattern.²⁰⁵ In the general intelligence tests, male and females scored equally, women were more successful at the verbal intelligence tests, but men did better at the practical K test.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ Appendix A to A.M, letter A161223/41 D.T.T., TNA, AIR 29/710. See also: H. R. Rollin, ‘Pediculosis Capitis and Intelligence in W.A.A.F. Recruits’ *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4293, (1943), p. 475.

²⁰¹ Vernon and Parry, *Personnel Selection*, p. 70.

²⁰² Appendix A to A.M, letter A161223/41 D.T.T., TNA, AIR 29/710.

²⁰³ WAAF: Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, (1939-1945), G. Barker ‘WAAF’ (1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/1.

²⁰⁴ Nicholson, *Kiss the Girls Goodbye*, p. 15.

²⁰⁵ Private Papers of O. J. Noble, IWM, Documents 685.

²⁰⁶ G. Barker ‘WAAF’ (1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/1. See also: Appendix A to A. M. letter A161223/41 D.T.T., TNA, AIR 29/710.

GVK tests were used to choose which trade recruits went in to. The tests were checked for effectiveness and accuracy by sampling recruits' progress through their trade training and defining the average acceptable average success rate of personnel at different trades with varying GVK scores.²⁰⁷ Each test was scored out of a hundred. For example, to become a Grade 2 electrician, a candidate had to achieve GVK scores higher than 60, 50, and 65 respectively. Scores below 40, 30, and 40 indicated that they would not make successful electricians.²⁰⁸ A ground gunner would fail his training only with a score below 10, 15, and 5.²⁰⁹ Recruits could be found fit for trade training, fit for unskilled service as aircrafthands, or rejected. Those with 'anomalous' scores or who scored 15 or less were seen by a psychiatrist, and the recruitment centre's officers and NCOs were also encouraged to refer personnel who complained of illness, exhibited unusual behaviour, or seemed to have an 'intellectual defect' to be interviewed by the specialist.²¹⁰ Such interviews lasted around twenty minutes. In her interview with a psychiatrist, Marjorie Bevan-Jones did not want to admit her true motives for joining the WAAF. Although she gave a ridiculous answer, she was accepted into the service and went on to become an officer. She must have been thought to have 'the right temperament.'²¹¹ Recruits who the specialist thought to be 'unlikely to make good as airmen or airwomen' were

²⁰⁷ Vernon and Parry, *Personnel Selection*, pp. 70-71. See also: Appendix A to A. M. letter A161223/41 D.T.T., TNA, AIR 29/710.

²⁰⁸ 'Instructions on the use of GVK Intelligence Test Results by C.T.T.BD. Interviewers, 1942, TNA, AIR 29/710. See also: Appendix A to A.M. letter A161223/41 D.T.T. TNA, AIR 29/710.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ See for example: Medical (Code B, 48): Psychological examinations of recruits and other personnel by industrial psychologists, (1942-1945), H. L. Burton, 'Indications for referrals of WAAF Personnel under training to a Neuropsychiatric Specialist' TNA, AIR 2/6400. See also: 'Notes for the Guidance of Psychiatrists in connection with the Psychological testing of Recruits' and 'Psychiatric Examination of Ground Personnel on Entry' (1942), Markham, (et. al), 'Conditions in the Three Women's Services', p. 27, TNA, CAB/66/27/41, and Expert Committee on Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services (1942 – 1943), Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry in the Royal Air Force. National Archives, p.3, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

²¹¹ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 8.

discharged from the service.²¹² At Penarth 7 per cent of the men seen were rejected, while at Gloucester 16 per cent of WAAF recruits were rejected.²¹³ However, the GVK tests were intended to help trade selection rather than to reject unsuitable recruits.

In 1942, 36 per cent of RAF and 49 per cent of WAAF invalided from the service were on psychiatric grounds,²¹⁴ and it was hoped that it should be possible to 'weed out the obviously undesirable recruit at the onset, rather than waste time, trouble and money on ... an obviously hopeless recruit'.²¹⁵ The psychiatrist Eric Jewesbury complained that the medical inspection during the recruitment process could be inefficient. He quoted examples of airmen who had been invalided from the RAF but who passed medicals and were allowed to re-enlist months later. Including cases of affective disorders, anxiety, hysteria and epilepsy, these airmen were soon referred to RAF specialists and invalided once again.²¹⁶ Like the WAAF above, recruits would tell the recruiting officer and medical officer one thing in order to be accepted for the RAF and the complete opposite if they later desired to leave the service.²¹⁷ A neuropsychiatric specialist highlighted that 'completed questionnaires made by entrants to certain branches of the RAF bear little relation to histories obtained after breakdown.'²¹⁸ At Bridgnorth 5 per cent were referred to the psychiatrist and 2 per cent were rejected, while at Gloucester 13.6 were referred to

²¹² Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry in the Royal Air Force, p. 3, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

²¹³ Medical (Code B, 48): Psychological examinations of recruits and other personnel by industrial psychologists, (1942-1945). Minute 29.2 (a) 8 September 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²¹⁴ Minute 80.2, 22 June 1943, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²¹⁵ Minute 53.5, 9 November 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²¹⁶ Neuropsychiatry: miscellaneous reports and publications, (1941-1945). E.C.O. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems of an R.A.F. Neuropsychiatric Centre' (1943), p. 39, TNA, AIR 49/357.

²¹⁷ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p.8. Bevan-Jones was later sent to the hospital at Torquay and was treated by Gillespie. See p.144.

²¹⁸ D. N. Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel' *Journal of Mental Science*, 90, (1944), p. 570

the specialist and 5 per cent were rejected.²¹⁹ The practice at different recruitment centres varied, and at some establishments the opinions of the neuropsychiatric specialist was ignored or overruled. Many regarded as unfit for ‘any form of service’ were accepted into the RAF and WAAF.²²⁰ Examining recruitment centres, the consultant psychiatrist, Group Captain, Robert Gillespie found that CTTB officers overruled the recommendations of the neuropsychiatric specialists and trade trained some personnel the specialist considered were only fit for unskilled work. At Penarth, twenty cases considered only suitable for unskilled occupations were trained as ‘Batman, Gunner, Driver M.T., Cook and Butcher and Concretor [sic].’²²¹ Psychiatrist G. L. James complained a ‘difficult enrolling officer’ would not reject anyone, and gave examples:

C.T.T.B. advised 14 days ago that this girl was psychopathic... Four days later ... on a charge, awarded 3 days C.C for thieving. Three days ago in close arrest for wholesale thieving, also trimming the edge of a groundsheet. Further she needed a clothes line, so promptly cut the tapes of gas capes, tied tapes together – a clothes line. Exasperated administrative people refer to me! For discharge.²²²

A follow up of cases thought by a psychiatrist to be ‘unfit for any form of Air Force Service, but accepted by the Executive’ showed that within a year 79 per cent were

²¹⁹ Minute 24.2, 10 August 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²²⁰ Minute 29.2 (c) 8 September 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²²¹ R. D. Gillespie ‘Report on visits to RAF stations Innsworth, Cardington, Penarth, Padgate and Edinburgh’, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²²² G. L. James letter to air commodore Burton, 25 May 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400. ‘C.C.’ was shorthand for ‘confined to camp.’

giving ‘unsatisfactory service’ or had been discharged.²²³ In 1942, Gillespie attempted to improve the psychological profiling with the aid of a questionnaire which he envisaged would be given to all recruits in addition to the GVK tests.

In an attempt to prevent personnel predisposed to neurosis being accepted as air crew, Gillespie had previously developed a ‘predisposition score’ which gave a point for ‘adverse factors’ in the patient’s history.²²⁴ During an interview with the candidate, adverse constitutional and social factors such as nail biting, fainting at the sight of blood, or ‘timidity’ were noted by the psychiatrist and awarded points.²²⁵ Five points or more on the scale ‘meant the probability of ultimate breakdown’.²²⁶ Reviewing Gillespie’s report, Charles Symonds, the RAF consultant neurologist, saw the main advantage of such a system was that it gave ‘a numerical rating’ to a qualitative study, but that it was time consuming and could not replace an examination by a specialist.²²⁷ Gillespie’s ideas were tested further, but throughout the war the RAF continued to rely on physical tests and general knowledge and mathematic exams to assess the temperament and capabilities of potential air crew.²²⁸

²²³ Whittingham DGMS Minute 94, 31 January 1944, TNA, AIR 2/6400. See also: ‘Follow-up of cases Classified by the Selection Psychiatrists as Unfit for any form of Air Force Service, but accepted by the Executive.’

²²⁴ Royal Air Force Personnel (Code B, 68): Proposal for selection of candidates for aircrew by combined psychiatric and psychological methods (1941-1943). R. D. Gillespie, ‘Predictability of Breakdown under War Conditions’, 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6345. See also: D. N. Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’ *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. 90, 1944, pp. 569 - 573.

²²⁵ Gillespie, ‘Predictability of Breakdown’ p. 2, TNA, AIR 2/6345. See also: R. D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier*, (London, Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1942). See chapters two and three, and pp. 171-174.

²²⁶ Gillespie, ‘Predictability of Breakdown’ p. 11, TNA, AIR 2/6345.

²²⁷ C. P. Symonds ‘Notes on Predictability of Breakdown under War Conditions’, TNA, AIR 2/6345. See also: Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp. 209 - 210.

²²⁸ See for example F. C. Bartlett, ‘Flying Personnel Research Committee: Preliminary Note on Promising Procedures for the Assessment of Temperament’ FPRC 529(b), TNA, AIR 2/ 6345. Bartlett experimented with ‘Assembly’, ‘Divided Attention’, ‘Two Handed Co-ordination’, ‘Reaction Time’ tests and an ‘Endurance test’ but he concluded they were time consuming and their value needed testing. Although the RCAF used a combination of psychophysical tests and the link trainer, the RAF continued to use a practical ‘flight grading’ system to see who could fly well. See: English, *The Cream of the Crop*, p.32-36.

After being asked to visit and report on recruitment centres,²²⁹ Gillespie devised a questionnaire to be given to ground personnel in an attempt to predict which personnel would fail to complete their trade training, or give unsatisfactory service.²³⁰ The written paper took less than half an hour to complete and was given to recruits together with the GVK tests. One version consisted of twelve questions including: ‘Have you ever suffered from “nerves” or had a “nervous breakdown”?’²³¹ The questionnaire was intended to highlight recruits who should then be interviewed by the recruiting centre’s neuropsychiatric specialist. Small scale trials of the questionnaire were held, and more recruits were rejected by this system than by the GVK tests alone.²³² Gillespie’s experiments continued with 1000 subjects, but the RAF continued to rely on the GVK tests for the remainder of the war.²³³ Harold Whittingham, the Director General Medical Services, concluded that Gillespie’s questionnaire was too time consuming and did not reject many more than the practice of psychiatric interviews following GVK test results.²³⁴ Wells discusses Gillespie’s work with both air crew and ground personnel, but fails to recognise the continuity in his work.²³⁵ However, Gillespie’s interviews with air crew, and his ground personnel questionnaire (and a later suggestion that air crew candidates should be given his questionnaire) were all logical progressions of his study of predisposition to break down.

In common with other studies of the recruitment of air crew and Army personnel, there were conflicts of interests about the selection of ground personnel

²²⁹ Minute 29.2, 8 September 1942, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³⁰ Minute 79, 27 May 1943, TNA, AIR 2/6400. See enclosures 79C and 80A.

²³¹ Enclosure 80A, TNA, AIR 2/6400. Another version couched eleven similar questions in a closed Yes/No format.

²³² Enclosure 91A, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³³ H. Whittingham DGMS Minute 94, 31 January 1944, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp. 15-18.

within the RAF and the Air Ministry, and between psychologists and psychiatrists, over which methods of testing should be used. Both psychologists and psychiatrists hoped to use their methods to identify and reject unsuitable recruits, but also to consolidate their profession's standing in military medicine. At the same time, Whittingham was under pressure from the Ministry of Labour to 'accept the halt, the maimed, and the blind... and men and women of dull intelligence'.²³⁶ Even as late as 1944, it was felt that there was a need to recruit grade three personnel to perform menial tasks because, due to a manpower shortage, skilled men were spending a large proportion of their time on unskilled work.²³⁷ Only the worst psychopaths, neurotics, schizophrenics and 'homosexualists' were to be excluded from the service.²³⁸

Trade training

The GVK tests divided recruits into several groups of 'broad ability'.²³⁹ To accommodate the needs of the service there was still an amount of flexibility as to which trade recruits would be assigned to. The recruit's own preference was of secondary importance but was considered if possible. Many individuals believed that their trade selection was decided by chance or in order to find the worst fit possible.²⁴⁰ The grading of personnel and their allocation to different trades began to create and enforce the hierarchy of trades within the RAF. The length of a trade

²³⁶ Minute 95.6. 18 February 1944, TNA, AIR 2/6400. See also: Letter from H. N. De Villiers (Ministry of Labour) to Air vice-marshal J. W. Cordingley, 10 February 1944, enclosure 95A, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³⁷ Minute 95.5. 18 February 1944, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³⁸ 'Psychiatric discharges: Cases in which invitation to re-enlist not issued' Enclosure 112A, TNA, AIR 2/6400.

²³⁹ Vernon and Parry, *Personnel Selection*, p. 70. See also: 'Instructions on the use of GVK Intelligence Test Results by C.T.T.BD. Interviewers', 1942, TNA, AIR 29/710.

²⁴⁰ R. F. Ashbridge, *Yer actual 'ERK': A Collection of Stories of World War II Groundcrews*, (Heighington, Lincoln, Tucann, 1998), p. 3.

training course varied according to their perceived importance and how technical they were.

Ted Sadler wanted to be an engine mechanic. He believes he was made to become an airframe mechanic because the first letter of his surname came in the second half of the alphabet.²⁴¹ The Markham report highlighted that girls were often not trained in their chosen trade because they were either unsuitable or because there were no vacancies. It also meant that often their talents and experience were not always put to best use. The appeal of learning to drive meant that many girls who had secretarial skills and experience were being trained as MT drivers.²⁴² A WAAF flight mechanic/ fitter originally turned down the trade of 'clerk: special duty' (plotter) because she did not understand what it was and she wanted to be more involved with aircraft.²⁴³ Another had promised her mother she would not become a driver as it would entail her being alone in a vehicle at night. She found that the only open trades for her intake in 1943 were MT driver, batwomen or radar operator.²⁴⁴ Not getting the trade they hoped for, either because it was unavailable, or because their GVK test results suggested they were unlikely to complete the training successfully, meant that some recruits began trade training with a negative attitude. By her second day at Gloucester, Nina Chessall felt 'miserable' at being told her chosen trade was closed.²⁴⁵

Trade training 'was carefully 'phased',²⁴⁶ and, in 1943 lasted between three to seven months.²⁴⁷ For WAAFs, trade training could last between one and six

²⁴¹ E. Sadler, 'My War' p. 5, IWM, 14842.

²⁴² Markham, (et. al), 'Conditions in the Three Women's Services', p. 35, TNA, CAB 66/27/41.

²⁴³ Private Papers of K. M. Cove, (1992), IWM, Documents. 1947.

²⁴⁴ Arnold *Radar Days*, p. 91. See Appendix B for a list of WAAF trades.

²⁴⁵ Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic*, p. 53.

²⁴⁶ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p. 42.

months.²⁴⁸ Trainee flight mechanics were first taught how to handle tools and progressed to work on small ‘test pieces’ before taking a trade test.²⁴⁹ WAAFs being taught technical trades had to be taught the very basics down to the names and purpose of the tools.²⁵⁰ Ted Sadler’s technical training as an airframe mechanic lasted 16 weeks. He was taught ‘metal work, riveting, woodwork, sewing for repairs to fabric covered aircraft, and painting.’ He also learned about pneumatics and hydraulics, splicing, lighting systems, and the theory of flight.²⁵¹ The training courses were both practical and academic. Ian C----s underwent his trade training to become an armourer at Melksham in Wiltshire. He thought his training ‘was thorough and at times like one’s school days, sitting at desks and making copious notes in issue exercise books.’²⁵² At the top of the ground personnel hierarchy, trainee aircraft mechanics and fitters effectively had to create their workshop manuals in their own time after lectures and demonstrations. Indicating the level of pride technicians took in learning their trade, numerous copies of handwritten and handdrawn notebooks containing intricate diagrams and meticulous notes can be found in the archives of the RAF museum and the Imperial war Museum.

Trade training met with a mixed response from recruits and varied across different trades. Trained in December 1939, fitter Ronald Hall found his trade training ‘comprehensive and to an excellent standard,’²⁵³ however, an armourer thought that much of his syllabus ‘was over-elaborate, and sometimes quite

²⁴⁷ Royal Air Force Personnel (Code B, 68): Requirements for various trades, (1942-1943). Technical training Command, Top Secret ground training policy and plans 25 May 1943, TNA, AIR 2/4821.

²⁴⁸ Bentley-Beaman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, p. 111.

²⁴⁹ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (I. C----s), RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵⁰ Cove, IWM, Documents. 1947.

²⁵¹ Sadler, ‘My War’ p. 6, IWM, 14842.

²⁵² C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵³ Hall, RAFMH, AC96/5.

erroneous' and was not adequate preparation for working on operational stations.²⁵⁴

Armourer Donald Aris found his trade training for both guns and bombs 'adequate but hurried' and was forced to pick up the practicalities of being an armourer on an operational station.²⁵⁵ Also at RAF Melksham, during the summer of 1941, John Sommerfield reported for Mass-Observation that his training on a bombing course was a:

fearful bind, and extremely irritating. A great deal of what we have to learn is obsolete stuff, and much of the rest consists of having to memorise endless tables of bomb components that are a complete waste of time to learn... we aren't learning to do a job at all, but to pass a test board. This seems pretty general in these training places, [the] result is that chaps who arrive enthusiastic to learn a new job, after a few weeks don't give a fart in a colander for it and are only concerned with getting through with the minimum amount of trouble.²⁵⁶

For all trades however, the final trade test was a daunting prospect. Those that passed became AC1s, AC2s or were promoted to LACs.²⁵⁷ The 18 girls on a training course at Cranwell were told that there were three outcomes, passing the course and being sent to an operational station, further training, or remustering to another trade. They were fearful that they would suffer the ignominy of failure.²⁵⁸ One of Ted Sadler's test pieces included 'interior and exterior threading with taps and dies.' After his 16 weeks he was examined by a senior NCO and was led to believe that if

²⁵⁴ C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵⁵ Aris, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵⁶ Correspondence, J. Sommerfield, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I

²⁵⁷ Quarterly Examination Boards ending December 1941, TNA, AIR 29/710.

²⁵⁸ Arnold, *Radar Days*, p. 108.

he failed he would be posted to the Army.²⁵⁹ Test pieces had to be accurate to a tolerance of 2 thousandths of an inch.²⁶⁰ Trade tests represented the culmination of weeks of work and studying. Some recruits recorded or made light of their worries through humorous cartoons but it is clear that tests were daunting. (See FIG. 2.4. and 2.5)

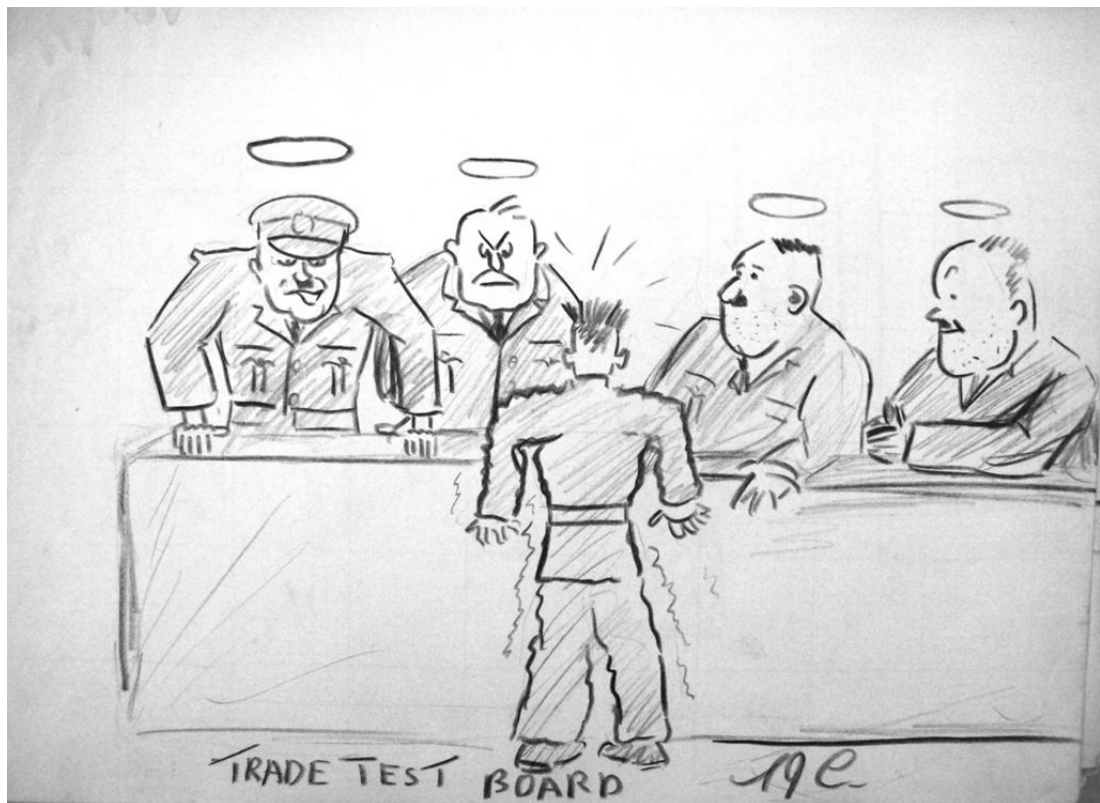


FIG.2.4. Cawner note book, 'Trade Test Board', RAFMH, X006 7041.

Here the knock-kneed young recruit is visibly shaking as he is questioned by a panel of his 'angelic' older, knowledgeable and confident superiors. In figure 2.5, the recruit is physically dwarfed by the three officers standing over him.

²⁵⁹ Sadler, 'My War' p. 6, IWM, 14842.

²⁶⁰ C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

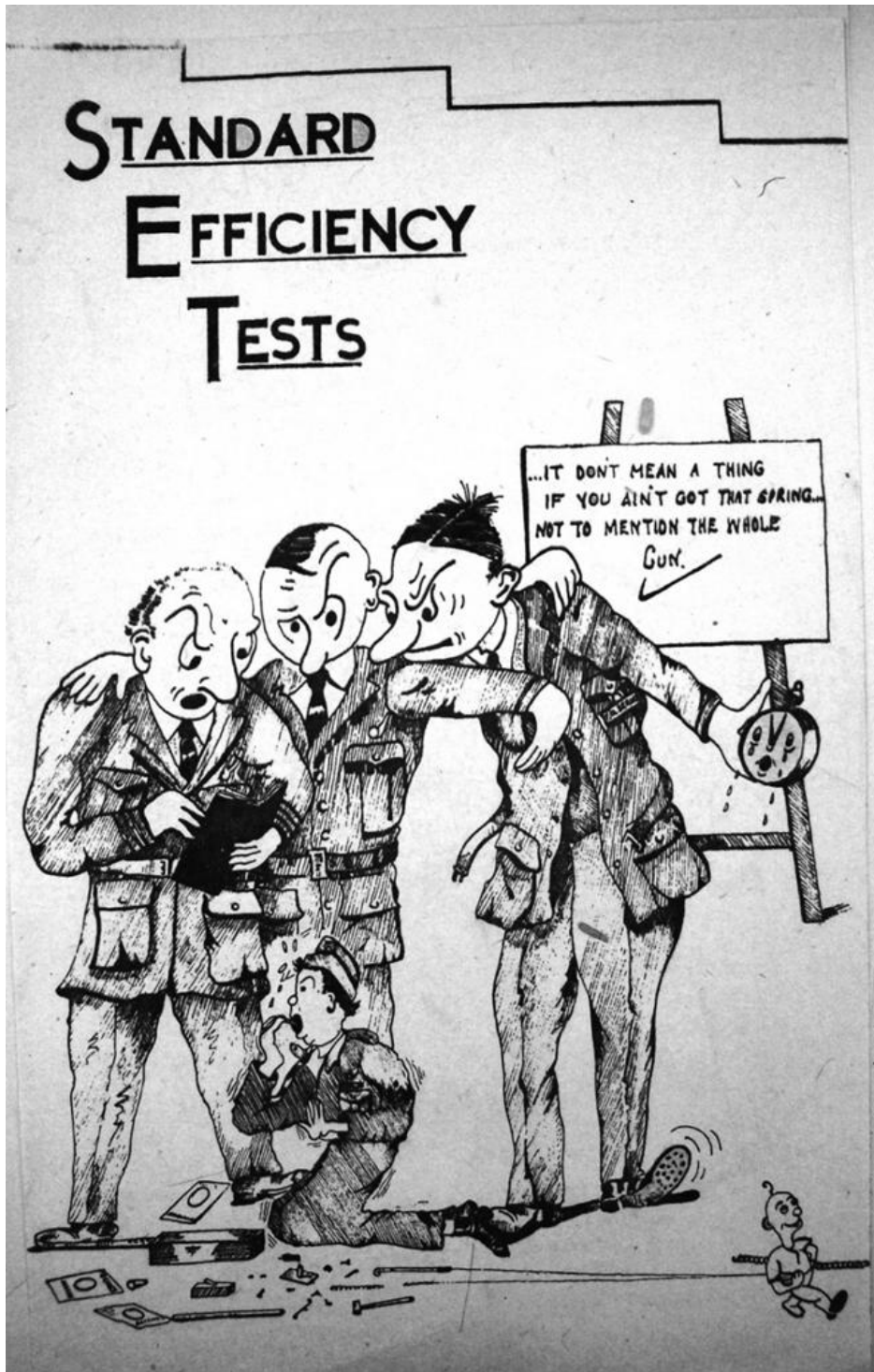


FIG. 2.5. Goldsmith papers, 'Standard Efficiency Tests', RAFMH, X003.9925.

He is sweating, and trembling while raising his right hand to his mouth; he is either worried or has caught his fingers in part of the mechanism of the gun which is in

pieces on the floor. The task of reassembling the gun is to be completed against the clock and the officer on the right is impatiently tapping his foot and holding a stop watch which is crying. The task is not helped by the fact that the wing commander on the left appears to be shouting at him while at the bottom right of the page a 'gremlin' is nonchalantly making off with the crucial main spring. Almost everything that could go wrong has done so.

Recruits had to learn to cope with the stress of trade tests and examinations as, even after their initial training was completed and newly qualified personnel left for their first postings, training was continuous throughout an individual's service. Personnel could voluntarily remuster or be promoted, which entailed new training courses. For example, trade test papers for reclassification ACW1 to ACW2 or LACW as a clerk were three-hour written papers and were concerned with RAF bureaucracy and regulations. There was also a typing test and a voluntary shorthand test.²⁶¹ Male personnel whose trades were diluted by the influx of WAAFs were retrained in other roles, while later in the war many WAAFs from Balloon Command were remustered and retrained when their roles also became unnecessary. As will be discussed further in the following chapters, within the RAF, an individual's trade was part of their identity, and was partly constructed in opposition to the other. Many of those on a flight mechanic's course at RAF Hednesford over the winter of 1942 and spring of 1943 were WAAFs from Balloon Command being remustered. Others on the course 'thought some of them were a bit rough'.²⁶² Such WAAFs were also

²⁶¹ Pickering, *Tales of a Bomber Command WAAF*, 179-186. See also Private Papers of S. Watts, IWM, Documents 5652. (Watts was Pickering's maiden name.) ACW1 and ACW2 were the female equivalent of AC1 and AC2.

²⁶² Cove, IWM, Documents. 1947.

‘pretty disgruntled with having to remuster... so were not receptive to any discipline.’²⁶³

As well as personnel who were remustered, people who failed in one trade were retrained in other roles. Arthur Batten volunteered to be an air crew wireless operator and air gunner but he failed his initial Morse code aptitude test. Rather than being posted to an air gunnery school he was ‘washed out’ and posted to a ground gunnery course as part of the RAF regiment instead.²⁶⁴ Others were less lucky; the sick bay at Blackpool contained some men who were ‘morse happy’ from the strain of trying to learn morse code.²⁶⁵

Their time at training establishments changed recruits both mentally and physically. Mervyn Base found the pre-war training at Cardington ‘strenuous’ but he put on weight and was fitter and wiser at the end of his twelve weeks there.²⁶⁶ From a more affluent background, James Herriot lost weight.²⁶⁷ Pat Lockitt thought that the food was ‘fairly good’ but ‘stodgy’ and she thought that most of the girls put on weight.²⁶⁸ In a letter to her friend, another WAAF thought that life in the service was a healthy combination of fresh air and good food. She expected she would ‘grow horribly fat’.²⁶⁹ The weeks and months of training forged strong friendships that were usually broken by the RAF policy of posting individuals rather than forming units as the Army did. When people that he knew were posted in different directions, Picton thought ‘Christ I’m browned off. I don’t suppose we shall see half of these blokes

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Batten, Reel 4, IWM, 27802.

²⁶⁵ A. Rob, ‘RAF days: My life and times in the Royal Air Force’, RAFMH, 001.3517/001.

²⁶⁶ Base, *Get Some In*, p. 14.

²⁶⁷ Herriot, *Vets Might Fly*, p. 95.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Patricia Lockitt, IWM, 27207.

²⁶⁹ Willmott, Letter to ‘Peg’ IWM, 7199.

again.²⁷⁰ Most were very sad to be posted away from their friends, but it was an important lesson to be learned about the Air Force; friendships ‘could burn bright for six months, then flicker and die’ as personnel were posted to different units.²⁷¹ One WAAF thought her training had not been as harsh as she had expected and with the exception of only a few days, she had been happy during her training.²⁷² In common with many, looking at the faces of the crowds all smiling and waving at her passing out parade a WAAF ‘felt a lump rising in... [her] throat’.²⁷³

Conclusion

For recruits and conscripts it was during training that an understanding of the RAF hierarchy was established. GVK tests quantitatively scored recruits’ aptitude, and for those in technical trades, their training began to instil a sense of pride and belonging. Unskilled recruits ‘got some in’, and learnt how to cope with being in the RAF. Thousands of recruits shared common experiences as they progressed through the ‘machine’ that was created by the RAF to fill vacancies in the rapidly expanding force. At their peak the RAF and the WAAF received thousands of new recruits each week, their reception and initial training was compressed into a few days and even the most technical trades were taught in the shortest time possible. The GVK tests were introduced to increase the efficiency of trade selection from 1942, but by then many had already been assigned their trades, and even after the tests became policy, the exigencies of the service meant that often the choice of trades was limited. Some felt they were in the wrong job, and others found that their trade training did little to

²⁷⁰ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

²⁷¹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 57. See also: Smith, *Why Did We Join?*, p. 67.

²⁷² Willmott, Letter to ‘Peg’ IWM, 7199.

²⁷³ Noble, IWM, Documents 685.

prepare them for working on operational stations. Specialists in the RAF medical services were very much aware that some people were incapable of performing adequately in the roles they had been assigned to. After the National Service Act, many thought the WAAF was preferable to other armed services, working on the land or in munitions factories. WAAFs joined from a sense of duty, for the adventure, and because of a romantic image of aircraft and flying. For some the alluring blue of the uniform was also a factor. They found that the ability to ‘swank’ around in a uniform came at a price however. Many were homesick; recruits were cut off from civilian life and under pressure to conform to military discipline. The RAF and WAAF appealed to many as it was perceived to be a modern technical force, specialist trades such as engine or airframe mechanic or fitter seemed preferable to becoming an army infantryman. Some recruits were dismayed to find that they could not avoid the ‘bullshit’ and hours of drill during their initial training. As well as the weight of the RAF authority conveyed to the recruits by their drill instructors and the corporals in charge of their huts, new recruits created their own social pressure to conform. The change into uniform and sending their civilian clothes back home was a symbolic event for many; outwardly at least the recruits had conformed to military service. Recruits had to negotiate their new self image themselves however. WAAFs could retain some of their femininity and individuality by keeping their own underwear. Their uniform and trade became an important part of their identity and it was important for them that they did not stand out as ‘sprogs’. Once in the service they accepted its language and fashion, investing their free time in making their uniforms look like they were time served. It was also during training that individuals’ pride in their trade and their place in the hierarchy of the service began to be formed.

Together, recruits survived the ordeals of FFI inspections, inoculations and drill. These 'rites of passage' helped to mould the new recruits into service personnel,²⁷⁴ and they learned to accept hardships and disappointments and to grow their 'hide.' The final test of their strength of personality came at the end of their training when friendships were broken up by the forces policy of individual postings. This identification with the popular trope of a stoic ideal was to continue as recruits were posted to stations within Bomber Command and 'got some in'. The next chapter will examine the experience of ground personnel on operational stations.

²⁷⁴ Bet-El, *Conscripts*, p. 27.

LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Life on a bomber station is made up of moments of feverish activity and breathless excitement, followed by suspense and, all too often, heartbreaks, interspersed with long periods of boredom – but especially boredom.¹

For many, in common with the other services in wartime, life on an operational base was one of monotony occasionally interrupted by panicked rushes of work or ‘flaps.’² The work of an engine mechanic ‘required little courage and was not particularly exciting – except at odd moments – although at times [it was] unpleasant and often tiring.’³ AC1 Frank Taylor complained in a letter to his parents that life in the Air Force was ‘a rather monotonous’ experience.⁴ This chapter will examine the living conditions, working conditions, and leisure activities of non flying personnel on operational bomber stations. Using examples, it will examine the roles of three groups of personnel: ground crew who worked directly with the aircraft and flyers; those (including some WAAFs) with limited contact with either aircraft or air crew; and finally those such as cooks, general duties clerks or airfield defence personnel who were furthest removed from flying and operations. Examples of the dangers ground personnel risked and the potentially traumatic events they witnessed will also be discussed.

¹ Private Papers of Miss J M Brotherton MBE, (1997), p. 12, IWM, Documents. 6649.

² C. H. Ward-Jackson, *It's A Piece of Cake or RAF Slang Made Easy*, (1945) (London, Read Books, 2010), p.28. Boredom was common in all arms of the military. See P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 96.

³ S. Rew ‘They also Served: The Story of an Ordinary Aircraftsman’, p. 146. RAFMH, B3692.

⁴ Frank Taylor letters, 13 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

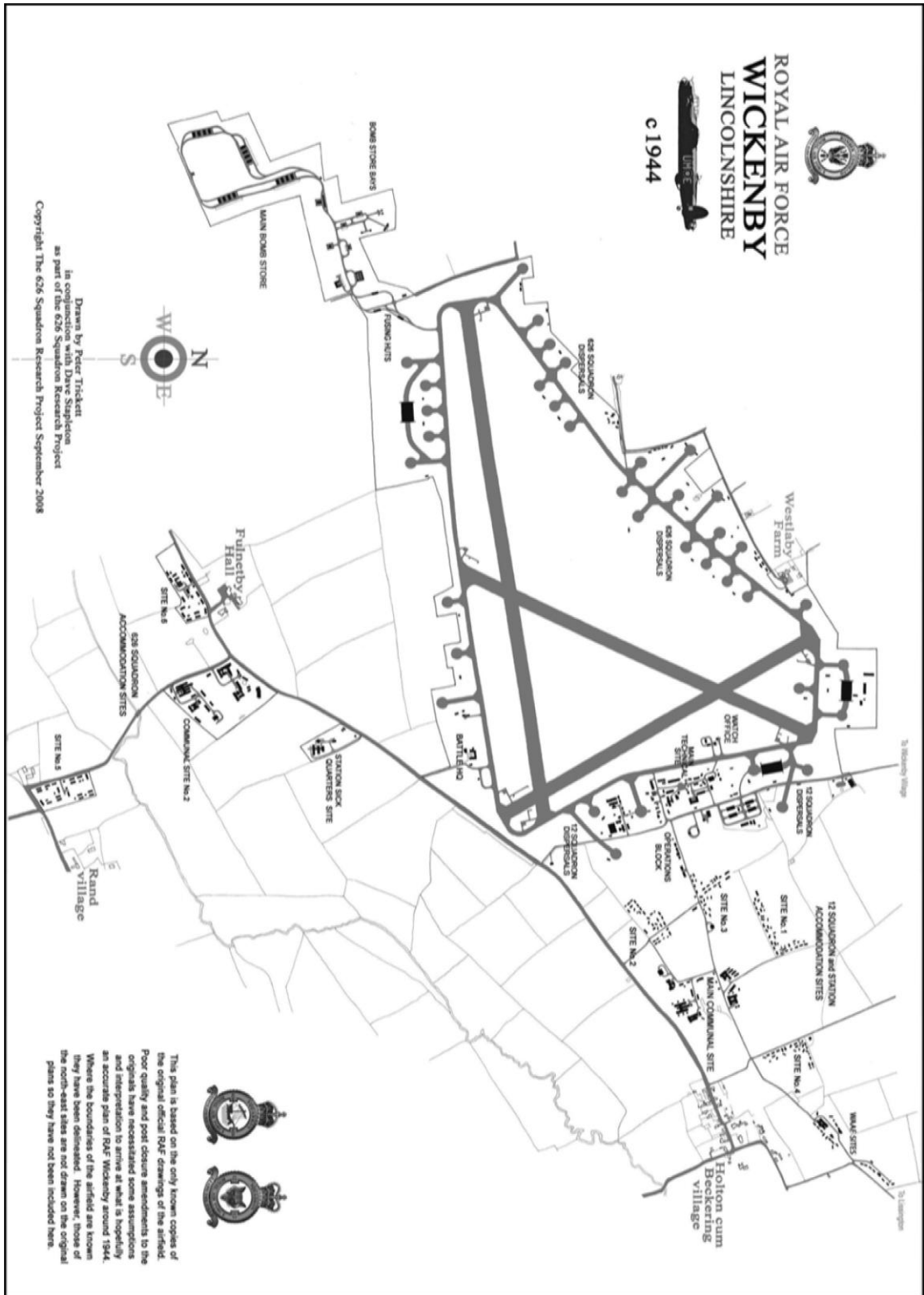


FIG. 3.1. Plan of RAF Wickenby, a dispersed bomber station circa 1944, 626 Squadron Research Project, RAF Wickenby Memorial Collection (WMC).

Taking into account local topography, wartime dispersed sites such as Wickenby or Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire were built to a similar design.⁵ (See FIG. 3.1.) A typical dispersed wartime bomber station, RAF Wickenby was built and opened in 1942. Home to Wellingtons and later Lancasters from 12 squadron, it was expanded in 1943 when the dispersed sites to the south of the airfield were built to accommodate 626 squadron's personnel. The plan of the station shows the wide dispersal of the living, accommodation and working sites, together with the circular 'pan stands', the aircraft dispersal points. To give an idea of scale, the shortest runway was around three quarters of a mile long (1.2 km). From the main communal site to the furthest aircraft dispersals was around 1 ½ miles as the crow flies, and a much longer journey around the perimeter track. The bomb dump, built in a slight depression, was even further away. As can be seen, the station's buildings were more numerous and occupied much more ground than the nearby villages of Holton cum Beckering and Rand. (The slightly larger village of Wickenby lies to the North West of the airfield.)⁶ Surrounded by a perimeter track which connected the aircraft dispersals, the three runways were the centre of the airfield. At points from the perimeter track were access lanes to the hangars, and the technical site, (with stores and offices). The communal site, (NAAFI, ablutions, kitchens and messes) and the domestic sites where personnel slept were outside the perimeter track. The petrol and bomb dumps were as far away as possible, often camouflaged by a wood. During the working day personnel could expect to walk or cycle miles between their living quarters, the ablutions (the facilities provided for washing), the mess, and the sites

⁵ D. J. Smith, *Britain's Military Airfields 1939-45*, (Wellingborough, Patrick Stephens, 1989), p. 25.

⁶ See: website, *A Brief History of RAF Wickenby*, (2014) at: <http://www.wickenbymuseum.co.uk/Museum/TheHistoryofWickenby.html> (accessed 22 January 2015).

where they worked. At Wickenby it is a twenty minute walk from the WAAF site to the technical site. When Don Charlwood dated a WAAF at Elsham Wolds in Lincolnshire, the round trip between the camp cinema, the ‘waaferly’ (the WAAF quarters) and his own quarters was a five mile round trip.⁷ Travel of up to 30 miles a day between ‘sleeping, messing and working sites’ by bicycle was the norm on some dispersed sites.⁸ Bicycles also enabled people to escape from the airfield into the surrounding countryside, villages and towns.⁹ Pre-war permanent stations differed in that they were built to a better standard. They had better amenities and infrastructure and were less dispersed, but personnel still had to travel long distances between the communal areas and aircraft dispersals.¹⁰ RAF stations were in effect small towns or large villages themselves. A section of this chapter will examine the social lives of ground personnel on and off the station through the lens of Erving Goffman’s theory of closed sites. On each bomber station the Air Force provided eating, sleeping and washing facilities for over 2,000 male and female personnel of different ranks, some of whom worked unusual shift patterns. On most stations an effort was also made to provide facilities for recreation; a camp cinema, ‘the Astra’, was common on many stations as were Navy, Army and Air Forces Institute (NAAFI) canteens. The influences of scale and military authority dictated that, of necessity, personnel had to live and work communally, to share facilities, and conform to regulations. As an institution, the RAF had authority over the lives of personnel in almost all areas of

⁷ D. Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, (Victoria, Hudson, 1991), p.156.

⁸ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234: The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, (Air Historical Branch, 1953), p. 31.

⁹ The Memoirs of Mr. Holman, p. 6, RAFMH, B4264.

¹⁰ From late 1942, stations were organised and administered in groups of three, in what was known as the ‘base’ system. Usually, a pre-war permanent station (commanded by an air commodore) was the ‘parent’ for two newly built satellite stations with fewer facilities. For more on the organisation of Bomber Command see: J. Falconer, *The Bomber Command Handbook 1939-1945*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1998).

their life. However, as part of wider society, personnel came into contact with the civilian population in neighbouring villages and local towns. Surrounded by numerous stations from two Bomber Groups, Lincoln was the city in the centre of ‘Bomber County.’

Living Conditions

As Bomber Command rapidly expanded, wartime stations were built quickly and on a restricted budget. The paucity of materials and the speed of construction meant that buildings were of poor quality, and that on many stations the facilities ‘were overtaxed’.¹¹ Buildings were ‘austere’ and ‘purely functional’.¹² At Wickenby, the majority of the buildings were prefabricated, either of concrete with corrugated roofs, or nissen huts.

It was a half round corrugated iron hut with brick ends, each containing two windows and a door, while internally there was a concrete floor covered with brown linoleum. The walls were lined with matchboard and hooks were provided for hanging up clothes and equipment. A round coke stove with an iron chimney pipe was situated in the centre of the hut... A good roaring fire in the stove made the place comfortable enough in winter, but on the winter mornings long after the stove had died out, the damp advanced across the floors almost to the centre of the hut. The beds nearest the stove were the

¹¹ S.C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, (London, HMSO, 1955), pp. 26-27.

¹² S. Wells, ‘Not all had wings’, WMC, DOC 00252.

warmest to be in, but had the disadvantage that people congregating around the stove always sat on them.¹³

The shared accommodation made a lasting impression on its inhabitants and is frequently described in contemporary sources and later memoirs. The accommodation at Ludford Magna in Lincolnshire, described above, is a typical depiction of a nissen hut. The alternative prefabricated concrete, wooden or asbestos huts were little warmer in winter, and all could be oppressive in the summer. The cold and the ineffectiveness of the ubiquitous and temperamental cast iron stoves are also a common theme in many sources.¹⁴ The stoves often went out either due to their inefficiency or the lack of fuel. Combustible material was ‘begged, borrowed and scrounged’,¹⁵ while many have admitted to having gone on ‘commando raids’ to steal coke from the supply for the officers’ mess.¹⁶ During the winter, the cold in nissen huts ‘seemed to soak through the walls, up from the damp concrete floor, untouched by the small round iron stoves.’¹⁷ The RAF medical services noted a high incidence of upper respiratory tract infections, pneumonia, and pulmonary tuberculosis.¹⁸ For extra warmth it was common practice for airmen to put newspaper between their blankets and sleep under their groundsheets to protect their bedding from the condensation which dripped from the ceiling.¹⁹ Conditions were cramped

¹³ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (I. C---s), p. 10, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁴ See for example D. Langon, ‘Batman, Save my Fire!’ in: R. Raymond, & D. Langdon, (eds) *Slipstream: A Royal Air Force Anthology*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946), pp. 56-59.

¹⁵ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (E. Howell), RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁶ ‘RAF Museum Hendon, Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (R. A. Sewell), RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Holman, p. 9. RAFMH, B4264. E. Smith, *Why Did We Join? A former WAAF remembers service life in World War II*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2003), pp. 73-74.

¹⁷ M. L. Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, (London, Pandora Press, 1984), p. 23.

¹⁸ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 65.

¹⁹ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

too; as Angus Calder notes, overcrowding was a common wartime experience for many, especially in industrial areas,²⁰ and, within the RAF, the space allocated to each individual in the shared living accommodation decreased during the war. After December 1942, WAAF officers were allocated 96 square feet, senior NCOs 58 square feet and airwomen only 38 square feet.²¹ Airmen originally were to have 45 square feet, but by necessity this was reduced to 32 square feet per man.²² In their sleeping quarters airwomen had a bed (after 1943 often a bunk), '2 feet of shelving with two hooks, half a mat and a quarter of a folding chair.'²³ Airmen in wooden or brick built huts lived in similar conditions.

Between the rafters are tied pieces of string from which a variety of clothing is hanging to dry, and by each bed are a couple of coat-hooks, a shelf, and a kit bag, these constituting each man's own little world. On the wall above the beds are lurid pin-up girls, or a snap of "the wife and kids". The atmosphere is thick and stuffy, the black-out frames not providing the best of ventilation, while the floor is littered with cigarette-ends, sweet wrappers and other rubbish.²⁴

Both men and women kept their limited possessions in 'bomb boxes' under the beds. The floor was swept each morning but, other than the day of the weekly inspection, when the huts were tidied and the floor polished, the huts were obviously lived in. The Markham Report into the welfare of service women concluded that they could expect to live in 'Spartan decency'.²⁵ The report was especially concerned with the

²⁰ A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London, Pimlico, 1994), p. 316.

²¹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 30.

²² Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 29.

²³ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, pp. 34-35.

²⁴ Rew, p. 63, RAFMH, B3692.

²⁵ V. Markham, T. Cazalet, W. Elliot, J. Milner, D. Munro, J. L. Stocks, E. Summerskill, F. Sykes,

condition of the ablutions.²⁶ In rare instances the WAAF facilities were connected to sleeping quarters by covered walkways. However, the men never had this luxury, and for both males and females, the paths to the ablutions could be waterlogged and muddy in inclement weather.²⁷ The Air Ministry were aware of the effect this had on the hygiene of both male and female personnel, and were particularly concerned about the ‘impropriety’ of women having to walk outside ‘in a state of dishabille’.²⁸ To allow for adequate ventilation while also accommodating the blackout, ablutions were unlit on some stations; on some sites they could only be used during daylight hours.²⁹ They were unheated and the concrete floor was covered only by wooden ‘duck-boards.’ At times the ablutions were busy and crowded due to the limited availability of hot water,³⁰ and in addition the wash houses never seemed to have had plugs. While Eileen Smith and others improvised by wrapping a hanky around a penny,³¹ many had their own plugs which they took with them as part of their wash kit. The ablutions at East Kirkby in Lincolnshire froze one winter,³² and walking or cycling between sites in the in all weathers also had a demoralising effect on personnel.

The airmen and airwomen’s messes were another area of asserted institutional authority. RAF practice was to have separate messes for officers,

‘Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women’s Services’ National Archives, (1942), p. 8, TNA, CAB 66/27/41.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 27. See also: Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

²⁸ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 31. See also Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 36.

²⁹ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 31.

³⁰ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

³¹ Smith, *Why Did We Join*, p. 28. See also D. Lindo, *A WAAF at War: Wartime Jottings of a WAAF Driver 1941 – 1946*, (Fontwell, Woodfield, 1992), p. 21. P. Beck, *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, Crecy, 2004), p. 108.

³² ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (A. Turner), RAFMH, AC96/5.

sergeants and airmen.³³ Combined messing facilities for male and female personnel of the same rank were formally introduced in 1943.³⁴ With allowances made for those working shifts, weekly menus could consist of bacon and tomato with bread and marmalade for breakfast, roast or boiled meat served with potatoes and cabbage followed by chocolate blancmange for dinner, sausage and mash and bread, butter and jam for tea, and macaroni cheese or soup for supper, when cocoa, Horlicks, Ovaltine or hot milk would also be available.³⁵ Some messes could seat hundreds at a time, and after eating, leftovers had to be scraped into a pigswill bin, plates were stacked and personnel rinsed their own mug and 'eating irons' in a tub of hopefully hot water before shaking them dry.³⁶

It was an offence to leave too much food,³⁷ and the mess was sometimes a site of resistance. In the NCO's mess at Bexwell in Norfolk, the men complained to the orderly officer that the food was so bad a dog wouldn't eat it. This was tested with a station dog, and indeed the armourer's mascot turned its nose up. Unknown to the officer the food had been laced with paraffin and the food quickly improved.³⁸ As well as resistance to authority, the messes were also sometimes the site of conflict between the hierarchical groups within the RAF. When one WAAF complained to an officer about the food she was 'sent to Coventry' by the corporal who served the

³³ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 32. As Max Hastings acknowledges, the influx of young sergeant air crew into the sergeant's mess caused some friction amongst the ground personnel 'old sweats' who may have waited for years for their promotion. Non commissioned air crew eventually had their own messes. M. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, (London, Michael Joseph, 1980), p.71, 156.

³⁴ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 32.

³⁵ Log of events submitted by W.A.A.F. detachments at various R.A.F. Stations, (1940), RAF Drone Hill diet sheet 31 August 1940, TNA, AIR 24/1641.

³⁶ Lindo, *A WAAF at War*, p. 13.

³⁷ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (J. C. Smith), RAFMH, AC96/5.

³⁸ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (F. L. Warner), RAFMH, AC96/5.

meals, and she went hungry for several days.³⁹ Generally however, RAF personnel tended to eat better than civilians, their diet was carefully balanced and, although it was a rare occurrence worthy of writing home about, sometimes even the lower ranks were given real eggs.⁴⁰ Those who had missed the main meal times, did not like the food, or were still hungry could augment their diet by visiting local cafes or the NAAFI for a cup of tea and ‘wad’ as cakes or buns were colloquially known.⁴¹

The RAF provided sports facilities, most stations had a cinema, messes arranged dances, ENSA shows occasionally visited,⁴² and, on some stations, personnel organised their own stage shows. At RAF Chedburgh in Suffolk a biweekly camp newspaper, ‘The Con’, was even started by some personnel.⁴³ Camp cinema cost 7d and was usually full. It often showed a double feature with news and a MOI short.⁴⁴ Audiences behaved differently to civilian cinema audiences, and rather than quietly watching the films, they were given witty, sarcastic commentaries by the audience. Farfetched scenes were ‘mocked’, love scenes were given ‘cat calls’ and ‘leg displays’ were ‘greeted... with appreciative whistles.’⁴⁵ Apart from ‘domestic nights’, when personnel were supposed to carry out mending and cleaning in their quarters, on evenings off, personnel could spend their free time on or off the station. However, due to the relative isolation of many stations and the problems of transport, personnel often chose to remain on the station and the NAAFI was very popular.

³⁹ Settle, *Brave Promises*, pp. 143-145.

⁴⁰ Letters from Frank Taylor, 13 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

⁴¹ Ward-Jackson, *Piece of Cake*, p.61.

⁴² The acronym ENSA stands for Entertainments National Service Association. It was sometimes satirised as ‘Every Night Something Awful.’

⁴³ Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Operations Record Books, Royal Air Force Stations. Chedburgh. Appendices. (1943 – 1944), TNA, AIR28/147.

⁴⁴ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

The NAAFI at Woodhall [Spa] was a large wooden hut, occupied by some twenty small tables, each with three or four chairs around it. Within an hour of opening time at seven pm., the tables were invariably covered with dirty plates, cups and glasses, pools of spilt tea, and cake crumbs. At one end was a counter, divided into four sections, one selling sweets, cigarettes, soap, razor blades etc., the next tea, coffee and cakes, the third, suppers, and the last beer and minerals. The place was usually crowded, the tables being occupied by airmen and WAAFs, either singly or in groups. On a wet, winter evening, the atmosphere was thick with tobacco-smoke, coke fumes from the glowing, but useless stove, the smell of food, and the peculiar odour of damp uniforms.⁴⁶

Frequently featuring in both contemporary sources and in later recollections, the NAAFI was important to both servicemen and women. Although some thought it had the ‘atmosphere’ and ‘comfort’ of ‘railway buffets’,⁴⁷ with its piano and cheap food and drink, to ‘the impecunious airman, the NAAFI was front parlour, lounge and social club.’⁴⁸ Open from 6pm until 10pm, but serving food between 7pm and 9pm, the menu at Wickenby was written on a blackboard:

Steak Pie	4d
Mutton & Potato Pie	5d
Beef & Leek Pudding	4d
Cheese Pasty	3½d
Battered Spam	6d
Double Chips	2d
Rabbit Pie	6d
Beans on Toast	3½d
Mushy Peas	1½d
Slice of Bread & Marge	1d

⁴⁶ Rew, p. 61, RAFMH, B3692.

⁴⁷ Letters from Cpl Stevens, 11 September 1941, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁴⁸ Rew, p. 62, RAFMH, B3692.

Nelson Cake	2d
Jam Tarts	2d
Rock Buns	1d ⁴⁹

The NAAFI was ‘the enforced centre’ of social life on bomber stations and was a place where personnel of all ranks and trades could meet.⁵⁰ Many people maintain they preferred the food in the NAAFI, but perhaps more importantly, the NAAFI gave airmen and women the freedom to choose what they ate, and to avoid the authority of the messes. However, airmen preferred the beer in civilian establishments if they could get to one or afford it.⁵¹

After working a succession of night duties, AC1 Frank Taylor enjoyed a day off and visited the cinema and the YMCA in the nearest town, and the ‘local’ just outside the station.⁵² A Mass-Observation correspondent thought that older men and NCOs tended to stay on camp and it was the younger men who went out. He felt that nearly all personnel who left the station pursued the activities of eating, drinking, dancing, meeting women, and the cinema.⁵³ In Cambridge the large numbers of RAF and WAAF personnel remained separate from the students;⁵⁴ arguably the city was divided into town, gown and RAF. However, surrounded as it was by so many RAF stations and without a university, Lincoln became an RAF town.⁵⁵ Known as ‘the snake pit’, the Saracen’s Head on the High Street was famously popular with flyers,⁵⁶ and places such as the YMCA canteen (also on the High Street) were often full with

⁴⁹ M. Rendall, ‘NAAFI Memories: “We Serve those who Serve”’ in: R. Nicholls (ed) *The Wickenby Register Newsletter*, (2006), No. 63, p. 1, WMC. A chip buttie was 3d.

⁵⁰ Rew, p. 62, RAFMH, B3692.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵² Taylor letters, 13 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

⁵³ Assorted material sent in by Observers in the RAF, (1939-1943), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/J.

⁵⁴ J. Beech, *One WAAF’s War*, (Tunbridge Wells, Costello, 1989), p. 85.

⁵⁵ Lincoln was surrounded by stations from both number One and Five Groups, York was the central city for personnel from Four and Six (Canadian) Groups, While Cambridge was closest to Three Group and Eight Group (Pathfinders).

⁵⁶ G. Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead- Uncensored*, (Manchester, Crecy, 2005), p. 74, 94. See also: Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

both servicemen and women.⁵⁷ For some men swimming in the pool in Lincoln and watching football were popular pastimes in the summer.⁵⁸

Bomber Stations as Total Institutions

Erving Goffman defined total institutions as:

a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.⁵⁹

Although Goffman used T. E. Lawrence's *The Mint* as an example of a military total institution,⁶⁰ wartime bomber stations were different to the inter-war establishments as described by Lawrence. When they could not afford to go out in Lincoln, or did not have the time for the journey there and back, personnel from RAF Wickenby descended on The White Hart at Lissington. At other stations too, RAF personnel almost took over certain public houses in nearby villages.

Like the NAAFI, visits to the nearest town or village local enabled personnel a brief escape from military regulations, and civilians in the village pubs 'were tolerant' of the 'invasion.'⁶¹ Holes in the hedges surrounding the airfield allowed personnel to come and go from the station circumnavigating the guard room, and working on the dispersals, some ground crew were given shelter and refreshments by locals in nearby houses and farms.⁶² Personnel had some freedom to pass between

⁵⁷ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁵⁸ Reports from Individual Members of the Forces (1939 – 43), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/J.

⁵⁹ E. Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, (London, Penguin, 1991), p. 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 37, 40, 44, 59-61, 70.

⁶¹ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

⁶² 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (W. E. Wilkinson), RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Memoirs of C. J. Shepherd, RAFMH, X002-5411.

the military and civilian spheres; however, despite this permeability, the wartime RAF can still be regarded as a 'total institution' and personnel had a very different experience to civilians. Personnel became institutionalised; on a trip into Lincoln from East Kirkby, Eileen Smith and a friend visited 'Ye Olde Tea Shoppe' and on leaving automatically took her plate and cutlery away with her.⁶³ In effect the towns and villages, cafes and public houses they visited almost became extensions of the RAF. Personnel were still in uniform, they were still subject to the force's discipline; they had to salute officers, and they were under a curfew. When off the station both air crew and ground personnel often went out of their way to avoid having to salute each other.⁶⁴ Apart from rare occasions when ground crew might be invited to celebrate an air crews' completion of a tour, officers and other ranks, air crew and ground personnel usually drank in different pubs, or at least in different rooms in the same pub. When in Lincoln, Eric Howell and his friends preferred to drink in a pub around the corner from the Saracen's Head.⁶⁵ Personnel tried to circumvent the regulations but were still bound by them; public civilian spaces became controlled by conventions of RAF discipline.

Although unlike the relatively small number of the pre-war professionals, the majority of personnel in the RAFVR saw themselves as civilians in uniform, but as an airman told his parents in a letter home, once in the RAF there was little time for

⁶³ Smith *Why Did We Join*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ R. F. Ashbridge, *Yer actual 'ERK': A Collection of Stories of World War II Groundcrews*, (Heighington, Lincoln, Tucann, 1998), p. 28. See also: R. Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall: An Ordinary Airman's War*, (Vancouver, Grey Stone Books, 1986), p. 64.

⁶⁵ E. Howell, *The OR's Story: Bomber Command Other Ranks in World War Two*, (Swindon, NPG, 1998), p. v.

anything other than to ‘eat work and sleep’.⁶⁶ In gentle wartime propaganda readers were reminded that:

the whole thing’s a system, and as soon as you get into the R.A.F. you become part of the system and not a person any more. Civvies are persons, but airmen are part of the system.⁶⁷

Apart from a minority who lived off the station, living and working did not take place in separate spheres. For many, the station’s living accommodation became home and their colleagues became a surrogate family. As will be discussed further in the following chapter, personnel formed ‘cliques’ with strong ‘group loyalty’ and their ‘own particular coterie.’⁶⁸ Living and working together, personnel ‘ended up looking after each other’s interests.’⁶⁹ Life in the RAF ‘was very enclosed and there were so many rules governing your life that external things appeared less important.’⁷⁰ The government, the War Office, the Air Ministry and the RAF chain of command were seen as an amorphous ‘them.’

“They” were equally responsible for every item of our military disasters, and the complex structure of rules and regulations that arranged the details of our daily lives; “they” were to blame for the quality of our food, the rate of our pay, for every petty hard-ship and injustice that we had to suffer, for every example of bureaucratic frustration and inefficiency that came our way, for everything that tended to make our lives in uniform a burden and weariness.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Taylor letters, 13 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

⁶⁷ J. Macadam, *The Reluctant Erk and other stories*, (London, Jarrolds, No Date), 114.

⁶⁸ C----s, p. 18, RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Private Papers of K. M. Cove, IWM, Documents. 1947.

⁷¹ J. Sommerfield, *The Survivors*, (London, John Lehman, 1947), p. 18.

Recruits and volunteers quickly recognised that the RAF attempted to control all aspects of personnel's lives. Each station had an education and an entertainment officer, and as well as the NAAFI, camp entertainments included a cinema, occasional dances, theatrical variety shows and 'pretty grim' ENSA concerts.⁷² After a visit to the station dentist, one airman quipped in a letter home 'I suppose if you have false teeth from the air force, every one would be marked A.M.'⁷³ As James Hinton discusses, identity and selfhood was continually renegotiated,⁷⁴ and, in his study of individuals during the war, he noted that in the 'interplay between the private and public lives of wartime citizens', women especially struggled for 'personal autonomy.'⁷⁵ Individuals in the Air Force had to negotiate the balance between conformity and individualism. There was considerable pressure to conform as 'dutiful citizens' during the war, however many attempted to retain aspects of their individuality and their private lives.⁷⁶ This included the individual touches to their uniforms, (as discussed in the previous chapter), and maintaining their hobbies, interests and relationships during of duty periods and leave.

Many of the young men and women in the RAF and WAAF were single and in their late teens or early twenties. As Claire Langhammer has discussed, there was a change in courtship rituals during the war, the fear of loss could lead to hurried hedonism. For many, the blackout, and the lack of parental supervision, together with the freedom and acceptance of long distance travel provided opportunities for sexual

⁷² 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (A. Tedder), RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁷³ Letters from Cpl Stevens, 26 April 1940, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁷⁴ J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4. See also: K. A. Cerulo, 'Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions' *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1997), 23, p. 387.

⁷⁵ Hinton., *Nine Wartime Lives*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11-12.

liaisons.⁷⁷ The emotional aspects of pursuing a love life in the service will be discussed further in the following chapter, but, beginning with the hygiene lectures during training, the RAF also attempted to govern personnel's sexuality and sexual behaviour. Concealing a venereal disease was an offence, and 'early treatment' kits were supplied in or near the guard room or ablutions.⁷⁸ For WAAFs pregnancy meant discharge from the force. Recently released documents discuss the discovery of lesbians in the WAAF,⁷⁹ and male and female living quarters were carefully segregated and policed. Officers were not supposed to 'fraternise with other ranks',⁸⁰ consequently local lovers' lanes and haystacks were popular with couples,⁸¹ and it was common for a WAAF officer with a torch to patrol frequently used areas to enforce segregation and the curfew.⁸² Edith Kup was caught by a WAAF admin officer who accused her and her friend of 'waiting to meet officers' and 'becoming ladies of the town' when they went to Cambridge.⁸³ Although the force could do little about airmen who had 'liaisons' with local women, or who entered into relationships that were effectively a 'practical substitution of husbands',⁸⁴ sleeping out passes were restricted. Periods of leave were dictated by the force, personnel were entitled to a 48 hour pass every month and to seven days leave every three

⁷⁷ C. Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 116-117.

⁷⁸ S.C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume I Administration*, (London, HMSO, 1954), pp. 400-401.

⁷⁹ See: Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF): treatment of immorality; policies and procedures regarding lesbianism/homosexuality, (1945-1968), TNA, AIR 2/13859.

⁸⁰ W. Thompson, *Lancaster to Berlin*, (London, Goodhall Publications, 1985), p. 111.

⁸¹ Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, p. 220.

⁸² Beech, *One WAAF's War*, p. 136.

⁸³ Private Papers of E. M. Kup, (1998), IWM, Documents. 507.

⁸⁴ Assorted material sent in by other Observers in the RAF, (1939-1943), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/J.

months,⁸⁵ but it was inflexible; personnel had to report back to the guard office at a very specific time.⁸⁶ Leave was also dependant on the exigencies of the service; it could be stopped or postponed at short notice.⁸⁷ In a letter home, one airman felt that leave was held back ‘as a sort of hostage to good behaviour.’⁸⁸

Joana Bourke believes that during modern total wars, the distinction between the “home” and “military” fronts dissolve’,⁸⁹ and unlike other armed forces, the personnel of Bomber Command fought their war as part of the home front. Through occasional telephone calls (if their family had a phone) and regular letters personnel had frequent contact with their families, but letters posted on the station could be censored.⁹⁰ In his letters home Frank McCarthy frequently thanked his parents for sending him food, cigarettes, and stamps. He also occasionally sent his dirty laundry home.⁹¹ His letters discussed the big events of the war and family matters, and he once asked for his dancing shoes and swimming costume.⁹² Like Michael Roper’s study of troops on the Western Front during the previous war, RAF ground personnel were still embedded in their civilian life.⁹³ When Frank McCarthy was posted to RAF Wattisham in Suffolk in January 1941 he wrote home saying, ‘I’m as happy as anyone in uniform could be – but all the same I shall be glad to get my dressing

⁸⁵ J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: New & Enlarged Edition*, (London, Amalgamated Press, 1943), p. 36.

⁸⁶ Taylor letters, 16 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

⁸⁷ Air Ministry, *The Airman’s Welfare: Notes For Officers*, (Air Ministry, 1941), p.6.

⁸⁸ Stevens letters, 26 April 1940, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁸⁹ J. Bourke, ‘Disciplining the Emotions: Fear, Psychiatry and the Second World War’ in: Cooter, R. Harrison, M. and Sturdy, S. (eds) *War Medicine and Modernity*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1999), p. 226.

⁹⁰ The only letter I have seen that was censored was when the content of the letter was about censorship. The censoring officer obviously had a sense of humour. See: Stevens letters, 12 February 1941, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁹¹ Frank McCarthy letters, RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003. See also: Stevens letters, 27 November 1940, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁹² McCarthy letters, 7 June 1941 and 22 June 1941, RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003.

⁹³ M. Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 30.

gown on again and my feet on the mantelpiece.’⁹⁴ The RAF did not fully become a surrogate family. Through frequent correspondence, personnel were able to keep in touch with their families, wherever they were posted. Relatively safe on dispersed bomber stations, many personnel were worried about their loved ones in cities targeted by the Germans. In his letters home to his family in Tottenham, Frank McCarthy frequently reassured his parents that he was safe but worried about his family during the blitz.⁹⁵ The dates and arrangements for their next period of leave were also frequent topics of such letters. However, some were able to see their loved ones more regularly than when on leave. Many ground crew members had been employed in other trades in their civilian lives before the war, they were often older than air crew or other recruits and some were married with families of their own.⁹⁶ Married men were sometimes allowed to live off the station with their wives and families. Working at RAF Waddington, Eric Howell arranged for his wife to travel from Wales to stay in digs in Lincoln, and he was able to obtain a sleeping out pass to see her when not on duty.⁹⁷ A flight mechanic felt that having a living out pass and being able to see his wife, ‘was the best of both worlds - duties permitting’.⁹⁸ Living with his wife did not stop Howell’s worries about her safety however. Although raids on London drew all the attention in the press,⁹⁹ Howell was in bed with his wife

⁹⁴ McCarthy letters, 26 January 1941, RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5 February 1941 and 17 April 1941. See also: Stevens letters, 16 January 1941, RAFMH, X005-6588-003.

⁹⁶ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

⁹⁷ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 57.

⁹⁸ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (G. F. Everett), RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁹⁹ R. North, *The Many Not The Few: The Stolen History of the Battle of Britain*, (London, Continuum International, 2012), p. 191.

when Lincoln was bombed,¹⁰⁰ and he insisted she returned to the safety of Wales when she became pregnant.¹⁰¹

For those whose family lived some distance from the station, leave was often the only time they could see their families, and for those who were in relationships with other service personnel, arranging leave that coincided with each other was especially difficult. The RAF provided rail passes, but many personnel preferred to hitchhike especially for short breaks. This was a common experience during the war, and although there was little on the roads, wearing a uniform made it easier to get lifts. For men and women, travelling ‘in those days was often an adventure, and “thumbing” was a way of life.’¹⁰² Anecdotal evidence tells of lifts in a multitude of vehicles ranging from sports cars, staff cars and dustbin lorries. Transport could often be summoned by telephone from a railway station to make the last leg of the journey back from leave, but relying on lifts could risk being late back and lead to disciplinary proceedings.

Being absent without leave (AWL), whether it was being a few hours or several days late in returning from leave, was a common reason for being put on ‘jankers’ as disciplinary action was known. Being twelve hours late returning from leave could lead to the stoppage of a day’s pay, while an airman who was four days late could expect seven days of jankers and a loss of four day’s pay.¹⁰³ Punishments could also be handed out for seemingly petty misdemeanours however, and an airman was given seven days jankers for turning up his overcoat collar without

¹⁰⁰ Howell, *The OR's Story*, p. 59.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰² A. Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, (Braunton, Merlin Books, 1985), p. 94. See also: Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 16. and Macadam, *The Reluctant Erk*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ Private Papers of S. C. Dix, (1993), IWM, Documents. 2469.

permission.¹⁰⁴ Jankers meant being confined to camp, frequent inspections, drill and unpleasant duties or fatigues. As some unfortunates had to report to the guard room for inspection after reveille, and drill in the evenings, if their turnout was not up to standard, the punishment could be self-perpetuating. Work frequently included scrubbing floors or fatigues in the cookhouses of which the washing of greasy pans was the least favourite.¹⁰⁵ In some instances the confinement to camp was seen as no great punishment; on some stations there was nowhere to go, and personnel working shifts could not leave the camp anyway. More serious offences could be dealt with by detention in the 'glasshouse' and court martial. The RAF's detention centres are outside the scope of this thesis, but the harsh military regime was an ever-present threat.¹⁰⁶ Rumours of individuals who had been discharged from the RAF and being drafted into the Army also served as effective deterrents.¹⁰⁷

The disciplinary procedures for WAAF personnel were different and changed during the war. For the first drafts of WAAFs only minor punishments were allowed; these included extra duties, stopping leave, restrictions of privileges and 'admonition.'¹⁰⁸ Originally WAAFs could not be charged with desertion or being AWL without a court martial. If a WAAF chose not to accept punishment she could leave the service without notice and no charges could be pursued.¹⁰⁹ After a new act in April 1941 WAAFs could be admonished and confined to camp as a punishment by officers and NCOs, and although the Markham report advised that more

¹⁰⁴ Private Papers of E. Sadler, (2006), p. 13, IWM, Documents. 14842.

¹⁰⁵ E. J. Williamson, 'A Life for Men: Memoir of a non-flying, non-commissioned regular Airman 1940 to 1953', p. 20, RAFMH, X006-0262. See also: Settle, *Brave Promises*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ See: Committee of Inquiry into Detention Barracks, (1943), TNA, CAB 66/42/42,

¹⁰⁷ Private Papers of S. C. Dix, IWM, Documents. 2469.

¹⁰⁸ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234* p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

disciplinary powers were required, no further changes were made.¹¹⁰ The differences in disciplinary procedures did lead to some discontent among airmen that women received preferential treatment particularly in the first years of the war, but as many ground personnel discovered, the secret to survival in the RAF or the WAAF was to bend the rules as far as possible without being caught.¹¹¹ For both male and female personnel, life was more regimented than for those who were drafted into civilian industry. Civilians in the armaments industry could expect more pay, but might have to work longer hours,¹¹² and in some industries, strike action for better pay and conditions was possible.¹¹³ In engineering a male civilian could earn around £7 a week,¹¹⁴ while a flight sergeant engine mechanic with four years service received close to £4 a week.¹¹⁵ Unlike the services, there were few sanctions (other than a loss of pay) for absenteeism in civilian life; workers took days off to prevent fatigue, and, as Angus Calder discusses, around half of absenteeism was due to certified illnesses.¹¹⁶ As will be discussed in chapter five, reporting sick in the RAF could lead to a confrontation with the medical officer and RAF authority. As an institution, the RAF controlled most of its personnel's lives; it dictated their daily routine, restricted their free time and routinely inspected their living quarters, their possessions and their bodies. Any failure to conform was punished by further restrictions of freedom, being docked pay, and by being given unpleasant duties. Frank McCarthy wrote to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-21. As Tessa Stone notes, few WAAFs were aware that their legal rights were substantially different to their male counterparts. See: T. J. Stone, 'The integration of women into a military service: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War.' PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 1999), p. 185.

¹¹¹ Lindo, *A WAAF at War*, pp. 62-63

¹¹² Calder, *People's War*, p. 329.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 259, 285, 403.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 403.

¹¹⁵ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p. 12-13. See Appendix C and D.

¹¹⁶ Calder, *People's War*, pp. 388-389, 436. The rate of absenteeism varied around seven per cent for men and between twelve and fifteen per cent for women. A quarter was thought to be avoidable.

his mother that working with aircraft on the flights was different to his earlier experiences in the RAF; 'we work seven days a week & we don't have to polish up except about once a week or when we go out anywhere.'¹¹⁷ Even the comparative lack of 'bullshit' noticed by personnel in certain trades still concealed the RAF's domination over them.

Hierarchy of trades

As discussed in chapter one, air crew were at the 'apex of the station pyramid';¹¹⁸ in their letters, diaries and in later recollections most ground personnel measured their courage and sacrifice in contrast to that of the air crews.¹¹⁹ In her study of masculinities, Raewyn Connell notes that the hierarchical structure of institutional settings is not accidental,¹²⁰ and as Frank Barrett highlighted in his study of modern U.S. Naval officers, group unity was constructed around common qualities, shared tasks and experiences, and through conflict and difference to personnel in other trades.¹²¹ In the wartime RAF, hegemonic patriarchal assumptions about race, class, and gender, together with the RAF intelligence tests, pay scale and ranks dictated a hierarchy of trades on personnel; but the subtle and complex hierarchy was also self-imposed. In common with Max Weber's components of social stratification, this hierarchy of trades can be regarded as 'occupational status groups';¹²² members of

¹¹⁷ McCarthy, RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003) (undated letter).

¹¹⁸ Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, p. 114.

¹¹⁹ See for example: 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (Everett and W. McLean), RAFMH, AC96/5, and K. Lee, 'Tales of Bomber Command', RAFMH, X002.9356.

¹²⁰ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), p. 35.

¹²¹ F. J. Barrett, 'The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: The case of the U.S. Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3, 3, (1996), p. 129.

¹²² M. Weber, 'Class, Status, Party' in: Lemert, C. (ed) *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings, Third Edition*, (Oxford, Westview Press, 2004), p. 124.

each group had to conform to the expectations and social norms of the group.¹²³

Certain trades were regarded as important and prestigious. Ground crew were 'a class apart',¹²⁴ while ground defence personnel and kitchen staff were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Indeed, some unpleasant kitchen duties were used as punishment.

Personnel of the same rank but of different trades saw themselves as of differing levels of importance. Part of this was a continuation of the unwritten, but universally understood system of social class prevalent in the civilian life personnel had recently left. Don Charlwood, an Australian navigator was puzzled by the British class system, and thought that rather than rank, their perception of their place in the class system determined their 'outlook and attitude.'¹²⁵ Gwen Arnold felt she 'had progressed up the social scale' from a shop assistant to a clerk before joining the WAAF, and she felt it would have been humiliating to become a batwoman, an officer's servant.¹²⁶ Even from their training the hierarchy of trades was explicit. Radio Mechanic James Newton was told by a drill instructor that their standard was far better than 'reluctant' General Duties men.¹²⁷

Once on operational stations however, 'spit and polish' and 'square bashing' became signifiers of those who were distanced from the aircraft (or air crew) and were consequently less important.¹²⁸ Unlike the station defence personnel, ground crews were rarely paraded; they spent the majority of their time working on aircraft at the dispersal areas away from the administration sites.¹²⁹ Once 'on the flights'

¹²³ Ibid., p. 120. See also: K. A. Cerulo, 'Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions' *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1997), pp. 394-395.

¹²⁴ A. J. Brown, *Ground Staff*, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1943), p.59.

¹²⁵ Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, pp. 69-70.

¹²⁶ G. Arnold, *Radar Days*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2000), p. 91.

¹²⁷ J. C. Newton, 'Memoirs of an airman', RAFMH, B1157.

¹²⁸ Interview with John Charles Elliott, (1993), IWM, 13094. For more on symbolic boundaries in the construction of identity see: Cerulo, 'Identity Construction', p. 395.

¹²⁹ Howell, *The OR's Story* p. 9.

there was little need for orders; once a regular crew had been established, they ‘knew and trusted each other.’¹³⁰ For mechanics on operational stations ‘there was still a distinct pecking order... but the sergeants and corporals were not martinets and the air crew officers were not salute-happy.’¹³¹ Posted to an operational station, signals staff soon learned where they came on the ‘ground crew pecking order.’¹³² Ex-Halton apprentice airframe and engine fitters and mechanics really mattered.¹³³

Although all those who worked directly on the aircraft believed themselves to be superior to other ground trades, there were distinct hierarchies among them too. Mechanics, fitters and riggers were assigned to work on one aircraft, but every aircraft was visited by what ‘fitters and riggers disparagingly called the “gash” (superfluous) trades:- the armourers, electricians, instrument “bashers” photographic mechanics, and radio and radar mechanics.’¹³⁴ The wartime dictionary of RAF slang politely defines ‘gash’ as ‘poor’,¹³⁵ but in the masculine and patriarchal society of the RAF the word ‘gash’ also had obvious connotations of both women and female genitalia, in effect working directly with the aircraft was ‘a man’s job.’¹³⁶ In turn armourers and others who worked in ‘gash trades’ treated ‘with indifference’ those ‘whose tasks lay beyond the perimeter track.’¹³⁷ Even those whose work did not

¹³⁰ Everet, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹³¹ Collins, *The Long and the Short*, p. 64. This was much the same in the hangars. See: Sewell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹³² E. J. Williamson, ‘A Life for Men: Memoir of a non-flying, non-commissioned regular Airman 1940 to 1953’, p. 69, RAFMH, X006-0262.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹³⁴ Rew, p. 38, RAFMH, B3692. See also: Williamson, p. 69, RAFMH, X006-0262.

¹³⁵ Ward-Jackson, *Piece of Cake*, p.31.

¹³⁶ As Raewyn Connell maintains, in masculine societies with a ‘rich vocabulary of abuse... [the] symbolic blurring with femininity is obvious.’ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), p. 79. Frank Barratt noticed a similar hierarchy in his study of officers in the U.S. Navy; at the bottom of the social scale, supply officers were called ‘derogatory terms’ by both surface warfare officers, and by the aviators who epitomised hegemonic masculinity. See: Barrett, ‘The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity’, p. 139.

¹³⁷ C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

often take them away from the communal or technical sites had an idea of their own status. Joan Beech, a meteorological WAAF briefly shared a hut with ‘a very superior set of girls who worked in Radar.’¹³⁸ This was based largely on their perception of the importance of their work and higher pay group, but they would not let Beech enter their clique. Radar mechanics and operatives, although also part of the ‘gash trades’, were regarded with a ‘grudging awe’ because of their ‘aura of mystery and secrecy’.¹³⁹

Serving as a WAAF in a station admin office, Mary Lee Settle noticed a connection between morale and aircraft. The aircraft were the reason they were there, and ‘those in touch with them, the mechanics, the “met” girls, the signals operators, carried... with them a verve, a dash from nearer the centre.’¹⁴⁰ Frank McCarthy was proud to be ‘working on “kites” that have been out on raids.’¹⁴¹ Stephen Rew, an engine mechanic, thought that working on aircraft was ‘the next best thing to flying them,’¹⁴² and a LAC armourer was upset to be posted away from working with Lancasters to working in the station armoury on a satellite airfield.¹⁴³ It was understood during the war itself that for WAAFs ‘the nearer they can get to the aircraft the better they like it.’¹⁴⁴ Margo West, a driver at RAF Waddington found it ‘satisfying’ to ‘put aircraft to bed’ in their dispersals after they had been on an operation.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Beech, *One WAAF's War*, p. 111.

¹³⁹ Williamson, p. 70, RAFMH, X006-0262.

¹⁴⁰ Settle, *Brave Promises*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴¹ McCarthy letters, (undated), RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003.

¹⁴² Rew, p. 14, RAFMH, B3692.

¹⁴³ C----s, p. 7, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁴⁴ V. Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me*, (London, Hurricane Books, 1943), p. 51.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (M. West), RAFMH, AC96/5.

Working in dispersal areas away from the eyes of administrative officers, ground crew were ‘not too involved in Station Routine Orders’.¹⁴⁶ Ground crews on the flights often saw air crew officers but despite the differences in rank, they were sometimes on first name terms.¹⁴⁷ While most air crew were treated with the upmost respect and regarded as heroes,¹⁴⁸ there is also some evidence of inverse snobbery, as because of their training, some ground personnel knew more about some aspect of the aircraft than those who operated in them. A commissioned air-gunner’s erroneous views about hydraulics and how machine guns should be harmonised ‘were listened to with respect, [but also with] wondering pity.’ The armourers felt that the officer ‘owed his commission to influence and his public school background.’¹⁴⁹ Ground crew were presided over by a flight sergeant, who was always called ‘Chiefy’.¹⁵⁰ Often a regular, who had been one of ‘Trenchard’s little bastards’ in the Aircraft Apprentice Scheme during the 1930s,¹⁵¹ ‘Chiefy’ epitomised the difference between career ‘Regulars’ and RAFVR in for the duration.¹⁵² Ground crew were little troubled by other officers, and embodying the competence that came from length of service, the experience of Chiefy sometimes even trumped higher rank. On a rare occasion when one mechanic was reprimanded by the squadron engineering officer for not working on a Lancaster that was about to be taken into the hangars for major repairs, Chiefy arranged for the aircraft to be towed away and assigned the crew to another aircraft.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁴⁷ Williamson, p. 116, RAFMH, X006-0262.

¹⁴⁸ Rew, p. 19, RAFMH, B3692.

¹⁴⁹ C----s, p. 7, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁵⁰ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 88.

¹⁵¹ Sewell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁵² Ashbridge, *Yer actual ‘ERK’*, p. 72.

¹⁵³ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 104.

Working Conditions: Mechanics, fitters and riggers ‘on the flights’

The work of mechanics, fitter and riggers was romanticised in propaganda:

These air frame and engine fitters, flight mechanics, electricians, armourers, instrument mechanics swear by the aircraft they service. They work day and night, often missing their meals, to prepare her for the air; they watch her take off, and in turn they watch her land. Every ground crew is loyal to its own bomber. These men in overalls, with greasy hands and dirty faces, follow the career of their colleagues in the air – and the aircraft they fly – with the closest concern and attention; and at the end of each operational flight one of them proudly paints another bomb on the nose of the bomber.¹⁵⁴

In common with the fashionable relaxed attitude to uniform of the air crew, mechanics, ‘fitters and riggers were proud of their oil spotted uniforms faded from washing’.¹⁵⁵ The ground crew’s appearance was symbolic of their importance and place in the hierarchy of trades. (See FIG 3.2). Their practical need for protective clothing set them crew apart from other ground personnel. Ground crew were ‘scruffy’; they wore an odd assortment of clothes because of the seasonal demands of working in the open air, and because of the dirty nature of their work. In the summer the men might work in shorts and vests and in the winter in whatever they could find to protect them from the elements. Clothing was also in short supply.¹⁵⁶ Eric Howell managed to acquire a leather and lamb’s wool jerkin that had been issued to

¹⁵⁴ Noble, *Girls, You Amaze Me*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Settle, *Brave Promises*, p.125.

¹⁵⁶ Sewell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

Rhodesian ground crew, and wore two pairs of socks and newspaper inside his wellington boots when on duty on the coldest nights.¹⁵⁷



FIG.3.2. 'Flight Mechanic (Engine).' Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941). p. 86.

Theoretically each aircraft was serviced by its own ground crew of two engine fitters, two riggers, a wireless mechanic, an electrician, an 'instrument basher' and an armourer, all responsible to a corporal. Each flight of eight or ten aircraft was

¹⁵⁷ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

supervised by a flight sergeant.¹⁵⁸ However, in Eric Howell's experience with 44 Squadron at Waddington in Lincolnshire, while in the early years of the war there were lots of ground personnel working on each aircraft, by 1942 the crew he worked with on his Lancaster was reduced to two fitters and a rigger.¹⁵⁹ For a short period of time Howell had to carry out the daily inspections on all eight engines of two Lancasters by himself.¹⁶⁰ For much of the war 'there was always a shortage of ground crews' and crews were 'very hard pressed' to maintain standards and serviceability.¹⁶¹ Equipment was poorly maintained and there was a shortage of engine stands, tools and parts such as gaskets.¹⁶² Also contrary to the image created by propaganda, while each ground crew were indeed responsible for their own aircraft, for some the loss of aircraft was far too common an occurrence:

Each ground crew had its own Lancaster to take care of, and remained with it until it was either lost on operations, transferred to another squadron, or it crashed. If any of the above happened, a new aircraft would appear on the pan stand the next day and the cycle would start all over again.¹⁶³

However crews 'really loved' their aircraft, and would 'jokingly curse the aircrew for not being more careful' if they returned with a damaged aircraft.¹⁶⁴ Ninety per cent of the servicing of aircraft was done exposed to the elements at dispersal sites.¹⁶⁵

Trestles were used to work on the engines; they were hard to move and involved a lot

¹⁵⁸ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p. 133.

¹⁵⁹ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Everett, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁶² Sewell, RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

¹⁶³ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁶⁴ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

¹⁶⁵ Holman, p. 3, RAFMH, B4264. Even major work was carried out on the dispersals; it was expected that an engine change on a Lancaster should be completed in eight hours.

of climbing.¹⁶⁶ (See Fig 3.3)



FIG 3.3. Ground crews overhaul the Rolls-Royce Merlin XX engines of Handley Page Halifax Mark II, BB194 'ZA-E', of No. 10 Squadron RAF, in a dispersal at Melbourne, Yorkshire, IWM, CH 7910.

Putting the engine, turret and cockpit covers on aircraft when there was to be no flying was a frustrating job.¹⁶⁷ An engine fitter at Waterbeach recalled that tying engine covers on in a strong wind required the 'abilities of a chimpanzee and the skill of a budgie'.¹⁶⁸ FIG 3.3 clearly shows the trestles placed by each engine to enable the crew to work on them, and a cover over the front turret. It gives some idea of the task involved to get the covers in place. Engine cowlings and tool boxes, as well as an airman's bicycle can also be seen. The airmen in the picture are working in the open

¹⁶⁶ Rew, p. 17, RAFMH, B3692.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 55-57.

¹⁶⁸ B. Yeomans quoted in: H. Dison, *Some of the Story of 514 Squadron: Lancasters at Waterbeach*, (514 Squadron Association, Waterbeach, 2002), p. 65.

in what appears to be moderate weather conditions, but ‘on even moderately warm summer days the dull camouflage paint on top of the black fuselages made the inside of the aircraft become like slow ovens.’¹⁶⁹ In winter however, they were freezing cold.¹⁷⁰

Exposure to the elements and especially the cold was a common experience of those who worked on the flights. Frank Taylor told his parents in a letter ‘believe me its dammn cold on dispersal at 1o/c in the morning, the wind practicly [sic] cuts you in two every time it blows.’¹⁷¹ Even fifty years later, engine mechanics remember the wind chill factor on exposed airfields. The wind from the North Sea was ‘like a whetted knife’,¹⁷² and while Daily Inspections (DIs) on a warm engine could be ‘bliss’, on a cold engine, mechanics’ hands froze and slipped and tore their knuckles on sharp edges.¹⁷³

the winters would be so cold that we two engine fitters would take turns doing the DIs or repairs on the engines, while one was working the other would be warming his hands in front of a fire of wood and old engine oil. Our makeshift shelter was made out from tree branches with engine and canopy covres [sic] over the top, the fire would be right outside the doorway.¹⁷⁴

Such shelters were a necessity during the winter months, and were made from whatever materials were available. See (FIG 3.4.) A crew at Wickenby had a hut

¹⁶⁹ Williamson, p. 94, RAFMH X006-0262.

¹⁷⁰ Holman, p. 3, RAFMH, B4264.

¹⁷¹ Taylor letters, 5 March 1943, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

¹⁷² Rew, p. 58, RAFMH, B3692.

¹⁷³ ‘Memoirs of C. J. Shepherd’ RAFMH, X002-5411.

¹⁷⁴ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

made from bits of Anderson shelter and timber; some crews even planted vegetables outside theirs.¹⁷⁵



FIG 3.4. Ground crew warm themselves on a stove in the snow at Rufforth, Yorkshire, before venturing onto the dispersal behind them to service a Handley Page Halifax of No. 1663 Heavy Conversion Unit, IWM, CH 12430.

Although obviously staged, this image shows a shelter constructed from tarpaulins and timber, the ubiquitous brazier and the differing items of clothing (including fingerless gloves) these men have obtained to keep themselves warm. On the far side of the nearest aircraft the legs of an engine trestle can just be seen. The cold was made worse for ground crews by their long hours and the distance they worked from the messes and the communal sites. The arrival of the NAAFI van was an important

¹⁷⁵ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

part of the day when everyone downed tools for a hot drink and a ‘wad’,¹⁷⁶ but meal times were often missed because of their work. Sandwiches and hot drinks were sometimes sent out to them but food was often erratic.¹⁷⁷ At Waddington, when he eventually got to the mess, Eric Howell often had to make do with left-overs, and ‘shit on a shingle’.¹⁷⁸ At Binbrook in Lincolnshire, ground crew became friendly with a housewife who lived on the other side of the boundary near their disposal site; she supplied them with tea and allowed them to get warm.¹⁷⁹ As well as the cold, the lack of sleep was also a great problem to those who worked on the aircraft.¹⁸⁰ Howell routinely worked two nights on and one night off.¹⁸¹ When his aircraft was on an operation he slept under his greatcoat on a bed made from tool boxes in the dispersal office. When his aircraft returned he would guide the pilot to the dispersal with torches, but before he could return to sleep he had to record any ‘snags’, check the oil, and refuel the petrol tanks to a minimum load.¹⁸² However as well as working routine shifts, ground crew also had to cover sickness and work extra hours when there was a ‘flap on.’ Before D-day, because one of the three wireless mechanics on ‘A flight’ at RAF Graveley in Cambridgeshire was on compassionate leave, and one was ill with tonsillitis, the remaining mechanic had to sleep at the dispersal hut so as to be ready if needed.¹⁸³ It was common for ground crews to do whatever was needed to keep aircraft serviceable. To clear a ‘mag drop’ on all four engines of a Lancaster at RAF Syerston in Nottinghamshire, Walter Thompson’s ground crew worked

¹⁷⁶ Shepherd, RAFMH, X002-5411.

¹⁷⁷ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁷⁸ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 93.

¹⁷⁹ Wilkinson, RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Shepherd, RAFMH, X002-5411.

¹⁸⁰ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁸¹ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 134.

¹⁸² Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁸³ Holman, p. 15, RAFMH, B4264.

through the night and half of the following day to remove clean and replace all 48 spark plugs.¹⁸⁴ Although spare aircraft were sometimes available, air crews tended to prefer their own, and it was part of the relationship that ground crew had with the flyers that they would do all they could to prepare the air crew's favourite.

Armourers and 'Gash trades'

Those who worked in the 'gash trades' but who also worked with aircraft, shared the same conditions exposed to the elements, long hours and irregular meal times.

Armourers were held in awe by some other trades because they worked directly with the aircraft and because their role was dangerous. However they were often rather blasé about it. Loading bombs with a hand winch was 'an exhausting experience'.

One armourer remembers it took something around twenty turns of the handle to lift a bomb an inch, and it was 'heartbreaking' if the load had to be changed.¹⁸⁵ Bombing up Stirlings was particularly hard because of their height from the ground.¹⁸⁶

Although they later had power operated winches, the weight of the bomb loads also increased, and the engines and hydraulics that drove the winches were often temperamental. 15 Squadron at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk had 22 aircraft and three bombing up teams; the first team to finish their seven aircraft had to start the last.¹⁸⁷

Bombing up could also be repetitive as the armourers at the bomb dump often prepared one type of ordnance at a time; they rarely fused and prepared a complete bomb load for each aircraft. At Wickenby, the teams had to visit each aircraft several times loading at first the 'cookie' and then other bombs and incendiaries.¹⁸⁸ James

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *Lancaster to Berlin*, p. 105.

¹⁸⁵ C----s, pp. 6- 7, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁸⁶ J. Johnstone, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁸⁷ F. L. Warner. RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁸⁸ A. Ashmore, 'The Wickenby Armourer' *The Wickenby Register Newsletter* (1992), No. 36, p. 4,

Johnstone remembered the length of the working day for armourers. Starting at 8:00, on a bad day they may have to change aircrafts' bomb loads three times. They would frequently work through their lunch, have a meal around 17:00 and then return to the aircraft.¹⁸⁹

At the bomb dump much of the work for armourers was 'sheer hard physical slog' and often involved lifting boxes containing 30 4lb incendiaries into the small bomb containers, fitting tail fins and lugs to larger bombs and, with the aid of winches and gantries, lifting bombs onto the bomb trailers.¹⁹⁰ An armourer 'loathed' his work at the armoury and felt it was a waste of his training and abilities. He found it 'monotonous and totally devoid of... job satisfaction'.¹⁹¹ Personnel in other trades were able to take pride in their skill, in the unusualness of the trade and in their importance. Ken Lee was one of only two compass adjusters on his squadron, and the accuracy of every aircrafts' compass, and therefore potentially the accuracy of their navigation was his responsibility.¹⁹² Up to September 1944 only 623 compass adjusters were trained in the entire RAF.¹⁹³

Those 'beyond the perimeter track'

All personnel had certain shared experiences. Whatever their rank, their living conditions were similar, and while not everyone worked for hours in the open out on the flights, they suffered from the cold and exposure to the elements as they walked or cycled between sites. In his diary, medical officer David Stafford-Clark wrote 'my

WMC, This could entail miles of travelling between the bomb dump and each aircraft on its dispersal each day.

¹⁸⁹ Johnstone, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁹⁰ C----s, p. 8, RAFMH, AC96/5.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹² K. Lee, RAFMH, X002.9356.

¹⁹³ Royal Air Force: General (Code 67/1): RAF recruiting: policy, (1939-1953), Appendix 'C' RAF Volunteers and N.S.A. acceptances September 1939 – September 1944, TNA, AIR 20/8992.

face froze almost solid where the wind could reach it round the corners of my greatcoat collar. What price my long awaited Balaclava?'¹⁹⁴ All personnel (including air crew) were sometimes needed for snow clearing duties on the runways and perimeter tracks for example. However some trades and roles were gendered, and personnel in some trades had more contact with aircraft or air crew, or could see a direct relevance between their trades and the war effort. WAAFs in trades including sparkplug testers, trolley accumulator operatives and parachute packers had obvious and direct links to either the aircraft or the flyers. Some drivers were among the last to see flyers as they were driven to the dispersals before an operation. Cooks could even rationalise that they cooked the air crew's bacon and eggs. WAAFs working in radar, in radiotelephony, and in the watch office took especial pride in their work.

Personnel trained in one trade had little idea of the intricacies and working conditions of others. At night, when aircraft were flying, one person from each technical trade was assigned to form a 'duty crew'; unless there was urgent work to be done on the aircraft, most ground personnel took it for granted they could have their evenings off.¹⁹⁵ However, personnel in other trades were just as frequently required to work anti social hours, either because of 'flaps' or because they were on a rota to do so. At Waddington, 'Pip' Beck was one of four radio-telephone operators covering a 24 hour watch system in the watch office. Each operator worked a four hour watch and an eight hour watch with a day off between each twelve hour day worked.¹⁹⁶ Working in the ops room at RAF Pocklington in Yorkshire, Edith Kup also worked a rota of watches. She was often on duty throughout the night from

¹⁹⁴ D. Stafford-Clark, *Diary 1940-1945*, 5 January 1941, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2.

¹⁹⁵ Williamson, p. 83, RAFMH, X006-0262.

¹⁹⁶ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 16.

19:00 until 09:00 the next morning. After 28 hours off she would be back on duty 13:00 to 19:00.¹⁹⁷

After seeing some WAAF patients, the RAF psychiatrist, Robert Gillespie, called for better welfare supervision. He identified that as well as the living conditions on dispersed sites, the 'irregular watches' they kept, often being 'on night duty two nights out of six', was 'a factor in their breakdown'.¹⁹⁸ Eventually the Air Ministry attempted to restrict their hours. Ideally, except in special emergencies, WAAFs would be limited to a 48 hour week, working no more than 8 hours a day. They were supposed to be provided with meals every four hours (except when they were asleep) and they were entitled to one day off a week and a 48 hour pass every month. It was later admitted that these guidelines were infrequently adhered to.¹⁹⁹ When a 'Queen Bee' (WAAF administration officer) 'expressed horror' at the duty rota and submitted a new one, the watch-keepers at Pocklington carried on as before.²⁰⁰ Edith Kup claims she preferred to work a long night shift as it enabled her to 'carry through the operation from start to finish'.²⁰¹ Working these shifts, WAAFs were able to maintain their contact with the flyers, but it occasionally brought them into conflict with administration officers who wanted to enforce their authority and WAAF discipline. If the facilities were available, shift workers were housed separately, and working shifts was frequently used as an excuse to avoid other duties, parades and inspections.²⁰² The officers were doubtless concerned about unwanted

¹⁹⁷ Private Papers of E. M. Kup, (1998), IWM, Documents. 507.

¹⁹⁸ Neuropsychiatry: miscellaneous reports and publications, (1941-1945), Letter from R.D. Gillespie to Officer Commanding RAF Officer's Hospital Torquay, 17 February 1942, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁹⁹ Air Ministry, *Air Publication 3234*, p. 35.

²⁰⁰ Kup, IWM, Documents. 507.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 19. On pre-war, permanent stations WAAFs were often housed in married quarters.

pregnancies, but some showed a lack of empathy for those who worked shifts.²⁰³

WAAFs were sometimes given surprise morning kit inspections and paraded despite the fact that they had had less than two hours sleep.²⁰⁴ Men too sometimes found their sleep disturbed by officers who tried to follow regulations to the letter.²⁰⁵

It was realised that one of the physically hardest, and least popular trades among WAAF personnel were those of cooks and kitchen assistants. Rarely if ever having to venture onto the airfield, they were lower down the unofficial 'pecking order' and had to work very long hours with little free time.²⁰⁶ By mid 1940 the Air Ministry was aware there was a problem with the working conditions, pay scales, discipline, and retention of WAAF cooks and kitchen workers. When the average male wage in 1940 was over £4 a week,²⁰⁷ a male LAC cook earned around £3 a week,²⁰⁸ and a WAAF cook just over £2 a week.²⁰⁹ It was found that these trades made up the 'bulk' of desertions from the WAAF.²¹⁰ Preparing breakfast for a thousand personnel was a task which began the night before by slicing eight sides of bacon to be fried in fifteen three foot square pans. To serve breakfast at 07:00, the cooks had to wake at 04:00 and start work at 05:00 by heating up 40 gallons of porridge in 2 giant cauldrons.²¹¹ Although a LACW cook liked it when miscreants were detailed to help in the cookhouse as they could help with the heavy lifting, it

²⁰³ Kup, IWM, Documents. 507.

²⁰⁴ M. Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake: The Diary of a Wartime WAAF 1940-1942*, (Bangor, University of Wales, 2005), p. 38-39

²⁰⁵ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Howell, *The OR's Story*, pp. 66-67. Howell was put on a charge by an orderly officer for being in bed at 08:00 despite the fact he had been working all night. Reporting to his flight commander as ordered the following morning, the charge was dropped.

²⁰⁶ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 65.

²⁰⁷ Calder, *People's War*, p. 352.

²⁰⁸ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, pp. 12-13.

²⁰⁹ Recruitment literature for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), 'Women's Auxiliary Air Force: Notes for the Information of Candidates' (1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/1/G/5

²¹⁰ Operations record Books, Directorate, WAAF: Air Ministry, Appendices, (1939-1940), DWAAF reports West Drayton 1939-1940, TNA, AIR 24/1643.

²¹¹ A. M. Douglas, 'The Battle for Breakfast' in: Raymond, & Langdon, *Slipstream*, p. 42.

still reminded her of the undesirability of her trade. Kitchen duties, ‘spud bashing’, cleaning, and washing up the greasy cooking pans were used as punishments; for kitchen staff working in the kitchens could seem ‘like jankers every day.’²¹²

Other tasks were equally tedious and were as hard to view as important to the war effort; clerks faced reams of paperwork and typing, drivers struggled to start engines without electric starters on winter mornings, and airmen spent summer afternoons sweating as they carried chairs from stores to set up for an ENSA show.²¹³ Guard duty was a miserable experience,²¹⁴ and it was found that in Bomber Command personnel assigned to ground defence were twice as likely to report sick.²¹⁵ During the war the Air Ministry began to become interested in ergonomics and work efficiency, but only in certain trades. This began with an interest in air crew efficiency, but by the middle of the war, research was also being undertaken by the Flying Personnel Research Committee into teleprinter switchboards and radar operators.²¹⁶ For example it was understood that radio telephone operators were affected by working in poorly lit and ventilated blacked out rooms.²¹⁷

It was harder for general duties aircraftsmen and women, those without a trade, whose duties could include guard duty, cleaning, fetching and carrying, and collecting and incinerating refuse, to reconcile their role in the war effort. After the threat of invasion had lessened, members of the RAF ground defence were regarded by many as the lowest of the low, they were furthest removed from the aircraft and

²¹² V. Holden in: Williams, B. R. (ed) *As We Were: Recollections of life in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), pp. 35-36.

²¹³ Private Papers of F. Taylor, Diary entry 5 October 1943, IWM, Documents. 8511.

²¹⁴ Sommerfield, *The Survivors*, p.121.

²¹⁵ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 687.

²¹⁶ Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Flying Personnel Research Committee: Reports and Papers (1942-1946), TNA, FD 1/3561. See for example FPRC/514, R. C. Browne, Teleprinter switchboard studies and investigations.

²¹⁷ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 65.

were most likely to be required to drill and pay attention to the shine on their boots, buttons and badges. To a certain extent, as long as the job was done, like those on the flights, the WAAFs who worked in the watch office and those in trades directly or indirectly connected with either the aircraft or the airmen could usually avoid the ‘bullshit’ ground defence and general duty personnel had to contend with.

Dangers and Risks: RAF Health and Safety and traumatic events

Sometimes we of the ground crews had our own little scares, bombs dropping off on the dispersal, some blew up, and enemy air raids etc, but a lot of the minor duties called for a little courage beyond the normal... No one fancied climbing up under the undercarriage to prime the engines prior to starting up, a frightening place, especially in the dark.²¹⁸

Other trades had their own health risks. A doctor at RAF Hospital Rauceby learnt of ‘Morse Headache’ from ‘listening for 6 hours’ and ‘Tele-graphists Cramp’. He also became aware how WAAFs could get eyestrain and headaches from working on ‘Radiolocation’ (Radar).²¹⁹ WAAFs were also aware of the risk of ‘Signals Shock’ from the accumulative effect of listening to the wireless through the German Jamming attempts.²²⁰ However, the dangers, risks and discomforts ground personnel faced paled into insignificance when set beside the heroism of the air crew, and the numbers of aircraft that did not return. Indeed, even compared to the publicised tales of heroic WAAFs during the blitz,²²¹ and stoic civilians in London, Coventry and

²¹⁸ Everett, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²¹⁹ Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Operations Record Books, Miscellaneous Units Sept 1939 - Apr 1945. RAF Hospital Rauceby, E.C.O. Jewesbury, ‘Training Medical Officers: Report on attachment at (FTS) RAF College. Cranwell’, 6 April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

²²⁰ Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, p. 115, 152.

²²¹ See for example, Anon, ‘Military Medal for three W.A.A.F.s: Bravery during attack on R.A.F. station’ *The Times*, (London), 2 Nov. 1940, p. 2, and Anon, ‘3 Military Medals for W.A.A.F.s’ *The*

elsewhere, ground personnel were relatively safe from enemy action. Slit trenches and shelters were quickly dug on pre war stations and blast shelters were designed and built on new dispersed sites. Gas drill and decontamination was regularly practised. However, apart from sporadic attacks by enemy intruders, personnel on bomber stations were obliged to do some things which, although by today's standards would seem excessively risky, were considered as part of the exigencies of war.²²² Accidents occasionally happened, and many ground personnel witnessed, experienced or knew about accidents and potentially traumatic events.

On the flights, mechanics, fitters and riggers frequently worked on the aircraft in precarious positions on the wings and fuselage, on engine trestles or standing on the undercarriage up in the wheel wells. Although he was unhurt, Stephen Rew once slipped and fell from the wing of a Lancaster, and he knew of someone else who fell and broke their leg while trying to put cockpit covers on.²²³ In another incident he needed 12 stitches when a tool box that fell from an engine trestle hit him on the head.²²⁴ As well as frequent heavy lifting, armourers had to contend with bombs resting on the bomb-bay doors of returned aircraft, 'hang ups' and fused delayed action bombs. For those on the flights, working long hours and under pressure to keep all aircraft serviceable, fatigue could lead to mistakes and accidents with armaments, aircraft and other machinery, while for all ground personnel, the cramped conditions in the living quarters facilitated the spread of illness and infection.

Daily Mail, 2 November 1940, p. 1.

²²² For a description of an intruder raid early in the war see: Elliott, IWM, 13094.

²²³ Rew, p. 57, RAFMH, B3692.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

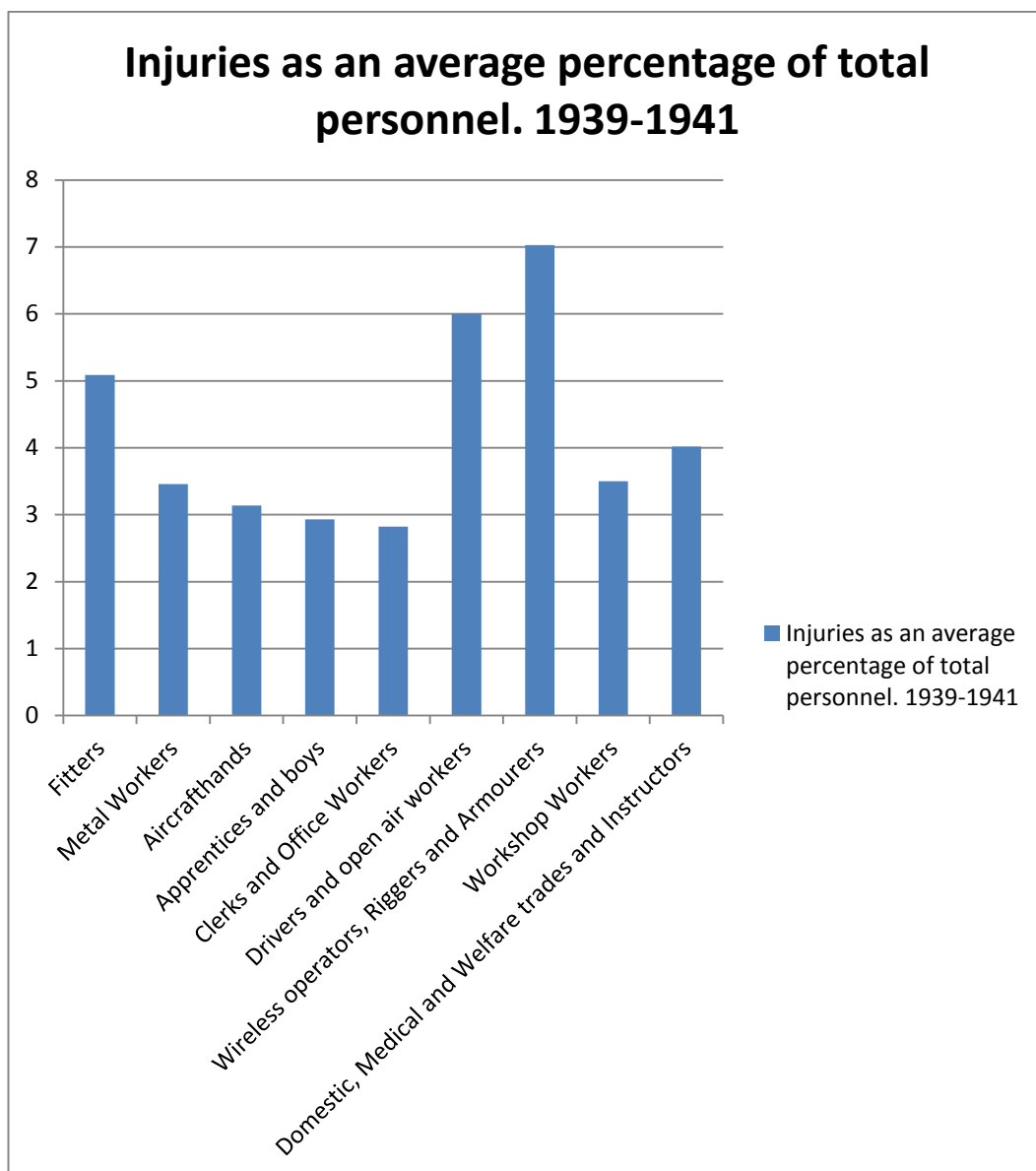


FIG 3.5. Data taken from W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, HMSO, 1972), pp. 588-592.

The average incidence of sickness or disease among other ranks ground personnel was just over 40 per cent per year. Accounting for more than a quarter of all sickness, upper respiratory tract infections were by far the most common cause of illness.²²⁵ 496 WAAFs died during the war, 287 from diseases (68 due to Tuberculosis) and 209 due to injuries.²²⁶ Each year on average just over 4 per cent

²²⁵ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p. 522.

²²⁶ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, p.633.

were injured severely enough to warrant recording.²²⁷ Figures only exist to examine injuries and illnesses by trade for the first three years of the war, but fitters, drivers and open air workers, wireless operators, riggers and armourers were more prone to accidental injuries than other trades. (See FIG 3.5.) Over the entire Air Force, and excluding air crew who became casualties on operations or in flying accidents, the cause of most non fatal injuries was recorded as ‘other’ (60 per cent). (See FIG 3.6)

Causes of fatalities and injuries in the entire RAF 1939-1945		
	Fatalities	Injuries
Air Raids	1611	2925
Propeller	204	1027
Mechanical transport	1256	21277
Starting motor engines	1	1357
Workshop Accidents	1	458
Accidental Explosions	474	2577
Athletic Injuries	148	43224
Self Inflicted	408	194
Other Causes	2704	110835

FIG 3.6. Data taken from: W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, HMSO, 1972), p. 568.²²⁸

However the next largest causes of injury were ‘athletic’ injuries. Over 43000 personnel (23 per cent) were injured playing sport or undertaking athletic activities. Most of these injuries were to the lower limbs.²²⁹ Air raids killed 1611 personnel (23

²²⁷ W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, HMSO, 1972), pp. 588-592.

²²⁸ The chart includes both air crew and ground personnel.

²²⁹ W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, HMSO, 1972), p. 566.

per cent of those who died while in the RAF) and injured nearly 3000 (only 2 per cent of those injured). Most were killed or injured in 1940 and 1941 when German air raids were more frequent.²³⁰ Mechanic transport accidents accounted for 21277 injuries (12 per cent) and 1256 deaths (18 per cent). Road traffic accidents were a national problem in the blackout. The figure includes those killed or injured while off duty.²³¹ Starting motor vehicles and static engines by hand injured 1357 people and one was killed presumably because the vehicle had been left in gear when they started it using the starting handle.

The figures show that airmen and women were statistically more at risk from playing sport or from road traffic accidents than being killed or injured by the enemy or in accidents with armaments or aircraft. However, workshop accidents, accidental explosions and incidents with propellers, while not statistically very likely, left a lasting impression on those who witnessed them. Where practical the RAF put in place safety precautions and trained personnel to reduce the likelihood of accidents. The RAF also attempted to reduce the occurrence of other less obvious industrial diseases and causes of disruptions to work. Focussing on Maintenance Command but also relevant to Bomber Command, lighting, heating and ventilation of aircraft hangars compatible with the blackout, industrial dermatitis, the inhalation of solvents, and dust, fumes and mists were also studied and regulated, and where it was thought necessary personal protection equipment was supplied.²³² The fumes of solvents and nitro-cellulose dope, used for setting the fabric covering on aircraft like the Vickers Wellington were dangerous if inhaled. Riggers could get 'high' on the fumes, but repeated exposure could also cause long term liver and nervous system

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, pp. 513-526.

damage. It was thought that drinking milk could lessen the effects and so riggers who worked with dope were given an extra milk ration.²³³ As a new phenomenon, studies were also made into shift patterns, lighting and ventilation for those working with radar.²³⁴

Revolving propellers were an unavoidable danger (See FIG 3.6). In her semi-autobiographical novel, Mary Lee Settle describes how an airman was decapitated when he slipped from the wing of an aircraft he was in the process of refuelling,²³⁵ and at Croft in North Yorkshire an airman cycled into a revolving air-screw. He suffered a 'Compound fracture of skull and laceration of the brain and sagittal sinus' but his life was saved by a mobile surgical unit from the RAF hospital at Northallerton.²³⁶ Accidents also occurred when personnel took a short cut across the runways rather than going around the perimeter track. Crossing the runway in a light van during blackout, Edgar Wilson misread a green light, which was meant for a returning Lancaster, and was nearly hit by it as it touched down.²³⁷ Rostered to drive a station ambulance, WAAF driver Florence Riddoch once had to collect the decapitated remains of the occupants of a car which had been driven into the path of an aircraft doing 'circuits and bumps'.²³⁸ Crossing the airfield runways was a calculated risk that personnel took on numerous occasions to try to save time. However some personnel also had to perform hazardous tasks as part of their everyday trade. Many personnel considered armourers had to be brave to:

²³³ Private Papers of K. M. Cove, (1992), p. 22, IWM, Documents. 1947.

²³⁴ Rexford-Welch, *Volume II Commands*, pp. 659-672.

²³⁵ Settle, *Brave Promises*, p. 65.

²³⁶ Operations Record Book, RAF Hospital Northallerton, 14 June 1944, TNA, AIR 29/764.

²³⁷ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (E. D. Wilson), RAFMH, AC96/5.

²³⁸ F. Riddoch quoted in: N. Small, *Spit, Polish and Tears: Stories of W.A.A.F.s in World War Two*, (Bishop Auckland, Pentland Press, 1995), p. 94.

fuse up and load bombs... and particularly to deal with 'hang ups' brought back or to make safe armament or bombs on crashed aircraft... courage of some sort or another was part of the daily life of an operational airfield.²³⁹

Armourer James Johnstone learnt to slowly open the bomb bay doors of returned Stirlings one or two inches as sometimes a small number of incendiaries could be lying on the doors having been hung up in their boxes.²⁴⁰ This also happened on Lancasters, although the bomb doors could not be opened slowly.²⁴¹ At Waterbeach, one armourer remembers catching loose bombs on old bedding biscuits when the bomb doors were opened.²⁴²

Although they did not usually explode, descriptions of the terrifying moment when a bomb accidentally fell from an aircraft onto the dispersal points are quite common in memoirs.²⁴³ Fourteen 1000 lb bombs were accidentally jettisoned from a Lancaster by an electrician while Howell and a friend were sitting in the cockpit having completed their daily inspections. All three quickly exited the aircraft. Howell admitted that his 'hands were shaking for several days after this incident.'²⁴⁴

Unfortunately however, accidental detonations did occur on many stations throughout the war. Just over 3000 personnel of all ranks and trades were killed or injured by accidental explosions (See FIG.3.6). At 10:15 on Friday 29 December 1944, the bomb load of a 514 squadron Lancaster at RAF Waterbeach exploded, destroying the aircraft and damaging seven others on their nearby dispersals. It is thought that a defective 250lb bomb fell when being loaded and caused the

²³⁹ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (D. Aris), RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁴⁰ Johnstone, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁴¹ Rew, p. 20, RAFMH, B3692.

²⁴² E. Basford quoted in: Dison, *Lancasters at Waterbeach*, p. 65.

²⁴³ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (J. W. Grimstone), p. 3, RAFMH, AC96/5. See also Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁴⁴ Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5. See also: Howell, *The OR's Story*, p. 75.

sympathetic explosion of the aircraft's entire bomb-load.²⁴⁵ From the ground crew working on the aircraft or in the vicinity, three bodies were recovered, six men were missing and four were wounded.²⁴⁶ The station medical officer, Geoffrey Dean stated in his report that:

three bodies were found with "multiple injuries" which is a euphemism, they had been thrown about 300 yards... hundreds of small pieces of cadaver were dispersed over a wide area.²⁴⁷

A roll call showed that six men who had been in the vicinity of the explosion were missing, but not one 'recognisable fragment' was discovered. 'Station Sick Quarters staff gathered all the small pieces of cadaver that could be found and the total filled a blanket.'²⁴⁸ Dean's staff worked 'like Trojans, although much of the work was exceptionally unpleasant.'²⁴⁹ Written in March 1944, 'Casualty', a poem by the previous senior medical officer at RAF Waterbeach, David Stafford-Clark, gives an emotive description of the task of removing a casualty from a gun turret of a heavy bomber by relating the conversation between the medical team and uninjured air crew members.

'Easy boys; leave it to the doc...'
'Afraid he's pretty bad, doc; we've not heard
A word from him since just before we bombed...'
Hands under his arms and knees
Lift him down gently; unplug his intercomm.
And disconnect his oxygen.
Now guide his shoulders and dislodge his feet

²⁴⁵ Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Operations Record Books, Royal Air Force Stations. Waterbeach, Appendices, TNA, AIR 28/891.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. See also: J. F. Hamlin, and O. J. Merrington, *At the 'Beach: The story of Royal Air Force Waterbeach and Waterbeach Barracks*, (Peterborough, GMS Enterprises, 2011), p29.

²⁴⁷ Operations Record Books, Royal Air Force Stations. Waterbeach, Appendices, January 1944 - August 1945, G. Dean, Medical Report, Month of December 1944, TNA, AIR 28/892.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

From the wrecked turret;
So lay him down, and look at him.

‘Much you can do?’
 ‘No-I’m afraid he’s dead,
Has been for hours-‘ ‘Oh. Well I’m sorry-’
 ‘Yes,
Probably never knew what hit him.’
But in the torchlight you can see
His face is frozen:
Cannon shells pumped into his side
From neck to knee. Skin white like rigid lard,
Eyes glazed, with frosted lashes,
Flying suit crusted with red chalk
That was his blood...
 Such is the cold
In a smashed turret open to the wind
Torn at that height and speed through icy darkness.

Yesterday
I heard someone complain
‘Last night the bombers in procession
Kept me awake...’²⁵⁰

If the complaining voice in the envoi is interpreted as a civilian, it also highlights the separation between the RAF and civilians. As well as injured and dead air crew members on returning aircraft, personnel also had to deal with crashes and fires, sometimes with very little training or equipment. P. C. Knight was trained as RAF fire and rescue service, but his training mostly consisted of domestic fires. In the early days of the war on operational stations a small core of trained men were augmented by ‘disinterested’ airmen rostered to fire piquet duty.²⁵¹ The fire tender was a lorry driven by someone from the motor pool with a 30 gallon fire extinguisher

²⁵⁰ David Stafford-Clark, *Sound in the Sky and Other Poems*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1944), pp.17-18

²⁵¹ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (P. C. Knight), RAFMH, AC96/5. Similar to guard duty, fire piquet, was a night-watch who were responsible for immediate attendance at any fire.

in the back. When they approached a crashed aircraft the crash crews rarely knew whether it had any bombs on board.²⁵² Working on fatigue duty on the crash tender, wireless mechanic John Grimstone attended a damaged Whitley after it landed. One crew member had been badly burnt and he remembers freezing at the sight of faceless wireless operator whose 'eyes looked like two black sockets.' Grimstone recalled he had to be 'shoved' to stir him from the shocked 'seizure' he was in.²⁵³ As well as the medical team and crash crews, of the 'heat and meat wagons', as the ambulances and crash tenders were called,²⁵⁴ other ground personnel were also reminded of the frailty of human life. Those that smelt burnt human flesh never forgot it. After a collision the crash crew brought a sergeant's charred chevron into the watch office, to be given to the investigating officer the next day. 'A most dreadful smell of burnt human flesh permeated the ops room, which I shall never forget.'²⁵⁵ When two bombers collided over RAF Stradishall in Suffolk, from the fourteen air crew, only ten bodies and three survivors were found. The following morning 'all spare personnel, aircrew and ground crew alike, were linked arm-in arm in one mighty line, and the countryside was combed in every direction.'²⁵⁶

For those who attended them, the not infrequent air crew funerals could be upsetting and traumatic for various reasons. One WAAF found it hard to approach the foot of the grave; she was worried about falling in as she saluted,²⁵⁷ and a WAAF corporal found it hard to command a detachment of WAAFs for the funerals of Hampden air crew at RAF Cottesmore in 1941.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Grimstone, RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵⁴ P. Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past: the lives and losses of a Lancaster crew in 1944-45*, (London, Grubb Street, 1995), p. 34.

²⁵⁵ Kup, IWM, Documents 507.

²⁵⁶ Gray, *Ghosts of Targets*, p. 137. The body was found a week later under the engine of one of the crashed aircraft when it was removed.

²⁵⁷ Kup, IWM, Documents 507.

Many of the young airwomen found it difficult not to be overcome by the solemnity of the situation, especially the firing of the funeral escorts rifles over the young airmen's graves. Some of the girls could not experience it for a second time. We all learned to be "brave" very quickly during the war years...²⁵⁸ For a radio mechanic a funeral he attended was unpleasant for other reasons. Having been kept in a room near the sickbay for a few days in the summer, the remains of two air crew members, who had died in a crash, had begun to seep through the wood of their coffins and the smell remained with the pallbearers for days afterwards.²⁵⁹

Conclusion

'We old ground crew 'Bods' had a gruelling time really'.²⁶⁰

During the war and in the following decades, the lives of ground personnel were considered in opposition to the sacrifices made by air crew and their perceived bravery. Influenced by the 'Myth of the Blitz,' in their contemporary letters and diaries, as well as later memoirs, ground personnel also compared their role in the war to their perception of the stoic civilian population living in cities targeted by the Luftwaffe. Working on dispersed sites, the lives of ground personnel could be monotonous, the conditions and tasks were often cold and unpleasant. Personnel in all trades worked long hours, with little time off, but also with comparatively little risk to themselves. It is impossible to separate personnel's living and working conditions on bomber stations; in common with Goffman's theories of total institutions, almost every aspect of life was controlled by the RAF, and any

²⁵⁸ 'Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*', (N. Older), RAFMH, AC96/5.

²⁵⁹ Williamson, p. 65, RAFMH, X006-0262.

²⁶⁰ Everett, RAFMH, AC96/5.

divergence from regulations or misdemeanours could be punished. However bomber bases were not closed sites, members of the RAFVR regarded themselves as civilians in uniform, and the distinction between the separate military and civilian spheres was constantly blurred. Although discipline and authority was not applied consistently over all living and working areas, or over all groups of people, the forces' discipline was applied in civilian areas and could be enforced by service police. RAF authority was acknowledged by many as a conflict between 'us' and 'them', and was constantly being tested and resisted. Personnel survived by adapting and by 'bending the rules', they learnt to look after themselves and each other, by scrounging extra clothes and equipment and by stealing coal to keep warm. WAAFs learnt to supply their own bathplugs, and against regulations used their gas mask cases as handbags. Although they were effectively extensions of the military sphere, on some evenings, together with the NAAFI, local pubs and cafes enabled personnel to express their individuality and freedom of choice, at least in what they ate and drank.

Personnel in different trade groups had different experiences of the RAF, and this was largely due to their trades' perceived importance to the war effort and their proximity to the aircraft or air crew. The more involved a person was with the aircraft, the higher up the hierarchy they were and the less they had to conform to RAF discipline. Due to their importance and their long hours of work, those on the flights rarely had to attend parades and were proud to be 'scruffy Erks.' Similarly, WAAF watch-keepers were in contact with the flyers through radio-telephones, and because they worked shifts, they were also able to avoid a certain amount of 'bullshit.' Conversely those who worked furthest away from the flights and dispersals were more likely to be seen by the administration officers who enforced

regulations. Parades, drill and bullshit became part of the everyday for general duties AC2s and ground defence personnel.

The hierarchical positioning and framing of different trades' relative importance in the war effort was created during the war and has continued into later narratives. The importance of the flyer, and their glamour and heroism, was first constructed as a narrative by wartime propaganda and has been reinforced by subsequent retellings of life on a bomber station. Ground crew who worked directly with the aircraft and associated with air crew gained extra status because of this association, but ground personnel rarely put their lives at risk through exposure to enemy fire. Becoming ill after months of living in cold, cramped conditions and working exposed to the elements, or falling from an aircraft when trying to place a cover over an aircraft's cockpit and breaking a leg, is neither heroic nor glamorous. On the rare occasions ground crew were killed or injured in accidents or even explosions, they were regarded as unfortunate accidents; these tales could not be romanticised as could the heroic deaths of air crew. Personnel were constantly reminded of the sacrifices being made by the air crew, by the sight of damaged aircraft, by the numbers who failed to return, the quick turnaround of air crew personnel and by attending their funerals. How witnessing the high attrition rate and the frequent deaths and injuries of air crew affected ground crew and ground personnel emotionally will be discussed in the following chapter. For all personnel, life on bomber station involved a constant redefinition of self that included an attempt to reconcile the conflict between the concept of individuality and the authority of the RAF (and the state) within the concept of total war.

THE LIVES AND EMOTIONS OF GROUND PERSONNEL

The Erk's Lament.

Why did I join the RAF?
 Why can't I learn to fly?
 Why can't I join this bloomin' war
 And Spitfire in the sky?
 Of flying we do nil all day,
 Our duty's on the ground,
 Where even squadron leaders
 Are terra firma bound.

Of stunting, jinking we see none,
 Of trips there's even less,
 We spend our time in carting swill
 And sweeping out the mess.
 We're fitters, drivers, Woms and Wops,
 Mechanics and G.D.'s-
 We fill in form and documents
 And lubricate and grease.

The Warrant Officer is tough,
 And Chiefy's even worse,
 The Corporal carries all the cans
 The Police are one long curse.
 Why did we join the RAF?
 Why can't we sweep the sky?
 We're browned-off doing ground staff jobs-
 Why can't we learn to fly?²⁶¹

²⁶¹ C. H. Ward-Jackson, (ed) *Airman's Song Book*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1945), p.129. See also: C. H. Ward-Jackson, *No Bombs At All: Some short stories of the Royal Air Force*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), p. 37. Ward Jackson wrote this song for a station concert party in 1940. A 'Wom' was a wireless-operator- mechanic, a 'Wop' a wireless operator, while 'G.D.' denotes either general duties or ground defence.

The reader of the 'Erk's Lament' can assume several things about the Erk in the poem. The poem acknowledges that the Erk regrets joining the RAF and it is clear that he is not happy, but although he does not like the war, he and other in his situation want to 'join' and play a bigger part in it. The Erk wants to fly, and in particular he wants to fly Spitfires, but as even squadron leaders are forced to work on the ground, the poem suggests that Erks should accept their position and do their duty. It may be going too far to interpret the last line as suggesting metaphorical constipation or impotence, however as will be discussed below, many ground personnel were 'browned off' with their lot. The context of wartime events, RAF regulations and the working and living conditions on bomber stations were crucial to how personnel experienced their service in the war. This chapter will expand on the previous chapter and discuss the lives and emotions of ground personnel on an operational bomber station. Sections of the chapter will consider the study of the history of emotions, its key theories and methodology, as well as examine specific emotions including fear and anxiety, guilt and grief. Personnel's identity and emotions were positioned within prevalent wartime discourses, of heroism and stoic endurance and duty. As was illustrated in the previous chapter, personnel struggled against harsh living and working conditions; occasional traumatic events and the frequent loss of aircraft and air crew also affected their lives. This chapter will show that personnel were able to cope with these conditions and events because of the shared emotional support of small communities with common interests within the complex hierarchical structure of the RAF Bomber Command. Personnel constructed nuanced identities through shared experience, belonging to a group, and through a

series of binaries; they saw themselves in opposition to both civilians and RAF authority.

Emotions

Studies of emotion in history tend to examine a particular society or, as in the case of Joanna Bourke's *Fear*, investigate one particular emotion over time.²⁶² A growing field of study that is hoping to be accepted into mainstream history in much the same way as gender,²⁶³ the study of the history of emotions is problematic largely because contemporary science and medicine are divided as to whether emotions are socially constructed or biologically hardwired.²⁶⁴ It is important therefore, to understand how emotions were regarded in the period of study.²⁶⁵ In 1985 Peter and Carol Stearns coined the term 'Emotionology: the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression'.²⁶⁶ In different societies, emotions are either regarded as restrained or freely expressed in what William Reddy has called emotional regimes.²⁶⁷ In a rigid emotional regime, emotional norms are more strictly drawn and enforced.²⁶⁸ Reddy also describes 'emotional refuges' as places or times where emotions do not have to be guarded and 'deviant feelings' may be expressed to a partner or a close friend.²⁶⁹ Barbara Rosenwein prefers the term 'emotional

²⁶² J. Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, (London, Virago Press, 2006).

²⁶³ J. Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: an Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns' *History and Theory*, 49, 2, (2010), pp. 237-265.

²⁶⁴ S. J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out' *Emotion Review*, 3, 1, (2011), p. 118.

²⁶⁵ P. N. Stearns, & C.Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards' *The American Historical Review*, 90, 4, (1985), p. 823.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 813.

²⁶⁷ W. Reddy in: Plamper, 'The History of Emotions', p. 243.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁶⁹ W. M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 136.

communities'.²⁷⁰ Like Peter and Carol Stearns, she argues that in any given society there can be multiple 'emotional communities', and as people move through them they moderate the outward display of the emotions and act or behave differently.²⁷¹ While there may be numerous sub-cultures within any given society, there may also be a hegemonic emotional norm, if not a singular dominant emotional regime. During the war, the RAF was part of wider society, while, as has been discussed in a previous chapter, many social divisions existed within RAF Bomber Command. Affected by wider social determinants such as class and gender, it will be shown that the emotional norms varied according to the hierarchical structure of the RAF, within emotional communities formed around trade groups and even within individual cliques. Throughout much of the twentieth century, emotions can be seen to have conformed to what Rosenwein has described as the 'Hydraulic model of emotions'.²⁷² A study of the use of metaphors used to describe emotions highlight that emotions are restrained or 'bottled up', until they escape as an emotional outburst. In this way, the metaphor of man as a machine was applied to the understanding of the bodies' 'fight or flight' adrenal response.²⁷³ During the war an important emotional norm was that of stoicism and the 'stiff upper lip.' Those who gave in to emotional displays, particularly of negative emotions, were thought of as weak, and, applying cultural stereotypes of class and gender, could be regarded as predisposed to neuroses. Distinctions between mental health and emotions are often blurred in some societies; as will be discussed in later chapters on the role played by the

²⁷⁰ B. Rosenwein in: Plamper, 'The History of Emotions', p. 255.

²⁷¹ B. H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History' *The American History Review*, 107, 3, (2002), p. 842.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 834.

²⁷³ J. Bourke, 'The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914 – 45' *Historical Research*, 74. 185, (2001), pp. 316-317. It was thought that activity was better in times of stress than passivity. See pp.322, 327.

medical officer and RAF neuropsychiatric specialists; this was also the case within the wartime RAF and wider society. As will be discussed in chapter five, fear, anxiety and other negative emotions were medicalized, and came to be seen as a medical problem.²⁷⁴

Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety were seen as the dominant emotions during the war and for much of the first half of the twentieth century,²⁷⁵ and as Joanna Bourke has highlighted, beliefs about fear and bravery were important cultural concepts during the war.²⁷⁶

Discourses of fear, bravery and stoicism were important in constructing perceptions of ground personnel. Francis maintains that in the RAF, concepts of fear and bravery were ‘closely attuned to the emotional codes and standards of a wider society’ and ‘authority of psychoanalytical expertise.’²⁷⁷ However, when both male and female ground personnel are considered, codes of courage and fear appear more nuanced.

There was a distinction between the bravery of those who flew and those on the ground. Expectations of men and women were subtly different too, ‘if a woman lost her emotional control she was being a silly girl or a foolish woman, if a man lost

²⁷⁴ M. Shapira, ‘The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, 1, (2013), p. 38.

²⁷⁵ I. Burney, (2012). ‘War on fear: Solly Zuckerman and civilian nerve in the Second World War’ *History of the Human Sciences*, 25, 5, (2012), p. 50. See also A. Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear; Wartime London 1939-1945’ *Journal of British Studies* 48, 1, (2009), pp. 153-175, Bourke, ‘The Emotions in War’, pp. 314–330, Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, (London, Virago Press, 2006), and R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation 1919-1939*, (London, Allen Lane, 2009).

²⁷⁶ See: J. Bourke, *Dismembering the male: men’s bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (London, Reaktion Books, 1996), Bourke, ‘The Emotions in War’, p. 315, Bourke, *Fear*, p. 199, and J. Bourke, ‘Disciplining the Emotions: Fear, Psychiatry and the Second World War’ in: Cooter, R. Harrison, M. and Sturdy, S. (eds) *War Medicine and Modernity*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1999), p. 225. See also: P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 273-283.

²⁷⁷ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 203.

control of his emotions he was being unmanly.²⁷⁸ John Tosh argues that the British ‘stiff upper lip’ had its roots in Victorian gender roles,²⁷⁹ and after the First World War it was accepted that courage consisted of recognising and overcoming fears.²⁸⁰ As Joanna Bourke discusses, people had a strong fear of displaying fear.²⁸¹ Edgar Jones argues the RAF policy towards LMF air crew was motivated by the need to punish and stigmatise those who refused to fly as a deterrent to others.²⁸² It was expected that fear would be the underlying cause of mental breakdown in pilots and air crew,²⁸³ and it was thought that tens of thousands of civilians would become casualties from ‘mass panic, fear and anxiety’ caused by prolonged bombing.²⁸⁴ Even though ‘The Blitz’ suggested that civilian morale would not be broken by bombing,²⁸⁵ the morale of German workers was a target for Bomber Command from at least 1941 onwards.²⁸⁶ However, wartime Britain’s hegemonic emotional norm or dominant emotional regime was of stoicism; ‘fear and anxieties could not be overtly expressed.’²⁸⁷ During the war the RAF and wider British society can be regarded as ‘rigid’ emotional regimes. Although fear is an understandable ‘individual and

²⁷⁸ S. Rose, *Which People’s War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), p. 157.

²⁷⁹ J. Tosh ‘Domesticity and Manliness’ in M. Roper, and J. Tosh, (eds) *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 65.

²⁸⁰ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 140. (Report of the war Office Commission of Enquiry into “Shell-shock” London 1922, p.190-195).

²⁸¹ Bourke, ‘The Emotions in War’, pp. 323-324. See also: Bourke, *Fear*, p. 215. See also: W.A.S. Falla, ‘Fear Factors in Flying Personnel’ *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 93, (1947), p. 47.

²⁸² E. Jones, ‘LMF: The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War’ *The Journal of Military History*, 70, (2006), p. 441.

²⁸³ Falla, ‘Fear Factors in Flying Personnel’, p. 43. C.P. Symonds, ‘Anxiety Neurosis in Combatants’ *The Lancet*, 242, 6278, (1943), p. 786.

²⁸⁴ Shapira, ‘The Psychological Study of Anxiety’, p. 32.

²⁸⁵ E. Glover, ‘Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population (3) The ‘Blitz’ - 1940-41’ *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 23, (1942), p. 36. See also E. Jones, R. Woolven, B. Durodie, and S. Wessely, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War’ *Social History of Medicine*, 17, 3, (2004), pp. 463- 479, and R. Overy, *The Bombing War*, (London, Allen Lane, 2013), pp. 114, 169-185.

²⁸⁶ M. Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A History of Bomber Command*, (London, Tauris, 2014), p. 43, 101, 112.

²⁸⁷ Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear’, p. 155.

cultural response to danger', its expression is mediated by the historical cultural context.²⁸⁸ The expression of fear was countered by the powerful wartime discourses of heroism and stoicism,²⁸⁹ and, particularly in the culture of the RAF, was hidden by euphemism and understatement. Parachutes were 'brollies', steel helmets were 'panic bowlers', to be killed was to have 'gone for a Burton' or to have 'bought it', and an ambulance was a 'meat wagon'.²⁹⁰ Acknowledgement of fear is hard to find directly. Fear was not directly documented by civilians in their diaries during the blitz, however it can be discerned through the descriptions of physical symptoms that may be the manifestation of fear.²⁹¹ Compared to the flyers, or even civilians during the blitz, the lives of Bomber Command ground personnel were not often in any grave danger; there was relatively little to be afraid of. Unlike fighter stations during the first stage of the 'Battle of Britain', bomber stations were only infrequently attacked by enemy aircraft, and throughout the RAF personnel had to live up to the example set by WAAFs who were fêted for heroically staying at their posts and continuing with their duty whilst being bombed and strafed.²⁹²

At RAF Waddington Pip Beck was on duty in the watch office logging the radio-telephone communication with returning aircraft when there was a red air-raid alert and an intruder bombed the airfield. Although after the event she admits she was 'petrified' and her 'mind went blank', she continued to do her duty as a stick of bombs came closer. The nearest bomb detonated between the watch office and a

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁸⁹ P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 78-105.

²⁹⁰ C. H. Ward-Jackson, *It's A Piece of Cake or RAF Slang Made Easy*, (1945) (London, Read Books, 2010), p. 16,12,32,15, 42.

²⁹¹ Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear', p. 159.

²⁹² Anon, 'Military Medal For Three W.A.A.F.s.' *The Times*, Saturday, 02/11/1940, p. 2. Anon, 'Military Medal For Two Women' *The Times*, 11/01/1941, p. 6. Anon, 'Jean and Joan Win the MM' *The Daily Mail*, 11 January 1941, p. 3. See also: K. Bentley-Beauman, *Wings on Her Shoulders*, (London, Hutchinson, 1943), pp. 57-59.

hanger and shook the watch office.²⁹³ Writing decades after the event, she admitted that once it was all over she had a ‘nervous reaction’, and laughing was replaced by ‘teeth chattering’ and ‘violent shivering’. Conforming to the discourse of stoicism even this reaction was relieved by a cup of tea.²⁹⁴ Following the writings of Freud, the distinction between the emotions of fear and anxiety was clearly defined. Fear was the emotion felt during a concrete event as it occurred, while anxiety was the emotion felt when anticipating future dangers,²⁹⁵ and involved an obsession with distinct fears.²⁹⁶ Fears needed to be dwelt upon to become debilitating. Having already witnessed an aircraft fire that killed all on board, engine mechanic, Stephen Rew imagined himself winning a posthumous George medal, or at least a mention in despatches, as he struggled to extricate the tail gunner from another crashed and burning Halifax. Although terrified and listening to the crackle of flames and smelling petrol he expected an explosion at any moment, the aircraft had ‘pranged’ on the edge of the dispersal where there was some fire fighting equipment, and ‘some intelligent characters’ quickly got the fire under control.²⁹⁷ Unlike the flyers, ground personnel did not have to contemplate repeatedly risking their lives. If a dangerous event like an aircraft fire or an enemy raid occurred it was sudden and there was little time for much other than action. Training, the cultural expectation of stoic behaviour, and the discourse of doing their duty helped individuals such as Beck and Rew to be brave. As will be discussed below, a subsequent reflection on events could be problematic for some, but for many ground personnel their anxieties can be divided

²⁹³ P. Beck, *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, Crecy, 2004), pp. 20-21.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁹⁵ Anon, ‘Fear and Anxiety at Tobruk’, *The Lancet*, 241, 6232, (1943), pp. 180-181. See also, Symonds, ‘Anxiety Neurosis in Combatants’, p. 785.

²⁹⁶ D. N. Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’ *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. 90, 1944, p. 575.

²⁹⁷ S. Rew, ‘They also Served: The Story of an Ordinary Aircraftsman’, RAFMH, B3692.

into individual or personal fears and anxieties partially created by the state and shared with civilians. Early in the war, the fear of invasion, parachutists and bombing were commonplace; these fears diminished after the blitz and the German invasion of Russia, but the fear of being bombed re-emerged with the V1 and V2 attacks.²⁹⁸ Personnel serving on RAF stations were concerned for the safety of their families at home during air raids,²⁹⁹ and although he had found his wife digs to be near him at RAF Waddington, after an air raid on Lincoln Eric Howell persuaded his wife to move back to the relative safety of Wales.³⁰⁰ For those who were in relationships with air crew on their station this fear was made more immediate because of the intimate knowledge of when operations were on. Watching take offs at Spilsby, WAAF intelligence officer, Joyce Brotherton:

felt like the old hen who watches her adopted children when they first become waterborne and sail away from her. I suddenly felt horribly alone. Waiting for return... I felt weighed down with the sort of sick feeling that I always had when I was waiting for the boys.³⁰¹

Anxieties about the safety of air crew meant that superstitious rituals were hard to resist. On the one evening at RAF Spilsby that Joyce Brotherton failed to wave as the aircraft took off on operations, six aircraft failed to return; she never missed a take off again.³⁰² RAF chaplains were thought of as 'good, bad, or indifferent welfare officers; and the Church itself... played no significant part in the life and thought of

²⁹⁸ A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London, Pimlico, 1994), p. 560.

²⁹⁹ Frank McCarthy letters, RAFMH, X004.8447.0004.003. See for example letters dated 17 April 1941 and 24 April 1941.

³⁰⁰ E. Howell, *The OR's Story: Bomber Command Other Ranks in World War Two*, (Swindon, NPG, 1998), pp. 57-58, 78.

³⁰¹ Private Papers of Miss J. M. Brotherton MBE, (1997), pp. 35-36, IWM, Documents. 6649.

³⁰² Ibid.

the camp.³⁰³ Flyers relied on lucky talismans and rituals, and civilians were also superstitious during the war.³⁰⁴ This was symptomatic of a decline in ‘orthodox beliefs’, a trend which was noticed in a Mass-Observation survey published after the war,³⁰⁵ Ground personnel were also frequently open to superstition and the supernatural. A common superstition in the RAF was the ‘chop girl’ or ‘jinx.’³⁰⁶ After a WAAF had lost three or four lovers, air crew avoided her and even refused to ‘accept a cup of cocoa from one.’ At Waterbeach, jinx girls were posted away, although one ‘hanged herself with a lavatory chain.’³⁰⁷ At East Kirby, Eileen Smith remembered a ‘jinx’ girl who had been engaged to several air crew members who had been killed:

On her bedside she had a few large studio photos of these men and I would see the dim red glow of a cigarette as she smoked into the early hours of the morning trying to come to grips with the tragedies of war.³⁰⁸

One of Eric Howell’s friends worried he might be a jinx because he had lost so many aircraft,³⁰⁹ and on other stations particular letters used to identify squadron aircraft were thought to be jinxed.³¹⁰ Ground personnel also sometimes believed they had premonitions about which members of air crew were for ‘the chop’:

I had developed sixth sense already and living amongst the tension of ops I knew when I got the list of a/c and captains and put them on the board, who

³⁰³ L. J. Collins, *Faith Under Fire*, (London, Leslie Ferwin, 1966), p. 72.

³⁰⁴ Francis *The Flyer*, pp. 124-125. See also; Calder *he People’s War*, p. 177

³⁰⁵ Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in popular attitudes to religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London Borough*, (London, Victor Gollancz, 1947), p. 7.

³⁰⁶ M. Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger: a flight of recollection and discovery*, (London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1969), pp. 145-146.

³⁰⁷ G. Dean, *The Touchstone: A Doctor’s Story*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2002), p. 35.

³⁰⁸ E. Smith, *Why Did We Join? A former WAAF remembers service life in World War II*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2003), p. 101.

³⁰⁹ Howell, *The OR’s Story* p. 87.

³¹⁰ S. Rew, p. 35, RAFMH, B3692. For more on superstition, especially amongst air crew, see: Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 48-51.

would return that night – this seems ridiculous, but was there, some sort of aura which enveloped the crews as well.³¹¹

Michael Bentine served as an intelligence officer at Wickenby. He believed he saw a friend's face become a skull as he looked at him and 'knew that he would die that night.'³¹² Although they believed them to be real, these feelings are due to the fallibility of memory, coincidence, and narrative created from hindsight.

Marjorie Bevan Jones was often convinced that her husband, a pilot, was dead when he was late or had not been in touch.³¹³ In common with many female civilians, members of the WAAF were afraid for the safety and lives of their friends, boyfriends, lovers and husbands. In the early years of the war the propaganda campaign carried out by the Ministry of Information in posters and films led the public to assume spies and fifth columnists were everywhere.³¹⁴ Some air crew were convinced of the danger of saboteurs and fifth columnists.³¹⁵ I have found no evidence of ground crew worrying about sabotage; however they were concerned that they had made mistakes. After modifying the radio on a mosquito, radio mechanic E. J. Williamson's work was investigated when it was found that snatches of the air crews' conversations had been transmitted and could have given away the target and information to the enemy. It was found that the insulation on some of the

³¹¹ Private Papers of E. M. Kup, (1998), IWM, Documents. 507.

See also Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 119.

³¹² M. Bentine, *The Door Marked Summer*, (St Albans, Granada Publishing, 1981), p. 141.

³¹³ M. Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake: The Diary of a Wartime WAAF 1940-1942*, (Bangor, University of Wales, 2005), pp. 110, 126-127 139.

³¹⁴ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London, Pimlico, 2008), p. 259. M. Gillies, *Waiting for Hitler: Voices from Britain on the brink of invasion*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), p. 45, 162. Calder, *The People's War*, pp. 133-138.

³¹⁵ E. Smithies, *Aces, Erks & Backroom Boys*, (London, Past Times, 2002), p. 52, 60, 182. Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 112.

wiring was defective, and Williamson was relieved to keep his ‘clean sheet’ and not to be facing a court martial.³¹⁶

As well as concerns for others, whatever their rank or trade, all ground personnel were anxious for themselves when they were posted to new stations. An armourer gave himself a self inflicted wound to avoid posting to Wick,³¹⁷ and it was acknowledged by the Air Ministry that to:

enter a strange barrack room in which you have to live for the next few months, a barrack room full of strange faces, ... all of them taking stock of you without showing any signs of admiration, is always a bit of an ordeal.³¹⁸

According to Rew, depression was the usual state of posted airmen,³¹⁹ but posting could be even more daunting for women. Separated from her friends and the support of an emotional community, Edith Kup found false bravado was necessary:

In rather a quake I arrived in the mess, always an ordeal at a new station, for the boys having heard one was coming, were waiting to see what presented itself – I used to stand outside the anteroom door, count to ten and then stride in, head held high and looking straight ahead – a quick glance to locate any WAAF and go over and join her. Once that was over there were no further qualms. One was quickly accepted as part of the team.³²⁰

Compared to the flyer any unpleasant events were minor ‘ordeals’ that had to be stoically endured without complaint. For many personnel, illness was another

³¹⁶ E. J. Williamson, ‘A Life for Men’, pp.115-116, RAFMH, X006 0262.

³¹⁷ Base, *Get Some in!* p. 45.

³¹⁸ L. Taylor, *Ground Gen for Airmen (and Airwomen): A Brief Guide for airmen and airwomen of all trades and grades to the interior economy of life in the Royal Air Force*, (London, Pitman and sons, 1941), p. 24.

³¹⁹ Rew, p. 27, RAFMH, B3692.

³²⁰ Kup, IWM, Documents 507.

hardship to be ‘endured in silence’.³²¹ When ill, some WAAFs dosed themselves up with aspirin rather than visit the medical officer.³²² Sylvia Pickering used quinine and thought that benzedrine inhalers were ‘jolly good stuff.’³²³ Some anxieties were specific to an individual’s trade within the RAF, and did involve a genuine fear for their life. Although armourers could become rather blasé about retrieving ‘hang ups’, bombs and incendiaries that had failed to drop over the target and remained in the aircraft, often resting on the bomb-bay doors,³²⁴ personnel from other trades were much more in awe of the danger from explosives.³²⁵ An earth fault could drop bombs on the pan,³²⁶ and, as discussed in chapter three, explosions did occur. Ground crew personnel had a healthy respect for revolving propellers especially at night,³²⁷ and engine mechanics also feared the collapse of undercarriages.³²⁸ These fears were based on individuals’ knowledge of accidents that had occurred and they had either witnessed or heard about. Personnel were also expected to stoically downplay traumatic events and experiences, and evidence of this can be seen in both wartime sources and later sources. Discussing an aircraft that had failed to return in Neville Shute’s *Pastoral*, a WAAF officer ‘had found, from two years in the Command, that the harder and more matter-of-fact you were about these things, the easier it was.’³²⁹

³²¹ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 162. See also: Beck, *Keeping Watch*, pp. 91-92, 133-134.

³²² S. Woolaston quoted in: B. E. Escott, *A Woman in Air Force Blue: The story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough, 1989, p.145.

³²³ Private Papers of S. Watts, (1996), Diary 05 October 1942, IWM, Documents. 5652.

³²⁴ A. Ashmore, ‘The Wickenby Armourer’ *The Wickenby Register Newsletter* (1992), No. 36, p. 4, WMC. Armourers used to try to catch incendiaries and small bombs in a blanket or on old bedding biscuits.

³²⁵ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 75.

³²⁶ Memoirs of Mr Holman, p. 17, RAFMH, B4264.

³²⁷ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, pp. 124, 139. See also: Shepherd, p.6, RAFMH, X002 5411.

³²⁸ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (G. F. Everett), RAFMH, AC96/5.

³²⁹ N. Shute, *Pastoral*, (London, Pan, 1964), p. 51.

RAF medical officer David Stafford-Clark first witnessed wartime traumatic injuries when serving in France in 1940. Recording having to deal with a ‘charred corpse with trailing entrails and brittle limbs’, he wrote ‘urgh!’³³⁰ Later on he was more matter of fact when describing the corpse of a German airman ‘who had no top to his head.’³³¹ Although a modern understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorders may be evident in sources created after the 1980s, the wartime emotionology is also evident. Eric Howell’s typewritten description of a Hampden which crashed during take-off killing an electrician gives subtle clues to the emotional impact of such events. Throughout his eleven-page typewritten testimony his spelling is impeccable, however when he wrote ‘I was in a fl[igh]t dispersal at the time and witnessed the crash’ the word ‘witnessed’ was originally spelt with two ‘t’s, but has been corrected by a blue pen.³³² In the self-deprecating style typical of many similar testimonies, Howell admits that he typed his story with one finger, but, more than correcting a typographical error, the unusual handwritten deletion and alteration suggests the strength of emotions that still surrounded the memory of the event at the time of writing. Working as a radio mechanic in Lincolnshire towards the end of the war, Patricia Lockett’s job sometimes entailed examining radio sets recovered from crashed bombers to see if they were serviceable or beyond repair:

and one very unpleasant job I had to do – was to – clean up the radio which had got – part of a radio operator’s head embedded in it, which was very unpleasant and er – but – er – I felt for the radio operator, it was an

³³⁰ D. Stafford-Clark diary 13 June 1940, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/1.

³³¹ Ibid. 15 October 1940.

³³² Howell, RAFMH, AC96/5.

unpleasant job for me, but I thought, what a ghastly end. Erm, but on the whole it was pretty routine.³³³

Lockitt's oral testimony is archived in the Imperial War Museum, and in describing this scene her narrative is full of pauses that perhaps can be interpreted as conveying the emotion she still felt about this event in 2004. She admits it was 'very unpleasant' for her, but she framed her experience in the context of the radio operator who died. She 'thought, what a ghastly end' it had been for the operator, and that 'on the whole' her job 'was pretty routine.'³³⁴ The occasional unpleasantness Lockitt experienced in her job was insignificant compared to the heroic sacrifice the radio operator had made; her narrative displays typical wartime stoicism.³³⁵ Such stoicism is evidence of an important discourse that framed ground personnel's experiences.

At RAF Marston Moor, the first time a nursing orderly was confronted by bodies mutilated by a crash she followed the example of the male orderlies who were playing 'tough' and did not show any weakness in front of them, but walked off to cry on her own afterwards.³³⁶ Personnel 'learned to be "brave" very quickly'.³³⁷ However it was not just events that were visually witnessed that affected ground personnel. Sylvia Pickering, a clerk who worked in the sick quarters at Conningsby in Lincolnshire, could not forget 'the strange sickly stench of burnt bodies' kept in the station morgue.³³⁸ Pip Beck, a Radio Telephone operator at RAF Waddington, was haunted by the brief conversation she had with a pilot of a Wellington bomber

³³³ Interview with Patricia Lockitt, (2004), Reel 4, IWM, 27207.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ J. Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 13.

³³⁶ P. Bull in: A. Hall, *We, Also, Were There*, (Braunton, Merlin Books, 1985), pp. 128-129.

³³⁷ Older, RAFMH, AC96/5.

³³⁸ S. Pickering, *Tales of a Bomber Command WAAF (& her horse)* p. 120. See also: *Escott Air Force Blue*, p.143, and Kup, IWM, Documents 507.

before he crashed trying to land on one engine.³³⁹ She ‘felt shaken and sick... [hers] had been the last voice they had heard – would ever hear... [and she] felt related to them in a strange hollow intimacy.’ She admitted that the ‘experience haunted her dreams for a while’,³⁴⁰ and the event was powerful enough to lead to her writing this poem.

Darky Call

Through the static
Loud in my earphones
I heard you cry for aid.
Your scared boy’s voice conveyed
Your fear and danger:
Ether –borne, my voice
Went out to you
As lost and in the dark you flew.
We tried so hard to help you,
In your crippled plane –
I called again
But you did not hear.
You had crashed in flame
At the runway’s end
With none to tend
You in your dying...³⁴¹

Marjorie Bevan-Jones worked in an operations room as a plotter, she did not even speak to air crew, but plotted the position of aircraft from radar and observer corps reports. At night, lost aircraft with damaged radios returning from raids were plotted as they tried to visually locate somewhere to land. She recalled:

The awful part is knowing they will probably crash in the end, and that they will all die, and all the time they are so near somewhere they could land if

³³⁹ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 53-54.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.53.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6. A ‘darky call’ was a coded call for assistance made by lost or damaged aircraft.

they could see...The helpless feeling is a big hole in the pit of my stomach.

When the plots stop coming we know they are dead, lying on some cold hillside, miles from anywhere. And we feel harrowed and torn apart inside.³⁴²

Coming to terms with the death of air crew was hard for all personnel. There are numerous tales of women crying themselves to sleep after their favourite airman was killed or posted as missing, and Pip Beck remembers a girl she was billeted with who had to be sedated when she learnt of the death of her fiancé.³⁴³ Unsurprisingly grief was also a powerful emotion that had to be expressed or repressed during the war, and it is clear that it was the loss of friends among air crew officers who Stafford-Clark drank and played with in the officers' mess that affected him most. In his diary are the names of twenty friends who were killed and ten who were badly wounded. His brother John who died in 1941 was at the top of the list.³⁴⁴ After the death of one of Stafford-Clark's particular air crew friends at Waterbeach, he wrote a long eulogistic entry in his diary and wrote nothing further for several pages.³⁴⁵

Loss and grief

After training, friendships were broken up by individual postings. In a way this prepared people for the disruption of friendships and the loss that service life and war would bring.³⁴⁶ All personnel on an operational station knew about the loss of aircraft and the loss or death of air crew when it occurred. Those in the kitchens and the messes knew because of the surplus food and extra place settings in the officers'

³⁴² Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 75.

³⁴³ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p.136-137.

³⁴⁴ D. Stafford-Clark diary, p. 368, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2. The list was amended sometime after the war.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-45.

³⁴⁶ M. Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue: Experiences in the WAAF*, (Stroud, Tempus Publishing, 2006), p.38.

mess.³⁴⁷ Others were aware of the ‘dismal ritual’ of collecting and packing the air crew’s possessions and the arrival of their replacements.³⁴⁸ Ground crews became ‘numb and devoid of feeling’ when aircraft did not return and it was learnt that they had not diverted to another station,³⁴⁹ and after five years of service an intelligence officer had had his ‘fill of grief.’³⁵⁰ It was worse for those on the station who were emotionally attached on a personal level. WAAFs on the station who were in relationships with air crew could be close to their men; but they could be close to their deaths too.³⁵¹

WAAF Nina Chessall continued to write letters to her fiancé after he was posted as missing,³⁵² and it took ‘superhuman powers’ for her to put her face on and get through the day.³⁵³ She was given compassionate leave almost a month later because her mother was ill.³⁵⁴ After an airman was posted as missing it might take weeks before confirmation was received as to what had happened to them. Displays of emotion were considered bad for morale and misinterpreted as weakness; as a consequence, few firsthand accounts of grief survive.³⁵⁵ In the wartime emotionology it was acceptable to grieve only in private,³⁵⁶ but for the rank and file in the WAAF or the RAF there was little or no privacy. Emotional refuges were rare. While it was not uncommon for air crew members to ‘have a good cry’ on the shoulder of an

³⁴⁷ K. Mackenzie in: B. R. Williams, (ed) *As We Were: Recollections of life in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), p.34.

³⁴⁸ H. Bolitho, *A Penguin In The Eyrie: An R.A.F. Diary, 1939 -1945*, (London, Hutchinson, 1955), p. 168.

³⁴⁹ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 137.

³⁵⁰ Bolitho, *A Penguin In The Eyrie*, p. 168.

³⁵¹ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.82.

³⁵² J. Harrington, (ed) *Nina & Vic: A World War II Love Story*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield, 2004), p. 296.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

³⁵⁵ P. Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England 1914-1970*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 171-172.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

understanding WAAF in private,³⁵⁷ WAAFs could only cry in the arms of a close friend in their billet or in the arms of the mother once home on compassionate leave.³⁵⁸ Pip Beck and two of her friends found themselves to be tearful when attending an off duty choir practice. Once one girl started to cry the other two friends did too, but they had to leave the room and cry outside unseen and unheard.³⁵⁹ Some WAAFs cried alone at night in their bed while others in the hut pretended to ignore them. The emotional community of the RAF dictated that when on duty displays of emotion were to be avoided at all costs. Edith Kup:

was mortified to be called out of debriefing to explain to an angry H.Q. why they weren't being informed as our a/c landed – my new w'keeper was just standing there in floods of tears – we had a crash on the runway, everybody being killed... One was her boy friend, but I'm afraid to say she got little sympathy from me, and I sent her back to her billet. I sat down to sort out the chaos. I posted her to one of the satellites the next day, there was no room for failure and all crying must be done off duty and in private. Crews went through enough without harrowing scenes.³⁶⁰

The watchkeeper's grief was regarded as an unnecessary 'harrowing' scene that could have had a negative impact on air crew and station morale, and having broken the code of the emotional regime, the unfortunate WAAF was banished, and as well as her boy friend, she lost the support network of her female friends. It was expected that duty would overcome personal feelings. The girl was punished for failing to conform to the stoic ideal of the emotional community of the WAAF and RAF. As

³⁵⁷ Kup, 'Memoirs of a Wartime WAAF', pp. 62-63, IWM, Documents 507.

³⁵⁸ Gane-Pushman, *We All Wore Blue*, pp. 73-74, 122.

³⁵⁹ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, pp. 77-78.

³⁶⁰ Kup, IWM, Documents 507.

will be discussed below, as an officer, Kup belonged to a more rigid emotional community than other ranks WAAFs.

Loss of aircraft

Within the Air Force, groups of people experienced the loss of aircraft and air crew differently. Engine mechanic Stephen Rew remembered the loss of 'his' Wellington, J Johnny:

‘Sometimes she had been a perfect lady, and sometimes a fickle bitch, but she had been ours, we let the Aircrew fly her, and they had abused our trust; foolish, illogical sentiments, perhaps but very human, and our grief was only partially alleviated when five of her crew turned up safe and sound.’³⁶¹

Ground crews could and did form relationships with flyers, especially those who reached double figures of operations or even completed a tour, At Wickenby they played cards, cricket and football with each other when take-off was delayed.

However other crews might not reach double figures of operations. ‘When a crew did not return there would be glum faces, but within a day or two a new crew would arrive and the whole cycle would begin again.’³⁶² Either through attrition or the completion of their tour, air crew came and went within weeks or months, while mechanics like Eric Howell at Waddington worked on the same station for years.³⁶³

If a crew completed a tour of 30 operations over four to six months,³⁶⁴ they would often celebrate with their ground crew, and promise to keep in touch, although they

³⁶¹ Rew, p. 33-34, RAFMH, B3692.

³⁶² S. Wells, ‘Not all had wings’, WMC, DOC 00252.

³⁶³ Howell, *The OR's Story*, p. 137. See also M. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, (London, Michael Joseph, 1980), p. 156.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120

rarely if ever did.³⁶⁵ Aircraft continued to fly with a new crew, by the end of the war some 'lucky' aircraft had flown more than 100 operations. However ground crew could see the real picture of attrition that even the air crew could not.

Ground crew can be regarded as another separate emotional community. They often believed that the aircraft they worked on was superior to all other types, and they became attached to the individual aircraft they worked on. Indeed they could be saddened more by the loss of 'their' aircraft than by a 'sprog' crew they didn't know. At an OTU a Whitley crashed into a hill, and Ian C----s 'felt a greater sense of loss over AD699's demise than I did for the crew whom I did not know.'³⁶⁶ Although this Whitley was lost from a training unit with a fast turnaround of trainee air crew, ground personnel on operational stations also felt the loss of aircraft keenly. Aircraft belong to the ground crew,³⁶⁷ and were given a character.³⁶⁸ It was common for ground crew to feel affection for 'their kite' although it 'was strictly taboo in conversation' and, until they needed to come to their aircraft's defence if someone had insulted it, they would often refer to it in negative terms as a 'bloody kite.'³⁶⁹ Stephen Rew saw Lancaster G for George as her ground crew's 'mistress', and their 'lives were largely ordered by her whims and caprices.'³⁷⁰ When she was lost on the night 3 / 4 May attacking Mailly-le-Camp, Rew 'felt an unreasoning hatred for every damned aeroplane' he saw as he returned to his billet. He questioned why it had to be his 'G' that was lost and thought it must have been shot down by either flak or

³⁶⁵ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

³⁶⁶ C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

³⁶⁷ Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF*, p. 134.

³⁶⁸ H. E. Bates, *The Stories of Flying Officer X*, (Mayflower, 1976), p. 55. See also: Rew, p. 82, RAFMH, B3692.

³⁶⁹ Rew, p. 82, RAFMH, B3692.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

fighters as he was sure mechanically she was ‘on the top line.’³⁷¹ During two years with 44 squadron at RAF Waddington, Eric Howell lost ten Lancasters;³⁷² like all ground crew, when his aircraft failed to return he worried he had missed something in his inspections that led to each aircraft’s loss.³⁷³ At Woodhall Spa, waiting for his aircraft to return from an operation, Stephen Rew prayed that ‘the centre of his hopes and fears, and her crew,’ would be safely returned to him.³⁷⁴

Guilt

As well as niggling doubts and uncertainty that mechanics and fitters had that they were responsible for an aircraft failing to return, many of these men had joined the Air Force in the hope that they would become flyers. Some of those who were assigned to ‘gash trades,’ or remained as a lowly AC2, were ashamed, angry and frustrated that they had failed to make the grade. John Sommerfield had volunteered to be an air observer but in 1940 he was posted to RAF Siloth as a general duties airman. He complained that men who applied to become air gunners were turned down although large adverts for air crew were continually placed in the press.³⁷⁵ As Sonya Rose argues, in wartime society the importance of individuals ‘doing their bit’ was stressed.³⁷⁶ The adult population was under pressure to be ‘quietly... heroic’ and ‘quintessentially reasonable citizens who willingly and with good humour sacrificed their private and personal interests for the collective good.’³⁷⁷ In the RAF, ground

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 81.

³⁷² Howell, *The OR's Story*, p. 119. A friend lost 21 aircraft. See p. 198.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁷⁴ Rew, p. 44, RAFMH, B3692. Again it is interesting to see he admits to more of an emotional attachment to the aircraft than her crew.

³⁷⁵ Correspondence, J. Sommerfield, (1940-1941), Letter dated 27 November 1940, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I .

³⁷⁶ Rose, *Which people's War*, p. 287.

³⁷⁷ Rose, S. ‘Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain’ *The American Historical*

personnel were constantly reminded of the sacrifice and bravery of the air crew, and some felt guilty that they were not doing more. Too old for air crew duties, Derek Barnes hoped that ‘any infinitesimal danger... would not find... [him] wanting.’³⁷⁸ Later on in the war large numbers of ground personnel volunteered to become gunners, and mechanics were encouraged to become flight engineers.³⁷⁹ As well as the glamour of being air crew, it meant promotion to sergeant,³⁸⁰ but ground crew knew the risks they would be taking and the odds against their surviving a tour.³⁸¹

Today Bomber Command veterans are thought of as either heroes (as victims of a failed military strategy and lacking in deserved recognition), or villains and ‘terror flyers’ responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians. While the political debate over their place in history has coloured testimony since the war, the debate over the legitimacy of area bombing began during the war itself. Protests against bombing were reported in the press,³⁸² as early as 1941 a campaign was started to stop the RAF from bombing at night.³⁸³ However, led by a ‘small intellectual and spiritual elite’ including Vera Britain, George Bernard Shaw and the Bishop of Chichester, their opinions were very much in the minority.³⁸⁴ The ‘Bombing Restriction Committee’ campaign was countered in the press by

Review, 103, 4, (1998), p. 1163.

³⁷⁸ D.G. Barnes, *Cloud Cover*, (London, Rich & Cowan, 1943), p. 85.

³⁷⁹ In the entire RAF over 70,000 ground personnel transferred to aircrew between 1941 and 1945. More than 30,000 of these transferred in 1943. See: Air Ministry, *Royal Air Force Personnel Statistics for the period 3rd September 1939 to 1st September 1945*, (Air Ministry, 1946), p. 190.

³⁸⁰ J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line*, p.87, 463. See also: D. Stafford-Clark, ‘Morale and Flying Experience: Results of a Wartime Study’ *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. 95, No. 398, 1949, p. 16.

³⁸¹ Howell, *The OR’s Story*, p. 20.

³⁸² Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p.53, 125-126.

³⁸³ The Committee for the Abolition of Night-Bombing, *Night Bombing* (1941), Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MRC). MSS.148/UCW/6/13/13/9.

³⁸⁴ M. Connelly, ‘The British People, the Press, and the Strategic Air Campaign against Germany’, *Contemporary British History* 16, 2, (2002), p.40, 52. see also: A. Chandler, ‘The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of Germany in the Second World War’ *The English Historical Review*, 108, 429 (1993), pp. 920-946 and M. Farr, ‘The Labour Party and Strategic Bombing in the Second World War’ *Labour History Review* 77, 1 (2012), pp. 133-153.

continuing propaganda,³⁸⁵ including publications such as J. B. Spaight's *Bombing Vindicated*.³⁸⁶ Although the military did not tend to consume the news, especially in its printed form, many were aware of the increasing capability of Bomber Command to destroy large areas of German cities. In a remarkably prophetic poem 'Sound in the Sky' Stafford-Clark was concerned in 1944 about the morality and ethics of bombing and the future legacy of the campaign:

There may come a day
When we who did this job are made ashamed.
Unsmiling now, his eyes are old with wisdom.
People forget; the end accomplished
But the means disowned. – All I should ask
If I lived then, would be acceptance
In my own heart, of truth untouched by bitterness;
The absolution of sincerity.³⁸⁷

A WAAF was seen crying because she had realised even her small part in the war effort was helping to kill Germans.³⁸⁸ However, in contrast, a flight mechanic was happy in the knowledge that Bomber Command was 'very important' and that Bomber Command 'alone...[was] winning the war.'³⁸⁹ Knowledge of the damage caused by the Blitz on British cities was a powerful justification for the RAF bombing campaign, and yet people surveyed in areas that had not been heavily bombed were more in favour of reprisals than those who had experienced bombing.³⁹⁰ Isolated from the blitzed cities by geography as the war continued, ground personnel were more likely to be in favour of the RAF bombing campaign as a reprisal for the Blitz. A WAAF typist admitted 'It gave me enormous satisfaction

³⁸⁵ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars* pp.121-136.

³⁸⁶ J. M. Spaight, *Bombing Vindicated*, (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1944).

³⁸⁷ D. Stafford-Clark, extract from: 'Sound in the Sky' *Sound in the Sky and other poems*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1944), p.28.

³⁸⁸ Rew, p.68, RAFMH, B3692.

³⁸⁹ Everett, RAFMH, AC96/5.

³⁹⁰ Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*, p.50.

that we were giving the Hun a dose of his own medicine having been through the blitzes (as a civilian) on Birmingham during the early part of the war.’³⁹¹ In 1943 propaganda had a lot in common with Lord Vansittart’s views; in his book *Ground Staff*, an RAF intelligence officer decried the existence of ‘nice Germans’ and called for the escalation of the bombing until Berlin was ‘devastated’ and the population was on ‘their knees.’³⁹² It was easy for ground crew and ground personnel to support the bombing campaign; night after night, they learned about aircraft that failed to return, and for them the flyers were the immediate victims of war rather than the abstract German war worker or civilian. For members of ground personnel who flew on ‘Cooks tours’ over Europe after ‘VE day’ to survey the damage, the sight of ruined cities was ‘sobering’.³⁹³ Robert Collins was posted to Hamburg as part of the Allied force occupying Germany; observing the results of the bombing he ‘felt a tangle of emotions. On the one hand: *We really stuck it to the Nazis this time!* But then, *There were women and children in there...*’³⁹⁴ As Stafford-Clark suggested in his poem above, ideas about guilt and the ethics of area bombing have to be considered in the context of total war. For many their role in Bomber Command only became problematic after the war ended. Many sources written after the war attempt to create a positive narrative of Bomber Command. Personal testimonies describe Operation Manna (in which food was dropped to starving people in the Netherlands), and the use of Bomber Command aircraft to repatriate prisoners of war. However

³⁹¹ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (A. Tedder), RAFMH, AC96/5.

³⁹² Brown, *Ground Staff*, p. 151.

³⁹³ Rew, RAFMH, B3692. See also: C----s, RAFMH, AC96/5.

³⁹⁴ R. Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall: An Ordinary Airman’s War*, (Vancouver, Grey Stone Books, 1986), p. 102 (His emphasis.)

during the war, in common with the wider population, the majority of personnel were firmly in favour of bombing Germany.

Boredom

As Angus Calder and Paul Fussell have highlighted, boredom was a common state for both civilians and Army personnel during the war.³⁹⁵ In the RAF, many personnel, especially ground defence personnel, were also ‘browned off.’ John Sommerfield complained to Mass-Observation that:

we clean buttons, present arms, have ceremonial parades. To prevent us falling into idleness on mornings off we have bayonet drill – how to stick a bloke in the guts, by numbering.... Am trying very hard to change my job (which consists of standing around beside a large A.A. machine gun in wind, rain, cold for no apparent reason, since I can’t fire the gun until ordered, and I can’t be ordered because the phone doesn’t work....).³⁹⁶

WAAF meteorological clerk P. Willmott found her work at an operational station more interesting than she expected, but thought she would ‘get bored with it in time.’ In a letter to a close friend she admitted that:

‘I think I must have a very unstable character Peg. It’s the routine of things which gets me ... probably my dislike of routine is why I like this shift work.’³⁹⁷

Both Sommerfield and Willmott regarded their wartime roles in the context of the trope of ‘doing their bit’ and of stoic acceptance of their place in the Air Force and

³⁹⁵ Calder, *People’s War*, p. 53, 337. Boredom was common in all arms of the military. See Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 96.

³⁹⁶ Sommerfield, correspondence, 27 November 1940, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I.

³⁹⁷ Private Papers, P. Willmott, Letter to Peg 30 July 1943, IWM, Documents. 7199.

wider society. Sommerfield felt he should be performing a more active, heroic role, while Willmott was concerned that she would be found wanting due to a perceived flaw in her character. After a while in the RAF personnel became ‘thick skinned’, they learned to play the system, ‘to scrounge... to evade unnecessary work... [and] to shift responsibility.’³⁹⁸

John Sommerfield acknowledged the difference between service personnel and civilians. RAF personnel lived, thought and felt differently to others in the country.³⁹⁹ Personnel had an ‘extraordinary lack of interest in outside affairs,’⁴⁰⁰ and isolated from the outside world, conversation was ‘almost entirely shop and women.’⁴⁰¹ Meeting for the first time, conversations between members of the forces were very formulaic, and topics centred around service life.⁴⁰² Men moaned ‘about the lousy conditions and the general lousiness of life in the RAF’,⁴⁰³ and Picton reported to Mass-Observation that at least two of his roommates admitted to regular masturbation.⁴⁰⁴ Boredom was symptomatic of individuals’ perceived lack of importance and participation in the war effort. Their apathy and lack of interest in world affairs was a reaction to their isolation from world events and their lack of agency.

Emotional norms and emotional communities

Personnel often forged a sense of belonging to mutually supporting friendship groups. These could be partly constructed around the civilian concepts of class, but

³⁹⁸ R. Picton, Account, Observations and Correspondence, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

³⁹⁹ Sommerfield, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I.

⁴⁰⁰ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² WAAF: Reports from an Observer, (1941-1942), MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁴⁰³ Sommerfield, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/I.

⁴⁰⁴ Picton, MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

although an individuals' original social status played a part in determining their role in the RAF, the subtle hierarchical distinctions between different RAF trade groups were more important. Group identities were partially constructed by when, where and how they worked. Emotional communities formed around the hierarchical groups.⁴⁰⁵ Such groups were formed around shared experience and expectations, and each could have its own unwritten codes of behaviour and rules for inclusion.⁴⁰⁶ As Penny Summerfield highlighted in her study of wartime women, in the women's services, individuals were forced to conform to the values of the group.⁴⁰⁷ When training, Barbara Mills shared a hut with a 'tow' haired 'monstrosity' who being a widow and older than the others, did not fit in.⁴⁰⁸ American, Mary Lee Settle was singled out and bullied because she was 'toffy-nosed'.⁴⁰⁹

The hydraulic metaphor of emotions was applied to both positive and negative emotions described in personal letters and by medical science.⁴¹⁰ A pilot wrote to his WAAF fiancé 'all the feelings and emotions are there in my heart, Nina, just as they have always been, with the safety valve clamped down tightly.'⁴¹¹ She later used similar metaphors in letters to him:

Oh I remember the keen pleasure I felt at seeing you after an absence of four weeks. It was like a river, that has been damned up for so long, running

⁴⁰⁵ K. A. Cerulo, 'Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions' *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1997), pp. 394-395. See also: D. Morgan, 'Theatre of War: Combat, the military and masculinity' in: Brod, H & Kaufman, M (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, (London, Sage Publications, 1994), p. 175.

⁴⁰⁶ M. Weber, 'Class, Status, Party' in: Lemert, C. (ed) *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings, Third Edition*, (Oxford, Westview Press, 2004), p. 120.

⁴⁰⁷ P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 174-177.

⁴⁰⁸ P. Howard- Dobson, (ed) *A WAAF at the Wheel: The Wartime Diary of Barbara Mills 31st October 1941 to 8th October 1942*, (Ipswich, Gresham, 2008), p. 9, 14.

⁴⁰⁹ Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, pp. 32-38. See also: Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 13 and Beech, *One WAAF's War*, p. 40.

⁴¹⁰ See for example, C. P. Symonds, 'The Human Response to Flying Stress: Neurosis in Flying Personnel' *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4326, (1943), pp.703 - 706. Symonds talks about the 'load' a man can carry before he became medically ill.

⁴¹¹ Harrington, *Nina & Vic*, p. 110. Letter to Vic dated 04/06/1944.

swiftly again on its course and overflowing its banks, the cool feel of it, the playful rippling edges, the hot turgid torrents and the strong pull of the tide.⁴¹²

Within the RAF and the WAAF emotional norms were influenced by the emotionology of wider society but with subtle differences. As well as personal relationships, their place in the RAF hierarchy and their proximity to the lives of the air crew had a large impact on the lives and emotions of ground personnel.

For ground crew, squadron morale appeared highest during periods of frequent operations and slumped during quiet periods.⁴¹³ Individuals measured themselves against the perceived heroism and stoicism of the flyers. The ‘resilience’ of the air crew made one intelligence officer feel ‘ashamed of... [his] own inwardness’,⁴¹⁴ and keeping a stiff upper lip on an operational station was ‘a must’.⁴¹⁵ Ground personnel were on edge when the aircraft were operating and felt ‘intense exhilaration’ when they all returned safely.⁴¹⁶ However, the emotional regimes of the Air Force varied according to the hierarchical and gendered structure of the service, within emotional communities formed around rank, trade groups and even individual cliques.

There was a more rigid code of behaviour for officers and other ranks who interacted with air crew on a daily basis. Including, amongst others, intelligence officers, the drivers who took them to their aircraft, and members of ground crew, they felt the need to maintain a positive demeanour for the flyers. At Wickenby and other stations there were separate quarters and messes for the two squadrons.⁴¹⁷ On

⁴¹² Ibid. Letter to Nina dated 20/06/1944.

⁴¹³ Rew, Hendon, 3692, p.57.

⁴¹⁴ Bolitho, H. *A Penguin In The Eyrie*, p. 168.

⁴¹⁵ Hall, *We, Also*, p.33.

⁴¹⁶ Brotherton, p. 38, IWM, Documents 6649.

⁴¹⁷ See the map in chapter 3, p. 146.

an operational station the ground personnel of different squadrons were friendly rivals; they took pride in their squadron and in their own aircraft. Together with the effect of the fortunes of war, the group's personnel worked in also effectively constructed separate emotional communities. On a smaller scale there was rivalry between individual crews within the same squadron.⁴¹⁸ Ground crew took pride in their work,⁴¹⁹ especially in getting their aircraft 'back in the line' after a fault had been identified or it had been damaged.⁴²⁰ This also meant that separate ground crews would be on their own emotional rollercoaster depending on their aircraft returning from raids. Ground defence personnel, trade-less AC2s, kitchen staff, and those with repetitive jobs furthest removed from the war effort were the most likely to be 'browned off', and more likely to complain.

Whatever their trade, officers also conformed to a different, more rigid regime than other ranks because of their status. They had more training and, generally coming from a different social class, they had the responsibility of setting an example to other ranks. Newly promoted to officer rank, one WAAF felt uncomfortable with both her fellow officers and the WAFs she commanded.⁴²¹ As described above, Edith Kup was unsympathetic with the tearful watch office WAAF who could not perform her duty after witnessing her boyfriend's aircraft crash, but she herself had to put a brave face on her own personal loss, and not openly acknowledge her own superstition and fears:

my own crew were to fly 'Q' one night and my heart dropped to my boots –
Higgy came into the the ops room... 'R' our own Ruhr valley express was u/s

⁴¹⁸ Rew, p. 17, RAFMH, B3692.

⁴¹⁹ See for example: Howell, *The O.R.'s story*, p.8, and Rew, pp.16, 83, RAFMH B3692.

⁴²⁰ Wells, WMC, DOC 00252.

⁴²¹ Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, pp. 136-137.

and ‘Q’ the standby a/c. I looked at Higgy, and he just shrugged and gave me a glance I recognised. The target was Hamburg... I met him just leaving the mess after his bacon and eggs as I came off duty. He never said a word, just kissed me and left. They were washed up on T..... several weeks later.⁴²²

Officers shared their living accommodation with less people than other ranks and may therefore had more opportunity for private moments, but they could also be observed by their batman (or woman) and they were also expected to set an example to those in their charge. Arguably for officers like Stafford-Clark their diaries and writing poetry served as emotional refuges and enabled them to release their emotions. Publishing poetry may have been acceptable to him as an educated officer and as a doctor, but it may have been regarded as too effeminate for others.

Airmen were more secure presenting a performance of more typical masculinity to their peers which involved swearing, the objectification of women and bragging about sexual conquests.⁴²³ For men the acceptable emotional refuge for the acknowledgement and ‘release’ of emotions involved masculine drinking culture.

We took Pensy to the Black Bull with the express intention of getting him drunk, but Pensy didn’t want to get drunk. We think that he realised our intentions, and he would not co-operate. He was no dummy. Pensy was hard to understand, his mood swings were not unusual, but his reaction to the loss

⁴²² Kup, p. 52, IWM, Documents 507. The abbreviation ‘u/s’ stands for ‘unserviceable.’ The superstition of personnel is visible here; the air crew preferred their own aircraft and felt that the standby ‘Q’ was unlucky.

⁴²³ See chapter 1, p. 80. For more on the construction of masculinity see: F. J. Barrett, ‘The Organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: The case of the U.S. Navy’, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3, 3, (1996), pp129-142, R. W. Connell, *Masculinities, Second Edition*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), M. Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity’ *The Historical Journal*, 45, 3 (2002), pp. 637-652, and D. Morgan, ‘Theatre of War: Combat, the military and masculinity’ in: Brod, H & Kaufman, M (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities*, (London, Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 165-182.

of his aircraft was unpredictable. From experience we realised that a trip to the Pub would dull and placate his emotions, but not this time.⁴²⁴

The use of alcohol as an ‘anodyne’ was common in the military.⁴²⁵ In the RAF, men drank to celebrate success and to drown their sorrows in times of loss and failure.⁴²⁶

As has been established, although it was frowned upon, women could cry freely in certain spaces and at certain times. They could cry in front of their friends and be consoled by them, ‘conventional barriers of restraint... [were] torn down,’ topics of conversation reached ‘bedrock’ and WAAFs used language they would not have used in public.⁴²⁷ However after petty squabbles a frustrated WAAF ran out of the dorm because she didn’t want to be seen crying.⁴²⁸ For WAAFs, the expression of their emotions was closely linked to their identity, their rank, trade, friendship groups, and love life. Good citizenship for women was to be ‘a good mother’ and ‘sexually virtuous’.⁴²⁹ The Markham report was partially intended to investigate and counter the popular conception of promiscuity and loose morals in the women’s services. Many WAAFs ‘bitterly resented’ the idea that they had joined to ‘get a man’.⁴³⁰ Air crew were excused their hedonistic behaviour. They ‘learned to live in hurry, fall in and out of love much faster... in short what would come to be considered promiscuous a decade later was more or less a necessity...’⁴³¹ Once on an operational station, air crew in their late teens and early twenties were ‘a generation

⁴²⁴ Howell, *The O.R.’s Story*, p. 87.

⁴²⁵ See Fussell, *Wartime*, pp.97-114.

⁴²⁶ Howell, *The O.R.’s Story*, p. 69, 76, 85, 105.

⁴²⁷ WAAF: Reports from an Observer. 05 July 1941, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2,

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Rose, *Which People’s War*, p.287.

⁴³⁰ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 125.

⁴³¹ P. Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past: The lives and losses of a Lancaster crew in 1944-45*, (London, Grubb Street, 1995), p. 160.

without a tomorrow',⁴³² and could have a life expectancy of only weeks. Young men and women were free from parental supervision but constrained by time, and they often had conflicting motives for entering a relationship; men wanted sex, while women hoped for commitment.⁴³³ Some WAAFs formed relationships with flyers because of their maternal and protective instincts.⁴³⁴ Some WAAFs saw it was their duty to console overwrought air crew. Others admitted that although it often led to heartbreak they were 'happiest when... conducting two or three successful affairs.'⁴³⁵ Pip Beck was heart-broken when she lost her wireless operator fiancé, and again when she discovered her next boyfriend had a wife in a Rhodesia.⁴³⁶ However, most WAAFs were aware of the potential risks of forming relationships with air crew, and admitted that sensible advice could be hard to follow.

As One WAAF to Another

Oh, do not fall for a pilot tall,
My bonnie little WAAFY,
And that goes too, for the rest of the crew
You may dance with in the NAAFI

If you give your heart it will fall apart
When the crews take off at night.
So don't be a fool but play it cool,
And they'll come back all right.

You'll only cry if you love a guy
Who's equally fond of you.
For you well know as you see him go
That he's got a heartache too.

Can't you be friends till the b. war ends?

⁴³² J. Rice, *Sand in my Shoes: Wartime Diaries of a WAAF*, (London, Harper Collins, 2006), p. 62.

⁴³³ Langhamer, *English in Love*, pp. 136-137.

⁴³⁴ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 38.

⁴³⁵ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2. For how men and women negotiated commitment and sex see Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 125-145.

⁴³⁶ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 24, 71.

Wait, without fret or fuss.
No, my dear, and nor I fear
Can he and the rest of us.⁴³⁷

The poem acknowledges that although it would be in WAAF's best interests to 'play it cool' it was hard not to fall for the glamour of the flyers. In the emotional communities of groups of WAAFs, there was considerable peer pressure to be in a relationship with a man, particularly a flyer. As Claire Langhamer argues, 'established courtship practices were disrupted and the relationship between public and private expression was differently weighted.'⁴³⁸ Stationed at RAF Digby, Mass-Observation correspondent 'N.M', was not averse to leaving a dance to spend some time in an air-raid shelter kissing and cuddling with a partner. She reported to Mass-Observation that on her station girls felt there was a hierarchy of men that were worth being seen with and they were in competition with each other. Top of her list were Canadian officers (flying) and at the bottom 'must I go out with an erk?' In her eyes Canadians always trumped the English, flyers were preferable to ground personnel, and the higher the rank the better.⁴³⁹ In a small clique of 'Met girls', those without a steady boyfriend were 'regarded as rather a poor fish.' Joan Beech resurrected a love interest with a childhood friend who was in the RAF but posted missing.⁴⁴⁰ On operational stations women were far outnumbered by men; however the bright dresses of civilian girls attracted more men than the blue of WAAF

⁴³⁷ R Whittle in: Hall, *We, Also*, p. 61. Written in the 'ops room' at RAF Scampton in 1942.

⁴³⁸ Langhamer, *English in Love*, pp. 116-117.

⁴³⁹ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2. Digby was a fighter station; the air crew there had a longer life expectancy than bomber crew.

⁴⁴⁰ J. Beech, *One WAAF's War*, (Tunbridge Wells, Costello, 1989), p.40. 'Met' girls worked in the meteorology department.

uniforms.⁴⁴¹ Without the glamour of wings on the uniforms, male ground personnel were at a similar disadvantage.

Unless they were married and had their wife in digs nearby, or had a mistress, sergeants and other older men tended to stay in the mess.⁴⁴² One Mass-Observation correspondent felt that married men who lived near enough to go home were most happy in the RAF, younger men spent nights with 'semi prostitutes' while older airmen engaged in open bigamous relationships, and in a 'practical substitution of husbands' airmen slept at their 'bint's house' whenever they could.⁴⁴³ Canadian Robert Collins thought that married men wanted to sleep with virgins as 'fooling around with other men's wives was immoral' but that for single men married women were 'fair game' [and] they knew what they were getting into...⁴⁴⁴ Relationships with other people, whether colleagues, family or partners were important in helping personnel cope with life on operational stations.

Identity

Although many RAF personnel were British subjects, personnel came from the Dominions and from all over the world; the enemy was the common 'external other'.⁴⁴⁵ As part of the hegemonic cultural construction of the nation, citizenship rested on an obligation to serve the state, and citizenship depended on self sacrifice for the common good.⁴⁴⁶ However, Langhamer sees this period as a time of social

⁴⁴¹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 63.

⁴⁴² Assorted material sent in by other Observers in the RAF, (1939-1943), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/J.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. This 'wife swapping' was common, see: Calder, *The People's War*, p. 314-315. There were also many 'amateur' prostitutes. See: Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 126, 135.

⁴⁴⁴ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 63. See also: Beech, *One WAAF's War*, p.41.

⁴⁴⁵ L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91*, (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 41.

⁴⁴⁶ Rose, *Which People's War?* p.288. See also: Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 91.

change and ‘conflict between self-discipline and self-expression’,⁴⁴⁷ and Rose maintains that issues of gender and class problematised the hegemonic narrative of shared identity.⁴⁴⁸ Although one WAAF thought that service life taught her self restraint and made her realise what a ‘selfish little pip’ she had been at home,⁴⁴⁹ a ‘batwoman’ refused to do domestic chores at an officer’s private house.⁴⁵⁰ As Lucy Noakes discusses, women in uniform challenged established concepts of gender, while men in uniform were an enactment of ‘desirable masculinity.’⁴⁵¹ Both male and female volunteers and conscripts were part of a citizen service and only ‘in it for the duration’, but for many their uniform made them feel superior to civilians.⁴⁵² Although young women could not be thought of as fulfilling the roles of mothers or homemakers,⁴⁵³ their roles in the WAAF were only temporary,⁴⁵⁴ and they were less of a threat to masculinity of male servicemen (who also expected to be demobbed after the war) than women in industry. As well as their perceived place in wider society, an individual’s rank and trade in the RAF played an important part in their identity.⁴⁵⁵

Civilians were also othered, and because of the sacrifice of personal freedoms they made, personnel felt they were doing more for the war effort. Personnel housed in civilian billets potentially had much more freedom than those who lived on the station, (the curfew could be avoided for example). From the military perspective

⁴⁴⁷ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Rose, *Which People’s War?* pp. 15-25.

⁴⁴⁹ Private Papers of Miss P. Willmott (1996), Letter to ‘Peg’ IWM, Documents. 7199.

⁴⁵⁰ Anon, ‘The WAAF Batman’, *The Daily Mail*, 4 March 1943, p.3.

⁴⁵¹ Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 99.

⁴⁵² Beech, *One WAAF’s War*, p.11.

⁴⁵³ Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 65, 71.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁵ See chapter one.

‘this close contact with civilian life was not good for the solidarity of the station’,⁴⁵⁶ but even those who lived on camp were still part of wider society. They drank in public houses, and ate in tea-shops, they used public transport, attended dances, and went to the cinema.

The RAF was aware of the differences between what personnel expected and the reality of service life. An official lecture told ground personnel:

To those of you who joined up for the war, the initial effort of getting into uniform and into the service was stimulating – morale was high.

All that has happened since – the realities, sometimes the discomforts, of the service – the lulls, sometimes the boredom – the disappointments may have had an opposite effect.

Do not let these things worry you.

Morale is affected by Physical, Physiological and Psychological factors. In other words by external factors like the weather, and by internal ones: your state of health and your state of mind.

You cannot control the weather, but to a great extent you can control both your state of health and your state of mind; and if these are sound, your morale will stand the worst physical conditions.⁴⁵⁷

As was shown in chapter three, ground personnel and ground crew in particular endured the hardships of working long hours exposed to the elements, often returning to equally uncomfortable living quarters with poor amenities. WAAFs in some trades worked long night shifts and then struggled to sleep during the day. After a night shift at RAF Dunholme Lodge, Pip Beck was woken by the sound of the Sunday

⁴⁵⁶ S.C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, (London, HMSO, 1955), p. 28.

⁴⁵⁷ RAF: miscellaneous official circulars, (1940-1945), ‘Morale’ p. 8, WL, PP/RMK/D.1.Box 7.

service being taken in the nissen hut next to hers. ‘I was very tired – so tired that I was almost in tears at having my sleep snatched from me – and I became more and more irritable as the service progressed.’⁴⁵⁸ To a certain extent night workers can be considered another emotional community. An observer for Mass-Observation recorded overhearing WAAFs complaining about their pay in comparison to those working in industry.⁴⁵⁹ Military personnel had no recourse to industrial action, and in common with the majority of the voting public, many ground personnel leant to the left politically.⁴⁶⁰ Many felt that, having done their duty as responsible citizens, after the war the state owed them employment, an improvement in living conditions, and the welfare state.⁴⁶¹ At Bomber Command Headquarters the Labour victory in 1945 was seen as a disaster by ‘the Establishment’; for others it was ‘the beginning of a hopeful new age.’⁴⁶²

Group solidarities were created at all levels of the hierarchy and, particularly in groups at the bottom of the hierarchy, their unity could resist the ‘official ethos’ of the service.⁴⁶³ As Tessa Stone concluded in her study, WAAFs were proud of their military status. Although they acknowledged that it was only temporary, they thought of themselves as military personnel rather than civilians. They made alterations to their uniforms to show their individuality rather than to accentuate their femininity,⁴⁶⁴ but more importantly as a signifier of their competence and to give an impression of long service. However, those at the bottom of the hierarchy, disenchanted with the RAF and looking forward to the day they would be demobbed,

⁴⁵⁸ Beck, *Keeping Watch*, p. 125.

⁴⁵⁹ WAAF: Reports from an Observer, MOA, SxMOA1/2/32/3/2.

⁴⁶⁰ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 106.

⁴⁶¹ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.83.

⁴⁶² Collins, *Faith Under Fire*, p. 90.

⁴⁶³ Morgan, ‘Theatre of War’, p. 175.

⁴⁶⁴ Stone, ‘The integration of women into a military service’, p. 206-207.

saw themselves as civilians trapped in the RAF. While such men (and women) have left few records of their lives in the Air Force, they are visible as personnel problematic to the RAF who were thought of by officers as having poor morale or lacking in discipline. Being a member of smaller emotional communities of friends and trade groups gave individuals a sense of shared identity in opposition to the big 'them.' Personnel tried to both protect and conceal their emotions behind an impervious 'hide'; they developed an apathetic, protective cynicism about any promises for an improvement to their lot.⁴⁶⁵ The lowest ranks knew they 'were aircraftmen second class, AC2s, "acey-deucys," "erks," the bottom of the barrel, the lowest form of human life.'⁴⁶⁶

There was 'a special intimacy of men in groups.' They knew more about each other, their 'habits, quirks, and secret worries – than parents, wives or sweethearts ever did.' One man was ashamed of his hairy back, another by warts on his hands and one was embarrassed to reveal to the group in the nissen hut that he was preserving his virginity until he was married.⁴⁶⁷ Recruits preferred to use Christian names during their free time in their accommodation but they were called by their surname and service number by those in authority.⁴⁶⁸ Service numbers were the force's unique identifiers and were needed in order for personnel to be paid. Today service numbers are a mark of honour, and even 70 years after the end of the war, many surviving veterans have not forgotten theirs. Nicknames were also common in the RAF, and were often either a bastardisation of a surname, or a comment on an individual's physical attribute, such as their height or hair colour. Collins worked

⁴⁶⁵ M. L. Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, (London, Pandora Press, 1984). pp. 96-97.

⁴⁶⁶ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p.16.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴⁶⁸ R. Picton, Account, Observations and Correspondence, (1940-1941), MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/H.

with 'Goodie', 'Red' and 'Mac'. He never knew their Christian names and wished for a nickname of his own.⁴⁶⁹ One WAAF felt that girls 'affected boys' names' in order to be a social success.⁴⁷⁰ A nickname was also a badge of belonging to the group, and a specific emotional community.

Belonging to a group was recognised as important in helping individuals cope.⁴⁷¹ People who did not fit in, or who crossed people in other trades or cliques could be bullied.⁴⁷² Leaving aside the problematic national identity, ground personnel saw themselves as part of their trade group, their squadron, the station and the Bomber Command group of which they were part.⁴⁷³ They took pride in their groups' successes and were hard hit by setbacks and losses. Being posted to a new unit damaged the integrity of the group and left individuals feeling vulnerable and insecure. Personnel latched on to others they were posted with or recognised at their new station even if they had previously disliked them.⁴⁷⁴ The homesickness felt by many was not a wish to go home, but rather to be reunited with friends and people they knew. As well as individuals personalising their bed spaces with pin-ups, pictures of films stars and family members,⁴⁷⁵ one group of WAAs decorated their hut at Christmas using the filling from service issue sanitary towels to represent snow on the rafters.⁴⁷⁶ Shared humour and the 'harmless leg-pulling and the sort of badinage common to friends in the local pub' was an 'antidote' to depression,

⁴⁶⁹ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 83.

⁴⁷⁰ Beech, *One WAAF's War*, pp.40-41.

⁴⁷¹ B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000), p. 244.

⁴⁷² Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, pp. 36-37, 144-145.

⁴⁷³ There was also a hierarchy of Bomber Command groups. By the end of the war, the squadrons in Five Group and Eight Group (Pathfinders) were established as elites. See Hastings *Bomber Command*, p. 298.

⁴⁷⁴ Rew, p. 91, RAFMH, B3692.

⁴⁷⁵ Smith *Why Did We Join*, p. 101.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Sanitary towels 'also came in very handy... for polishing floors, [and] covering the eyes when trying to sleep – the loops reaching the ears...'

discomfort and... fear.’⁴⁷⁷ For example, the chorus of ‘The Airmen’s Prayer’, a song popular with members of the RCAF, allowed airmen to safely vent their anger and frustration at their officers.

There were Squadron Leaders and Wing Commanders and Group Captains,
too,
Hands in their pockets with fuck all to do,
Stealing the beer of the poor AC2.
May the Lord shit on them sideways,
May the Lord shit on them sideways,
May the Lord shit on them sideways,
Said the airmen “Fuck you.”⁴⁷⁸

The camaraderie of the group was crucial for many and humour was also used as a form of resistance. Having made their nissen hut their home, when WAAF’s were made to vacate it for air crew they had taken out their revenge by filling the chimney pipes of the hut’s stoves with used sanitary towels. When the air crew lit the stoves the hut quickly filled with smoke.⁴⁷⁹

Coping

Diversions were also important in helping personnel cope with service life. At stations up and down the country personnel staged concert parties, dances, and sports including football leagues between units. (See FIGs. 4.1 & 4.2.)

⁴⁷⁷ ‘Reminiscences by former members of Bomber Command gathered in research for the writing of *The Hardest Victory*’, (R. Hall), RAFMH, AC96/5.

⁴⁷⁸ A. Hopkins, *Songs from the Front & Rear: Canadian Servicemen’s Songs of the Second World War*, (Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 1979), pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷⁹ Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past*, p. 37-39.



FIG. 4.1. The 'Ad Astras' at RAF Wickenby 1944, WMC, WR0076.



FIG. 4.2. WMC, WR 0156, RAF Wickenby Maintenance Wing Group Cup Final Football Team 1944-45.

‘Service life... was a life of physical and mechanical skills with little for the mind. Letters were my refuge.’ Collins was happiest when reading or writing letters.⁴⁸⁰ Although AC1 fitter, Frank Stevens was based at RAF Hibaldstow, a fighter station twenty miles north of Lincoln, the conditions on a bomber station in the ‘pestilent, soul searing nothingness’ of Lincolnshire were the same.⁴⁸¹ He wrote to his parents in Portsmouth regularly, and in a letter dated 12 March 1942 he told them:

The temperature has risen to about zero now, just enough to let the mud reform. There is no sign of spring, and in any case I doubt anything grows here except germs. Monotony, influenza & despair are the chief products of this hole. Seven nights out of eight I know exactly what I shall be doing, - wash, go to the Naafi & eat a meat pasty & chips & coffee, come back – go to bed at 9 – lie there reading and coughing till about 10.30 then merciful sleep until 8 am. So it goes on night after night, week after week, year after year. There was a fellow at Skeabrae so browned off with the RAF that his motto was “Roll on Death.” I begin to understand his feelings.⁴⁸²

Letters and diaries also show evidence of the wartime obsession with food, Frank Taylor was astonished to be given a real egg,⁴⁸³ and Stevens thought a meal of pasty, chips and coffee was worth writing home about. Although he and others complained, they accepted the hardships on operational stations. Like many others, Stevens was bored and counted the days until his next leave. The civilian world was easily accessible during regular leave when British personnel at least could return to their

⁴⁸⁰ Collins, *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, p. 48. (Collins was a Canadian fitter who later became a journalist and author.)

⁴⁸¹ Letters to and from Cpl Stevens, 25 July 1942, RAFMH, X005 6588 033. Hibaldstow is 25 miles north of Lincoln on the ‘Lincoln edge’, the same limestone escarpment which the Bomber stations of Hemswell, Ingham, Scampton, and Waddington were built on.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Letters from Frank Taylor, RAFMH, X002.6183.182.184.

family home. Frequent evening passes allowed personnel off the station to visit cafes, cinemas, dance halls, and public houses. Following the ‘popular association between the RAF and youthful hedonism’,⁴⁸⁴ many personnel dampened emotional responses through dancing and drinking. Joan Wyndham took Benzedrine recreationally to help her keep going during parties.⁴⁸⁵

Conclusion

The recovery of lives and emotions of ground personnel is problematic. There was a reticence to record negative emotions in letters to loved ones; with a few exceptions, most letters home put a brave face on events and living conditions. Mass-Observation and diaries are only slightly more revealing. Ex WAAF's produce considerably more post war testimonies than male personnel. Most sources describe the effects of anxiety and grief on others and tell of the emotional impact of life on a bomber station second hand. For most personnel Bomber Command's role in the war was not a cause for concern, it was a job to be done as an important part of the war effort; indeed some men felt disappointment and guilt that they were unable to become flyers. While the contentious debate over the morals and ethics of area bombing has to be taken into account when using post-war testimony as sources, during the war, most personnel fully supported the actions of Bomber Command. Conforming to the hydraulic model of emotions, emotional refuges were different for different emotional communities. Off duty and amongst close friends, some WAAF's were permitted to release their emotions and cry, while it was more acceptable for men to drown their sorrows with alcohol; officers such as Stafford-Clark found

⁴⁸⁴ Francis, *The Flyer*, p.23.

⁴⁸⁵ J. Wyndham, *Love is Blue: A Wartime Diary*, (London, Flamingo, 1987), p. 157, 188.

solace in his diary and writing poetry. The morale of the entire station was affected by the success of operations and the attrition of air crew. Personnel's darkest days were caused by the loss of aircraft and air crew, or when friendship groups were broken by postings.

As part of the hierarchy of the RAF, all personnel had to know and to come to terms with their place in the scheme of things and their perception of their value to the war effort. Early in the war WAAFs had to contend with the popular conception that they were merely 'officers' groundsheets', while some men who had hoped to become flyers had to resign themselves to a less glamorous position. Ground personnel's perception of their role in the war effort was important. But whatever their role, the performance of their duty and stoic sacrifice was expected. The discomforts and hardships endured by ground personnel were measured against the loss and sacrifice of the air crew according to dominant cultural expectations of stoicism and duty. In the context of the socially constructed cultural archetype of the 'stiff upper lip', 'Britain can take it' emotional resilience, it was their duty to overcome events and hardships without an embarrassing display of their feelings. Airmen and airwomen needed to become thick skinned, or to 'grow a hide' early in their air force career. They had to stoically accept that if they complained, perhaps about cancelled leave or absence of comforts, they would be told: 'You've had it!'⁴⁸⁶ The cultural and social divisions evident in civilian society were reflected in the military, but as well as the rigid emotional regime of the RAF, personnel belonged to smaller emotional communities formed around their rank and responsibility, their trade, shift patterns and their proximity to the aircraft and air crew. The hierarchy of

⁴⁸⁶ See chapter one, p.63.

trades was concurrent with emotional communities and how groups experienced and expressed their emotions. Those near the top of the hierarchy who worked closely with the aircraft or with the air crew took pride in their trade and contribution to the war effort, others further down the order rationalised their involvement in the war as best as they could, however, those at the very bottom of the hierarchy, regarded themselves as civilians caught up in the military machine. Apathy, cynicism and boredom were acceptable expressions of their reaction to the unglamorous and inconsequential roles some other ranks played in the war effort and their lack of agency.

Fear was expected to be the dominant emotion during the war, although for many ground personnel grief, guilt and anxieties were more common emotions. Fear was countered by the discourse of stoicism, and in the culture of the RAF by euphemism and superstition. Individuals in specific trade groups had their own particular fears; more general anxieties about the safety of family and loved ones were shared with the civilian population. Although personnel often worried about their families being bombed by the Germans, living on dispersed stations ground personnel themselves usually felt safe. Anxieties of service life were often caused by the disruption of the supportive emotional community and friendship groups. A sense of belonging to a group was crucial. Ground personnel's emotional survival was dependent on the friendships that were forged, often based around the trade they worked in, and their trade group was also an important part of individual's identity. Older personnel, who had had previous employment before the war, could be married with young families. However, all personnel constructed their identity

through a series of binaries, against the civilian ‘other’, but also in contrast to the ‘them’ of military authority, officers, air crew, and personnel in other trade groups.

The living and working conditions on an operational station were hard. Ground crew worked long hours exposed to the elements. For ground personnel in other trades, rather than the glamorous life suggested by the recruitment posters, their jobs could become routine, they had few luxuries, and everyone suffered in the winter. Personnel became bored; they obsessed about leave and reacted against the constraining nature of the RAF as an institution and their need to express their individuality. The hardest thing to come to terms with was the loss of air craft and air crew, especially as the expression of grief was regarded as a weakness. Personnel coped with traumatic events and loss through the emotional community of their friendship group. Together through humour, drinking and mutual support, these groups helped individuals to cope. It was when individuals were not part of a group, because they did not fit in, or because they had been posted to a new station, that they were more likely to become inefficient, have an emotional break-down or seek escape from the service through a real or feigned illness. It was then that such individuals came to the attention of the RAF authority and the medical officer. Their treatment and the role of the medical officer will be discussed in the next chapter.

THE MEDICAL OFFICER'S ROLE IN RAF BOMBER COMMAND

The first duty of the Service medical officer in war is to maintain the effective strength of his unit by every means in his power. This duty exceeds his individual obligations to his patients even as these obligations precede his personal gain... much of a junior M.O.'s work is exasperatingly trivial.¹

Performing much the same function in the RAF medical service as a general practitioner, the medical officer was the first port of call for personnel of all ranks with any illness. It was their job to distinguish between those who were genuinely ill and those who were malingering, and this was often subjectively determined depending on the individual doctor's interests, knowledge, training and personal whim.² In January 1943 the *British Medical Journal* published an article, 'Aspects of War Medicine in the R.A.F.' by Squadron Leader David Stafford-Clark, RAFVR. In his article he described the daily sick parade and the importance of training efficient medical orderlies. He discussed the treatment of both air crew and ground personnel, and how in many cases prevention was better than treatment. Stafford-Clark's published and unpublished work on air crew morale and flying stress was important in forming the official RAF understanding and policy towards LMF air crew, and its subsequent historiography. Studies have highlighted the importance of the medical

¹ D. Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine in the RAF' *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4282, (1943), p. 139.

² For an example of a similar difference of opinion between medical officers in the Army see: *M. Harrison, Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 250.

officer in maintaining the efficiency of air crew and ensuring that only a small minority ever refused to fly and were found to be ‘lacking in moral fibre’ or ‘LMF.’³ However, the medical treatment of male and female ground personnel who suffered emotional breakdown (also discussed by Stafford-Clark) has not been examined. This chapter examines the prophylactic and primary treatment of ground personnel who were potential neuropsychiatric casualties by RAF medical officers. During the Second World War mental health was often treated as a disciplinary rather than medical problem by the RAF. By the end of the war over 52,000 male personnel (1.5 per cent of the entire home force) and over 15,800 WAAFs (2.4 per cent) had been diagnosed with ‘nervous system and mental diseases.’⁴

Due to an understandable reluctance to admit to perceived weaknesses and mental health problems, there are few examples of life history written by personnel who suffered from mental health issues or emotional problems. Consequently, there is a shift in focus of the sources used in the final section of the thesis. Together with the following chapter, this chapter focuses on the medical officers’ opinion of patients rather than personnel’s experience of treatment. Using official records, medical journal articles and the personal testimony of medical officers, it concentrates on the role of the medical officer in diagnosing and treating mental illness amongst the ground personnel and WAAFs in their care. Together with an

³ See: J. McCarthy, ‘Aircrew and “Lack of Moral Fibre” in the Second World War’ *War and Society*, 2 (1984), pp. 87-101. S. Brandon, ‘LMF in Bomber Command 1939-45: Diagnosis or Denouncement?’ in Freeman & Berrios (eds) *150 Years of British Psychiatry, Vol. 2: The Aftermath*, (Athlone, 1996), pp. 119-129. A. D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939 – 1945*, (Montreal & Kingston), 1996. E. Jones, ‘LMF: The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War’ *The Journal of Military History*, 70 (2006), pp. 439-458. M. K. Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War*, (London, 1995), p. 149. E. Jones, and S. Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*, (Hove, Psychology Press, 2005), pp. 97-98.

⁴ W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, 1972), pp. 496, 613.

understanding of the RAF hierarchy, the medical treatment of ground personnel can be recovered through the sources available. However, the opinions and emotions of medical officers themselves are also important. As well as acting as intermediaries between personnel and the RAF authority, they were crucial members of ground staff in their own right.

This chapter begins by describing the role played by the typical medical officer on operational stations, before considering the social and cultural construction of mental health. It finally considers different definitions of malingering and the medical officer's conflict of duty between the needs of the service and the doctor's duty to the well-being of the individual. Medical officers were more concerned with the operational efficiency of the station, and the health and well being of air crew, than the mental health of ground personnel. Given their minor importance to the RAF and the war effort, individual neuropsychiatric ground personnel patients (both male and female) were marginalised by the medical officer.

The 'typical' medical officer

The RAF medical services expanded rapidly after war was declared to keep pace with the increasing size of the RAF. In September 1939 there were just over 550 doctors and over 121,000 personnel in the entire RAF;⁵ but at the force's largest in 1944, over 2500 doctors were responsible for more than 1,000,000 personnel.⁶ The majority of medical officers recruited were posted to either Flying Training Command or Technical Training Command, which included the majority of the RAF

⁵ For a discussion of the expansion of the Royal Army Medical Corps see: *M. Harrison, Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 8-38.

⁶ S. C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume I Administration*, (London, 1954), p. 84.

hospitals. In July 1941 only approximately one tenth were serving with Bomber Command.⁷ By 1941 a bomber station with two operational squadrons was home to between 2000 - 2500 personnel, and this remained typical throughout the war.⁸ In 1943 RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire was fortunate to have three medical officers: a senior medical officer with the rank of squadron leader and 'two young' flying officers.⁹ However, this was unusual; the majority of bomber stations had one medical officer per squadron. Squadron medical officers usually carried the rank of either flying officer or flight lieutenant, while the senior medical officer was usually a squadron leader.¹⁰ A typical medical officer's 'practice' then was in excess of 1000 patients; consequently when weather was good and the station was busy, the chance of a medical officer being granted leave was remote.¹¹ The vast majority of these doctors were not servicemen and in 1941 over 70 per cent of medical officers were in the RAFVR.¹² Some small satellite stations were even contracted to the care of a civilian medical practitioner who 'to all intents and purposes' worked as 'an M.O. without uniform.'¹³ Few medical officers had any practical experience of mental health problems and most were 'inadequately prepared' for psychiatry.¹⁴ Flying Officer Geoffrey Dean qualified as a doctor in June 1942 and was called up in

⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸ S.C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume II Commands*, (London, 1955), p. 22.

⁹ S. Pickering, *Tales of a Bomber Command WAAF (& her horse)*, (Bognor Regis, 2002), p. 118.

¹⁰ V. Tempest, *Near the Sun: The impressions of a Medical Officer of Bomber Command*, (Brighton, 1946), p. 67.

¹¹ G. Dean, *The Touchstone: A Doctor's Story*, (Liverpool, 2002), p. 38.

¹² Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume I*, p. 43. After hostilities began no further short service commissions were created; every new medical officer became part of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. By 1944 a total of 117 women Medical Officers had been appointed. The majority were posted to WAAF training or recruitment depots and will be outside the scope of this chapter.

¹³ P. B. Corbett, 'Service Medicine', *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4366, (1944), p. 355.

¹⁴ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 127.

August 1943 after spending some time as a locum.¹⁵ Aidan MacCarthy qualified as a doctor from Cork in 1938, but by the following year he acknowledged his career was ‘drifting.’¹⁶ In late 1939, after previously discounting a career in the Army, he and two friends decided to join the RAF rather than the Navy by the toss of a coin in a West End night club.¹⁷

Elliot Philipp served as a medical officer at RAF Feltwell and Mildenhall in East Anglia and published his experiences under the pen name of ‘Victor Tempest’ shortly after the war.¹⁸ The medical centres under his command were staffed by around ten trained medical orderlies and three or four administrative staff who had been trained by the medical officer.¹⁹ Sick quarters on large stations could have beds for up to 35 patients, an examination room, an operating theatre, electrical treatment room and dentist’s surgery.²⁰ The medical officer’s role was wide and varied. The duty medical officer usually worked a twenty-four hour ‘tour of duty’ from eight am and, in case of emergency, was required to inform the NCO in charge of sick quarters of his movements throughout the day.²¹ At RAF Scampton, after presiding over sick parades, the medical officer went on his rounds of the station sick quarters, and in February 1942, as well as the male and female wards, this also included an ‘over-

¹⁵ Dean, *The Touchstone*, pp. 26 - 29.

¹⁶ A. MacCarthy, *A Doctor’s War*, (London, 2006), p. 12. Unable to find employment in Ireland he had found temporary positions in Wales as a locum and in London in one of the few remaining Shilling Surgeries.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12. He joined the RAF on what must have been one of the last short service commissions and was to serve in France in the early stages of the war. By late 1940 he had been promoted to squadron leader and was posted to RAF Honington as senior medical officer. p. 32.

¹⁸ Tempest, *Near the Sun*.

¹⁹ Stafford-Clark, ‘Aspects of War Medicine’, p. 139.

²⁰ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 68. Electrical Treatment rooms were used for therapy for air crew using Ultra Violet and heat lamps. Satellite Stations and new wartime stations used nissen huts or improvised by requisitioning suitable existing buildings. See: Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, pp. 45 - 46. A small satellite station near Norwich had beds for five male and three female patients staffed by a doctor and three medical orderlies. See: Corbett, ‘Service Medicine’, pp. 355-356.

²¹ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 49.

flow of airmen in the Warrant Officer's hut.'²² Each station was equipped with ambulances and, on some well established stations, the sick quarters were prepared for resuscitation and emergency surgery.²³ On satellite stations medical officers were limited to emergency first aid, before transferring the patients to the local RAF hospital.²⁴ In order to minimise complications caused by 'unnecessary movements', it became the medical officer's responsibility to extricate casualties from aircraft; a medical officer and orderlies were expected to attend all crashes and forced landings, even those that occurred away from the airfield.²⁵ Other duties included FFI inspections and regular routine inspections of the station's living conditions including the sleeping quarters, ablutions, messes, kitchens and sanitation.²⁶ On a large dispersed station this sanitary inspection could take up to three days,²⁷ but this meant that he was aware of the sometimes adverse conditions the ground personnel lived and worked in.²⁸ Although the medical officer was responsible for the health of everyone in the squadron or on the station, ground personnel and WAAFs were very much of secondary importance, and it is acknowledged that doctors were predominantly concerned with the physical and mental health of the air crew and their subsequent combat efficiency.²⁹ In order to take every opportunity to observe fluctuations in individual air crew members' morale, the medical officers were

²² Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Operations Record Books, Miscellaneous Units Sept 1939 - Apr 1945. RAF Hospital, Rauceby, T. A. Sweet, 'Training Medical Officers: Report on attachment at Royal Air Force Station Scampton' 29 March 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

²³ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 62.

²⁴ Dean, *The Touchstone*, p. 37.

²⁵ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, pp. 76 – 77. See also: Dean, *The Touchstone*, p. 32, 37. Improvements in practice and equipment developed to extricate injured air crew from crashed or damaged aircraft are outside the scope of this thesis.

²⁶ R. W. B. Ellis, 'Report on attachment at Royal Air Force Station. Scampton' 6 April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

²⁷ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 44.

²⁸ See chapter three.

²⁹ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

expected to attend briefings and debriefings,³⁰ and to socialise with air crew in the mess.³¹ Air Ministry pamphlets gave some instructions and advice regarding the mental health of air crews,³² but in common with the institutionalised hierarchy of the RAF, the emotional well-being and mental health of ground personnel and WAAFs was given less consideration.

Medical officers had a close working relationship with their squadron and station commanding officers. It was their duty to give advice to the commanding officer about the health and hygiene of the station, but it was also expected that the commanding officer would act on such advice.³³ Although medical officers could only advise commanding officers on matters effecting morale,³⁴ to an extent, however unwillingly, they became part of the RAF disciplinary machine. The RAF expected its doctors to concentrate on preventative medicine, and a great deal of stress was placed on the importance of the health of the unit rather than the individual. This shift in priority, together with an understanding of RAF discipline and administration was to be learned in what was initially a three-month training period, although, due to the exigencies of the war, this was sometimes reduced to a week.³⁵ Geoffrey Dean's training consisted of a week 'square bashing' being taught about the RAF, how to march and salute together with some time at RAF Halton

³⁰ Sweet, 'Training Medical Officers', TNA, AIR 29/764.

³¹ C. Symonds and D. Williams, 'Personal Investigation of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel Of Bomber Command' in: Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, (London, 1947), p. 38.

³² Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Registered Files. Royal Air Force Personnel (Code B, 68): Aircrew who refuse or are unfit to fly: disposal policy, Air Ministry Pamphlet 100 'Notes for Medical Officers' TNA, AIR 2/8591. See also: Air Ministry *Air Publication 1269: Manual for Medical and Dental Officers of the Royal Air Force* (London, HMSO, 1940), chapter 6.

³³ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 140.

³⁴ R. Winfield, *The Sky Belongs to Them*, (London, 1976), p.57.

³⁵ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 43.

learning about aviation and tropical medicine.³⁶ Theoretically medical officers were given some training on ‘the psychological health of personnel’³⁷ but in a condensed training schedule this cannot have been very comprehensive, even if it was not completely omitted. Certainly, at the start of the war, the medical knowledge was based on the experiences of the previous war and was largely concerned with physical stresses of flying; the lack of oxygen, the vibration and cold.³⁸ However, lectures on practical psychiatry for new medical officers were held weekly at the Central Medical Establishment at Halton and at local NYDN centres.³⁹ There were also exchanges of doctors between operational bases and RAF hospitals that included NYDN centres.⁴⁰ Flying Officer Jones of 83 Squadron found one such exchange invaluable as he felt there was ‘a tendency for a squadron medical officer to lose touch with the more recent developments in the treatment of disease.’⁴¹ Perhaps influenced by the Beveridge report, towards the end of the war doctors began to discuss the future of post war medicine and whether any lessons could be learnt from their employment in the services. A flight lieutenant was concerned that many medical officers were ‘out of touch with civil practice.’⁴² He believed that too much

³⁶ Dean, *The Touchstone*, pp. 29-30.

³⁷ B.M.J. ‘The R.A.F. Medical Service, 1939 - 1945’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4420, 1945, p. 397. See also G.A. Bell, *To Live Among Heroes: A Medical Officer’s Insight into the Life of 609 Squadron in NW Europe 1944-45*, (London, Grub Street, 2001), p. 2

³⁸ E. J. Dearnaley, and P. B. Warr, *Aircrew Stress in Wartime Operations*, (London, Academic Press, 1979), p.1.

³⁹ Records of the Air Historical Branch, Flying stress: DGMS (RAF)’s correspondence, 1941-1946. DGMS in Appendix 33, TNA, AIR 20/10727. These lectures focused on the mental well being of air crew however. The RAF consultant Charles Symonds gave a lecture on flying stress at Rauceby Hospital in May 1943. 50 station commanders, group senior officers and senior flying instructors and 30 medical officers attended and discussed ‘medico-executive problems’ See: RAF Hospital Rauceby, TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁴⁰ RAF Hospital Rauceby, April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764. These exchanges will be discussed further in the following chapter.

⁴¹ E. Jones, ‘Report on attachment at RAF Hospital Rauceby’ 14 April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁴² E. L. Graff, ‘Refresher Courses for Service Medical Officers’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4304, (1943), p. 19.

time was spent on administration and inspections of sanitation and that hygiene took precedence over tending to the sick. He complained that the general practitioners could not follow the progress on 'interesting' cases as they were treated by specialists, and that the artificial population of male and female adults in the services meant that even specialists were becoming unfamiliar with illnesses affecting the young and old.⁴³ However, another doctor praised the access to effective drugs and the availability of RAF specialists, and he emphasised the importance of efficient orderlies to maintain accurate records and keep abreast of paperwork, which would allow the practitioner to concentrate on the 'clinical aspect of medicine.'⁴⁴ As well as having alternate conceptions of the future of post war medicine, it is clear that these two doctors saw their role as medical officers within the RAF differently, delegating differing amounts of routine administrative tasks to medical orderlies.

The medical officer first came into contact with potential psychoneurotic ground personnel casualties at the daily sick parades. (See FIG 5.1.) The sick parade fulfilled a similar role to the civilian general practitioner's surgery with a duty corporal acting as the receptionist; after reporting, patients were seen in the consulting room.⁴⁵ Separate sick parades were held for officers, WAAFs, NCOs and airmen between 08:30 and 10:30, with a later parade in the afternoon for air crew who had been on night duty.⁴⁶ In this illustration the medical officer, a flying officer complete with stethoscope, gives a cursory examination of the throat of a member of ground personnel, while the medical orderly, who is closely following the doctor, clearly has an administrative role.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁴ Corbett, 'Service Medicine', p. 356.

⁴⁵ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 50.



FIG. 5.1. Raff, *Behind the Spitfires*, (London, Methuen, 1941), p. 26.

Philipp found that on an average day twelve ground personnel and four or five air crew would report for sick parade.⁴⁷ Throughout the war the numbers of sick daily from the entire service never exceeded two per cent of total personnel.⁴⁸ Over a quarter of the illnesses were upper respiratory tract infections including the common cold.⁴⁹ The majority of recorded illnesses lasted less than forty-eight hours.⁵⁰ In a six month (summer time) study of ground personnel (excluding WAAFs) on a typical operational station the average attendance was 9 patients, the fewest 3, and the most

⁴⁷ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Mellor, *Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 467.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 522.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

22.⁵¹ Then at RAF Waterbeach, Stafford-Clark found that on his station the average was slightly higher when on a 'normal morning' a maximum of fifteen men and four women might report sick.⁵² Philipp found that 'ground crew suffer[ed] from gastric troubles, foot troubles from standing long hours, varicose veins and many everyday conditions of an identical nature to those met in general practice.'⁵³ Where possible the patients were treated for minor injuries and complaints in the sick quarters. However, specialists in all fields of medicine, including neuropsychiatry, were available for consultation in RAF hospitals. Personnel had to report for sick parade in uniform with their 'small kit' in case they were told to stay in the sick quarters. One WAAF wondered if the 'ordeal' of sick parade, often being kept waiting for long periods on an uncomfortable bench, was intended to discourage attendance. She preferred to self medicate 'with aspirin, hot water bottle and bed', and believed many chose to only report to sick quarters when in dire need.⁵⁴

Illness varied but the most common reasons for ground personnel to attend sick parade during neuropsychiatric specialist, Squadron Leader, R W Crocket's limited study were respiratory infections (15.2 per cent), skin complaints (13.6 per cent) and injuries including burns (13.6 per cent). Illnesses diagnosed by Crocket as neuroses were the next largest group making up almost a tenth of new patients (9.4 per cent).⁵⁵ However, as a specialist he was more likely to recognise and diagnose

⁵¹ R. W. Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel' *Glasgow Medical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1945, pp. 97 - 98.

⁵² Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

⁵³ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 62. Another medical officer also noticed a high incidence of patients reporting to sick parade with foot troubles while on an exchange visit from RAF Hospital Rauceby to RAF Conningsby. See J. R. Armstrong, Exchange visit to RAF Conningsby, 22 April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁵⁴ S. Woolaston quoted in: B. E. Escott, *A Woman in Air Force Blue: The story of women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the present day*, Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough, 1989, p.145.

⁵⁵ Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses', p. 98.

these conditions; other medical officers may not have identified their patients as such. Stafford-Clark felt that the 'daily sick list' could be easily divided: a 'constantly changing; smaller group, of the 'healthy majority' who were unfortunate enough to 'have something wrong' and a larger group of individuals who repeatedly attended: those with 'feeble spirits and faint-hearts... martyrs to a consuming self-pity... hopeful scroungers... [and] malingerers, all essentially indifferent to the challenge of this war and unable to accept its reality.'⁵⁶ In all the RAF home commands during the war, over 67,000 personnel were diagnosed with diseases of the nervous system and mental diseases and over a third of these cases were invalided from the service.⁵⁷

The majority of medical officers were newly qualified general practitioners with little experience of psychiatry or psychology and limited training. The RAF emphasised the importance of the health and well being of the flyers. Many medical officers considered their knowledge of aviation medicine to take precedence over the study of mental health issues. Routine duties were time consuming, the daily round of inspections and administration and concern with air crew meant that leave was a rare luxury. Only those medical officers with a strong interest in psychiatry such as Stafford-Clark may have taken the time to educate themselves further. The efficiency of the whole station was seen as more important than the complaints of an individual Erk or WAAF. During sick parades it was easier for the medical officer to concentrate on more obvious, organic diseases, physical illness and injuries that were arguably more responsive to treatment than mental health issues. RAF specialists at

⁵⁶ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

⁵⁷ Mellor, *Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 596. As an average over the war this equates to 4.6 invalidings per thousand personnel.

nearby hospitals were available for consultation for complicated cases of all kinds. However, to take advantage of the experience of neuropsychiatric specialists, the medical officer had to correctly diagnose neuropsychiatric illnesses. As will be discussed next, medical officers were influenced by the prevailing cultural assumptions and medical beliefs about mental health.

The social construction of mental health

Following the discussion of the cultural construction of ground personnel in chapter one, this section focuses on the social construction of mental health in wider society, the military and the RAF. It examines how the inter-war legacy of shell shock, soldiers' responses to Dunkirk and civilian responses to the Blitz affected the understanding, diagnoses and treatment of RAF ground personnel with neuropsychiatric symptoms by RAF medical officers and specialists. In the treatment of neuropsychiatric patients, medical officers were informed by theories developed during the inter-war period.

While many of the symptoms are similar, diagnoses such as shell shock, battle fatigue and post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) are not synonymous. Rather each subsequent term is a culturally constructed re-examination of a selection of medically unexplained symptoms that, while it may refer to previous explanations, is specific to its own context.⁵⁸ At the start of the Second World War, in an attempt to reduce the number of neuropsychological casualties, a press report from the Ministry

⁵⁸ A. Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995). See also, H. Croft, 'Emotional Women and Frail Men: Gendered Diagnostics from Shellshock to PTSD, 1914-2010' in: A. Carden-Coyne, (ed) *Gender and Conflict since 1914*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 110, E. Jones, and S. Wessely, 'War Syndromes: The Impact of Culture on Medically Unexplained Symptoms' *Medical History*, 49, (2005), p. 55, and T. Loughran, 'Shell Shock, Trauma, and the First World War: The Making of a Diagnosis and Its Histories' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, 1 (2012), p. 103.

of Pensions made it public that the ‘popular term “shellshock”... was a gross and costly misnomer... [which] should be eliminated entirely from our nomenclature.’⁵⁹ Combat troops displaying symptoms were told they were suffering from battle exhaustion or combat fatigue.⁶⁰ However, the concept of shell shock had achieved such a cultural significance and acceptance in society that it continued to be used in common parlance.⁶¹ The general public regarded war neuroses as significantly different to peacetime ones, however, psychiatrists and neurologists argued that the symptoms of war neuroses were the same as normal psychoneuroses.⁶² The RAF specialists argued that apart from demographic peculiarities, there was little difference between neuroses in civilians or in those who had experienced combat.⁶³ Throughout the early twentieth century there was an increased acceptance of the psychological rather than organic causes for certain symptoms.⁶⁴ Between the wars,

⁵⁹ Anon, ‘Shell-Shock Mistake’ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, 1 Jan. 1940, p. 5. See also: B.M.J. ‘Neuroses in War Time: Memorandum for the Medical Profession’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4119, (1939), p. 1200.

⁶⁰ B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000), p. 255. In Tobruk, soldiers were told they had a ‘fear state’. See: Anon, ‘Fear and Anxiety at Tobruk’ *The Lancet*, 241, 6232, (1943), p. 180.

⁶¹ See for example P. Bottome, *Within the Cup*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1943), p. 145, 160 and: Anon, ‘Shell-Shock Mistake’ *The Times*, p. 5.

⁶² D. K. Henderson, and R. D. Gillespie, *A Text-Book of Psychiatry for Students and Practitioners*, fifth edition, (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 534. See also: W. R. D. Fairbairn, “The War Neurosis: Their Nature and Significance” *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4284, 1943, p. 183, C. P. Symonds and D. J. Williams, ‘Statistical Survey Of The Occurrence Of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel In The Six Months February To August 1942’ in: Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1947, p. 123 and Ministry of Pensions, *Instructions for Medical Boards*, (London, HMSO, 1941), p. 23.

⁶³ R. D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier*, (London, Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1942), pp. 76-77. See also: Symonds and Williams, ‘Statistical Survey of The Occurrence of Psychological Disorders’, p. 123. War Office, *Field Psychiatry for the Medical Officer*, Services Kinematograph Unit, 1944.

⁶⁴ E. Showalter, ‘Male Hysteria: E. H. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock’ in: E. Showalter, *The female Malady: Women Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*, (London, Virago, 1996), p. 190. See also: M. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 182-186.

the importance of ‘unconscious drives’ was increasingly accepted,⁶⁵ and by 1939 it was largely understood that hysteria was caused by the subconscious ‘conflict between the instinct of self-preservation... and... ideas of duty and self respect’.⁶⁶ Edward Shorter states that psychosomatic illnesses are ‘any illness in which physical symptoms, produced by the action of the unconscious mind, are defined by the individual as evidence of organic disease and for which medical help is sought.’⁶⁷ According to Shorter, ‘culture intervenes in both forms, legislating what is legitimate, and mandating what constitutes an appropriate response to the disease.’⁶⁸ Driven by the need to avoid a repetition of the volume of shell shock cases from the First World War and to avoid paying costly pensions, the thousands of men suffering from shell shock had been partly explained by their own inherent weaknesses rather than their experiences of industrial warfare.⁶⁹ During the Second World War, mental breakdowns continued to be explained as a function of a person’s character rather than as a natural reaction to a traumatic event or events. It was believed that events did not cause neurosis, but that they were the excuse on which patients projected their ‘previously existing problems.’⁷⁰ Nervous disorders were constructed as a failure in self discipline,⁷¹ and by the 1930s it was also accepted that in civilian

⁶⁵ M. Thomson, ‘Before Anti-Psychiatry: ‘Mental Health’ in Wartime Britain’, in R. Porter and M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, eds, *Cultures of Psychiatry and Mental Health Care in Post-war Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam, Rudopi, 1998), p. 44.

⁶⁶ B.M.J. ‘Memorandum for the Medical Profession’, p.1200. See also: M. Shapira, ‘The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, 1, (2013), pp. 35, 47–50.

⁶⁷ E. Shorter, *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era*, (New York, Free Press, 1992), p. x.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁶⁹ M. Thomson, ‘Status, Manpower and Mental Fitness: Mental Deficiency in The First World War’ in: R. Cooter, M. Harrison, and S. Sturdy, (eds) *War Medicine and Modernity*, (Stroud, 1999), pp. 154-155.

⁷⁰ J. A. Hadfield, ‘War Neurosis: A Year in a Neuropathic Hospital’ *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4235, (1942), p.321.

⁷¹ E. Slater, ‘The Neurotic Constitution: A Statistical Study of Two Thousand Neurotic Soldiers’ *Journal of Neurology Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, 6, 1, (1943), p.1.

industrial environments ‘the genesis of nervous pathology lay in the workers themselves, not in the industrial environment or in the nature of their work.’⁷²

Research in the inter-war period established that constitutional and environmental influences predisposed some people to psychoneuroses.⁷³ In the limited number of studies of social conditions and mental health, class prejudice and psychological diagnoses were combined to explain working-class behaviour in terms of pathology.⁷⁴ Conforming to cultural expectations of class and race and partly influenced by the eugenics movement, mental health was linked to physical well being; a ‘neurotic constitution and inadequate intellectual endowment... [were] held to be the two most important predisposing factors for the manifestation of neurotic breakdown.’⁷⁵ Some neuroses were expected in people with ‘low intelligence’ or who were ‘feeble-minded’.⁷⁶ It was believed that psycho-dynamic causes reaching back in to patients’ childhood and early family life could both explain and predict their breakdown. As discussed in chapter two, it was hoped that psychological screening could prevent breakdown. After a breakdown occurred, the particular form a hysterical conversion took could almost always be explained by some ‘weakness’ or event in the patient’s history if the doctor searched enough.⁷⁷

By the end of the war, while theories of predisposition were still relevant, it was increasingly accepted that everyone had a breaking point.⁷⁸ Lord Moran, Churchill’s personal physician, believed that ‘a man’s will power was his capital and

⁷² B. E. Whitelaw, ‘Industry and the interior life: industrial ‘experts’ and the mental world of workers in twentieth century Britain’ Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Warwick, 2009), p.117.

⁷³ Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, pp. 166-171.

⁷⁴ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p.163.

⁷⁵ E. Slater, ‘The Neurotic Constitution’, p.15.

⁷⁶ A. Lewis, ‘Incidence of neurosis in England under war conditions’ *The Lancet*, 240, 6207, (1942), p.178.

⁷⁷ Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1927), p.184, 188.

⁷⁸ R. D. Gillespie, ‘War Neurosis after Psychological Trauma’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol.1, No. 4401, 1945, p.653.

he was always spending... When their capital was done they were finished.’⁷⁹

Although mental health problems became less stigmatised during the war, in popular culture, physical rather than psychological aetiologies were more acceptable. The wartime films *This Above All* (1942),⁸⁰ and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) both portray issues of mental health and what seem to be symptoms of hysteria, anxiety or neuroses due to combat.⁸¹ The male protagonists of both films are shown to be suffering from neuroses. In *This Above All*, soldier Clive Briggs has nightmares, headaches and mood swings, while in *A Matter of Life and Death*, Squadron Leader Peter Carter presents medically unexplained symptoms; he suffers from headaches, blind spots in his vision and hallucinations. However, rather than being ‘cracked’ both Clive Briggs and Peter Carter’s symptoms were depicted as being caused by physical injuries. Both required emergency neurosurgery to save their lives and sanity. Both characters were shown to be intelligent and to possess a strong moral code and sense of duty. The possibility that they were deliberately malingering, or were cowards, could be discounted by their implicit courage. Although it ostensibly seems in these films that mental illness was acceptable, ultimately the symptoms both Briggs and Carter exhibit are explained by previous physical injuries rather than psychological trauma. As this suggests, in physically fit military men, mental problems without an organic, physical cause still seem to have been problematic.

⁷⁹ Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, (London, Robinson, 2007), p. 69 – 70. After the war it became politically possible to admit this. During the war, with finite human resources, the military and the medical profession had to do all they could to encourage people to work and fight.

⁸⁰ The film was based on the novel of the same name. E. Knight, *This Above All*, (New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1941).

⁸¹ Released after the war but conceived in late 1944 and filmed during 1945, Powell and Pressburger’s *A Matter of Life and Death*, reflects rather than constructs wartime cultural expectations and understandings of mental health. For a discussion of how well Powell researched Carter’s symptoms of arachnoid adhesions on the olfactory nerve see: D. Broadbent Friedman, *A Matter of Life and Death: The Brain Revealed by the Mind of Michael Powell*, (Bloomington, Author House, 2008).

As discussed previously, the powerful inter-war discourses of fear and anxiety continued throughout the period.⁸² It was believed that fear and anxiety were the main causes of psychoneuroses during wartime, either from an ‘over-stimulation of the fear mechanism’ or from an ‘unconscious emotional conflict’ over continuing to work or fight despite suffering from anxiety.⁸³ Medical theories and definitions of psychoneuroses continued to evolve, but, influenced by theories surrounding shell shock during the First World War, psychoneuroses were largely divided into two distinct syndromes, anxiety or hysteria.⁸⁴

Diagnoses were also influenced by cultural assumptions about social status, class and gender. Hysteria has a long history of association with women, and it was found during and after the previous war that conversion hysterics were more common among the ‘rank and file’ while officers, and even ‘the better class of officers’, were more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety neuroses.⁸⁵ Requiring a level of intelligence and imagination, anxiety states were the product of the patient’s excessive introspection and ‘rumination’ on either past experiences or on their anxiety for the future.⁸⁶

Military personnel were in the prime of life, healthy, fit and under military discipline. It was hoped that psychological selection, training and new more fluid

⁸² I. Burney, ‘War on fear: Solly Zuckerman and civilian nerve in the Second World War’ *History of the Human Sciences*, 25, 5, (2012), p.50. M. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 61, 177. A. Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear; Wartime London 1939-1945’ *Journal of British Studies* 48, 1, (2009), pp. 153-175. See also R. Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation 1919-1939*, (London, Allen Lane, 2009) and M. Shapira, ‘The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, 1, (2013), pp. 31-58.

⁸³ C. P. Symonds, ‘Anxiety Neurosis in Combatants,’ *The Lancet*, 242, 6278, (1943), p. 785. For the Freudian conflict hypotheses see: James, G. W. B. ‘Anxiety Neuroses’, *The Lancet*, 236, 6114, (1940), pp. 561-564.

⁸⁴ Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, pp. 180-195.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.188. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, p.210.

⁸⁶ Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, p. 195.

tactics would reduce the impact of psychoneurotic casualties, but events including the fall of France and the evacuation of the Army from Dunkirk highlighted a large number of neurotic soldiers.⁸⁷ It was assumed that in a modern total war, civilians, men, women and children of all ages, would effectively be in the front line, and in contrast to the ideal of a highly trained, fit, healthy and disciplined soldier. It was believed that civilians would be even more susceptible to neuroses and the psychoneurotic manifestations of fear and anxiety.⁸⁸ Experts predicted millions of psychological casualties among the civilian population during the first six months of bombing suffering from ‘acute panic, hysteria and other neurotic conditions’.⁸⁹ However, after examining cases from Dunkirk and the Blitz, the medical profession discovered that there were far more military psychoneurotic casualties and fewer civilian casualties than were expected.⁹⁰ Edward Glover argued that before the war and during the ‘phoney war’ a ‘mass-neurosis myth’ had formed; the consensus of opinion was that air raids would lead to widespread war neuroses. However, after the Blitz an opposite belief, a ‘no neurosis myth’, that bombing did not cause the expected numbers of civilian psychoneurotic casualties gradually became prevalent.⁹¹ A study on Hull and Birmingham published in 1942 came to the same

⁸⁷ Slater, ‘The Neurotic Constitution’, p. 1. See also: E. Jones, S. and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*, (Hove, Psychology Press, 2005), pp. 59-61.

⁸⁸ Shapira, ‘The Psychological Study of Anxiety’, pp. 31–58.

⁸⁹ R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, HMSO, 1950), p. 20.

⁹⁰ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 171, and E. Glover, ‘Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population (3) The ‘Blitz’ - 1940-41’ *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 23, (1942), p. 29.

⁹¹ Glover, ‘Notes on the Psychological Effects of War’, p. 36. See also: P. E. Vernon, ‘Psychological effects of air raids’ *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 36, 4, (1941), pp. 457-476 and E. Jones, R. Woolven, B. Durodie, and S. Wessely, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War’ *Social History of Medicine*, 17, 3, (2004), pp. 463-479. S. T. Casper, ‘The Origins of the Anglo-American Research Alliance and the Incidence of Civilian Neuroses in Second World War Britain’ *Medical History*, 53, (2008), pp. 327-346. Casper discusses to what extent propaganda and politics drove the construction of this myth.

conclusion.⁹² There were claims that only those who were regarded as already predisposed succumbed. In a study published in 1942, it was found that almost three quarters of civilians with neuroses were neurotic beforehand, and severe neuroses hardly occurred except in those already previously neurotic.⁹³

Constructed by the media in films such as *London Can Take It*, and in the press, it was believed that among the civilian population, the effect of air raids in causing neuroses was ‘almost negligible’.⁹⁴ Although only a minority of the population experienced the bombing, propaganda and the media depicted the Blitz as a national event,⁹⁵ stoicism under adversity was highlighted as a national character trait.⁹⁶ Publishing in the *BMJ*, one doctor maintained that more neuroses were brought to his attention caused by anxiety and the fear of impending raids in 1939 before the Blitz than by actual bombing in 1940.⁹⁷ Giving only six examples of neuroses that were largely explained in terms analogous to shell shock and their proximity to explosions, during the Blitz the *Daily Mail* misquoted from the article and told its readers the ‘number of air-raid neurosis casualties has so far been “surprisingly small.”’⁹⁸ Although specialists were careful to use the medical terminology and maintained that reactions to air raids were the same as ‘those met in

⁹² Burney, ‘War on fear’, p. 66.

⁹³ Lewis, ‘Incidence of neurosis’, p.176. See also: Vernon, ‘Psychological effects of air raids’, p. 457.

⁹⁴ See for example: ‘Fewer Suicides’ *The Times* (London), 1 Sept. 1942, p.5. For an example of this belief articulated in popular fiction see Bottome, *Within the Cup*, p. 236.

⁹⁵ L. Allwright, ‘The war on London: defending the city from the war in the air 1932-1943’ Thesis (Ph.D.) - University of Warwick, 2011. p.426.

⁹⁶ A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London, Pimlico, 2008), p.106.

⁹⁷ G. Pegge, ‘Psychiatric Casualties in London, September, 1940’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4164, (1940), p. 553.

⁹⁸ Anon, ‘The Man who Lost his Nerve’ *The Daily Mail*, 26 October 1940, p. 3. See also: Pegge, ‘Psychiatric Casualties’, pp.553-555.

ordinary civilian life,⁹⁹ the media helped to perpetuate the concept of shell shock and neologisms such as ‘air-raid neurosis.’

The unexpectedly high number of military and the corresponding lack of civilian casualties were explained by the argument that, in contrast to service personnel under military discipline, civilians had a degree of autonomy and were able to move away from a place of danger. Those in the military suffered an internal conflict between self preservation and performing their duty. The concept of ‘secondary gain’ also meant that once the symptoms of a neurosis had been acknowledged, it was in a soldiers’ personal interest, whether consciously or subconsciously, to stall their recovery, while civilians had little to gain from prolonging their illness.¹⁰⁰ In addition, as Ben Shephard argues, civilian psychiatry was being overseen by ‘tough-minded veterans of the First World War’ who deliberately discouraged neuroses, while military psychiatry was largely governed by ‘younger, quasi-Freudian analysts’.¹⁰¹ Unlike civilians, individual soldiers were ‘permitted’ to become psychiatric casualties, while ‘policy towards civilians was much tougher’.¹⁰² In a recent article examining how fear, anxiety, panic and hysteria were conceptualized at the time by psychological experts from both ‘functional and analytical’ perspectives, Michal Shapira disagrees with Shephard and concludes that doctors came to accept that people were susceptible to neuroses and were less

⁹⁹ Vernon, ‘Psychological effects of air raids’, p. 462.

¹⁰⁰ Croft, ‘Emotional Women and Frail Men’, p. 116. ‘Secondary gain’ included added benefits from being ill and, in the case of First World War veterans, could include release from service or payment of pensions received for disabilities such as shell shock. It was believed that paying a pension could fix symptoms and reduce the chance of recovery. The avoidance of secondary gain was used to justify sending servicemen back into combat. See: E. Jones, and S. Wessely, ‘A Paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of psychological trauma in the 20th century’ *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 21 (2007), pp. 164-175

¹⁰¹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 181.

¹⁰² B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology’: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4, (1999), pp. 514-6.

judgemental on civilians displaying symptoms that they believed were caused by fear.¹⁰³ However, neuropsychiatric casualties in the RAF were perceived differently to both civilians and soldiers with similar symptoms, and neither Shephard nor Shapira's conclusions can be directly applied to this study. As Edgar Jones has argued, in the RAF, the stigma of the LMF was used as a deterrent to discourage air crew from becoming psychological casualties.¹⁰⁴ Some reactions to fear were 'ethically illegitimate'.¹⁰⁵ Flyers were told that fear was normal and should be accepted or ignored.¹⁰⁶ Despite this, as Shephard suggests was the case in the Army, RAF medical officers such as Stafford-Clark could be sympathetic to air crew who risked their lives and had broken down towards the end of a tour or after exceptional strain.¹⁰⁷ However, more in common with Shapira's theory, medical officers had little sympathy with ground personnel in relatively safe trades, who seemingly could not cope with the hardships of service life. Measured against both the heroism of the flyers and the publicised stoicism of civilians and WAAFs during the Blitz, ground personnel who broke down were treated more harshly.

¹⁰³ Shapira, 'The Psychological Study of Anxiety', p. 34, 38, 56.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, 'LMF', pp. 439-458. The RAF became more lenient as the war progressed. See: D. Ellin, 'Not Yet Diagnosed Neurotic or Lack of Moral Fibre? The Treatment of Neuropsychiatric Casualties in Bomber Command during the Second World War.' MA thesis (University of Lincoln 2010), pp. 77-80.

¹⁰⁵ Bourke, 'Disciplining the Emotions' pp. 225-234.

¹⁰⁶ Air Ministry, 'Addendum to Pamphlet 100: Notes for Medical Officers on the Psychological care of flying personnel' (unknown date), TNA, AIR 2/8591. See also: C. P. Symonds, 'The Human Response to Flying Stress: Neurosis in Flying Personnel' *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4326, (1943), p.705, and W. A. S. Falla, 'Fear Factors in Flying Personnel' *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 93, (1947), p. 43-54.

¹⁰⁷ See: D. Stafford-Clark, 'Personal Observations on Flying Stress.' Appendix 23, TNA, AIR 20/10727. See also: D. Stafford-Clark, 'Morale and Flying Experience: Results of a Wartime Study' *Journal of Mental Science*, 95, 398, (1949), pp. 10 – 50. See also: Dean, *Touchstone*, p. 33.

Mental Health in the RAF

All the armed forces expanded rapidly after war was declared and there was a perceived difference between professional servicemen and volunteers or conscripted personnel. In the Royal Navy, most cases of mental illness were to be found amongst 'hostilities only' personnel, while the mental health problem in the Army was thought to be more serious than in the other arms because of the high percentage of men of low intelligence who were harder to place in suitable jobs.¹⁰⁸ In the First World War, it was felt that 'the deskilled nature of trench warfare' led to the acceptance of mental defectives into the Army.¹⁰⁹

The cultural assumptions that underpinned the theories of predisposition in turn informed the RAF medical officer. By the 1930s the RAF was regarded as a highly technical service. Many trades required a level of intelligence and mechanical aptitude. Although the rapid expansion of the RAF meant that it became more socially diverse, the 'caste system' of 'class prejudice' remained.¹¹⁰ As in the Army, an individual's 'character' or 'personality type' was crucial to their success or failure in their trade,¹¹¹ and the tacit hierarchy of the service informed prejudices about different groups of people. In the RAF it was believed the very best quality of men were to be found amongst air crew officers. Air crew were commissioned because it was felt certain individuals had 'officer like qualities'.¹¹² At the start of the war these

¹⁰⁸ R. Stafford Cripps, A. V. Alexander, P. J. Grigg, A. H. M. Sinclair 'The Use of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services' p. 6, TNA, CAB 66/27/10.

¹⁰⁹ Thomson, 'Status, Manpower and Mental Fitness', p. 153.

¹¹⁰ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 47-52.

¹¹¹ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 62, 176, 183.

¹¹² J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line*, (Ware, 1997), p. 465.

were defined by the 'public school ethos' and family connections.¹¹³ Despite acknowledging his faults, Arthur Harris regarded Guy Gibson, the leader of the famous Dam Buster operation, as 'a thoroughbred.'¹¹⁴ It was believed that, among air crew, non commissioned officers broke down more frequently because of certain fixed and 'inherent qualities'.¹¹⁵ Within the culture of the RAF it was assumed that this was partly because they were not officers and gentlemen. Such men were often either middle-class ex-grammar-school boys,¹¹⁶ or members of the working classes who had been employed in ground trades, but who had volunteered as air gunners. Working in the Air Ministry personnel department, and responsible for investigating cases of lack of moral fibre, Wing Commander J. Lawson, found that 40 to 50 per cent of LMF cases were from wireless operators and gunners, and he 'expressed the opinion that the educational standard was the main cause.' He felt that even amongst air crew, wireless operators, engineers and gunners felt 'a sense of inferiority' and struggled with the 'unwelcome knowledge, however true, that they were of inferior quality.'¹¹⁷

RAF officers expected the tradesmen and the working classes who constituted the majority of the ground personnel and WAAFs to have certain characteristics that explained their inability to persevere in unpleasant duties. As discussed earlier, at the other end of the spectrum, it was felt that the least intelligent and least ambitious personnel had only a tenuous connection to the flyers and the

¹¹³ Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, p. 122. See also: P. Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back 1940-1945*, (London, 2007).

¹¹⁴ A. Harris, introduction in: G. Gibson *Enemy Coast Ahead*, (London, Michael Joseph, 1951), p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Symonds and Williams, 'Personal Investigation', p. 51. See also: S. Wessely, 'Twentieth-century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.41, No.2, 2006, p. 282.

¹¹⁶ F. Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers: An RAF Navigator's Perspective*, (Barnsley, 2005), p. 64.

¹¹⁷ D. Stafford-Clark, Private Papers, Correspondence file 11941-1969, Letter from Wing Commander Lawson to David Stafford-Clark 14 August 1945, WL, PP/DSC/E/1.

raison d'être of the RAF. Following their study of neuropsychiatric casualties in North Africa, the American psychiatrists Roy Grinker and John Spiegel made similar assumptions about USAAF ground personnel:

members of the ground personnel of the Air Forces have few of the identifications so important to the development of the kind of morale which has proved protective against the traumata of war. This is only to be expected in groups not designed primarily for combat. The groups are loosely organised, there is much shifting and transferring of personnel, and the officers function not so much as leaders, as administrators and technical experts. Because the function of these groups... is essentially civilian in nature ... the outlook is essentially civilian.¹¹⁸

Stafford-Clark found that ground personnel often reported sick with a 'grievance thinly disguised as a vague ache or "terrible pains", when they were called to do some, seemingly irrelevant, unpleasant duty such as a ground defence "backers-up course"'.¹¹⁹ One RAF neurologist believed that many men were invalided from the RAF regiment because they had joined the RAF in the hope that they could avoid the 'horrors' of drill, parades and practice with weapons.¹²⁰

Working at WAAF training selection depots, the RAF psychiatrist Henry Rollin carried out studies to confirm the accepted links between neuropsychiatric disorders and intelligence and, reinforcing class stereotypes, even the correlation between head-lice and intelligence. Rollin found that the majority of WAAFs who failed their trade training did so because of a lack of intelligence, and suggested that

¹¹⁸ R. R. Grinker, and J. P. Spiegel, *War Neuroses in North Africa: The Tunisian Campaign (January-May 1943)*, (New York, The Air Surgeon Army Air Forces, 1943), pp. 102-103.

¹¹⁹ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

¹²⁰ Neuropsychiatry: miscellaneous reports and publications, (1941-1945), E. C. O. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems of an RAF Neuropsychiatric Centre' p. 32, TNA, AIR 49/357.

head lice were ‘more prevalent among the less intelligent recruits.’¹²¹ Another neuropsychiatric specialist discovered in his study of both male and female personnel who broke down, a significant proportion had either left school aged fourteen or had very few qualifications.¹²² However, he believed that provided there were no complications caused by any other predisposition, personnel with a mental age as low as ten could be employed in the services in certain trades.¹²³ Rollin suggested that ‘dullards’ could serve in menial roles such as cook or batwoman.¹²⁴

The ‘industrial misfit’ was a popular trope of industrial psychology in the 1930s,¹²⁵ and it was believed that people often broke down because they were in occupations that they were intellectually and temperamentally unsuited for. Throughout the war it was felt that ‘square pegs’ were being put into ‘round holes.’¹²⁶ Such ‘vocational misfits’ were recognised in the services too.¹²⁷ While some personnel may have been required to perform roles beyond their capabilities, culminating in unnecessary levels of stress, others riled at occupations that to them were unimportant, unglamorous or beneath them. An airman who came to the attention of RAF specialists admitted to being ‘scared stiff’ of standing sentry duty.¹²⁸ Medical officers noted that ground defence personnel had a higher than

¹²¹ H. R. Rollin, ‘Pediculosis Capitis and Intelligence in W.A.A.F. Recruits’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4293, 1943, pp. 475 – 476, and H. R. Rollin, ‘Trade Training failures in the W.A.A.F. Factors in Predisposition and Precipitation’, *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1944, p. 63 – 76.

¹²² D. N. Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’ *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. 90, 1944, p. 568.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 568 - 569. See the discussion on GVK testing in chapter two.

¹²⁴ Rollin, ‘Trade Training failures’, p. 65.

¹²⁵ Whitelaw, ‘Industry and the interior life’, p. 99.

¹²⁶ Anon, ‘Psychiatry and the Services’ *The Lancet*, Vol. 235, No. 6088, 1940, p. 839. See also: E.C.O. Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p.34, TNA, AIR 49/357. R. F. Ashbridge, *Yer actual “ERK”: A Collection of Stories of World War II Ground crews*, (Lincoln, 1998), p. 3, and F. M. E. Davies, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4425, p.583.

¹²⁷ Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, p. 174.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

average sickness rate. Philipp identified that members of the RAF regiment, trained to defend stations from airborne invasion and other threats that failed to materialise ‘naturally became bored’, but ‘Erks’ who with a ‘sense of duty’ were kept busy servicing aircraft around the clock did not often report sick. They did not attempt to use tiredness as an excuse to avoid work.¹²⁹ In the services mental illnesses were explained as a failure to adapt to military life and the main causes of breakdown were thought to be ‘separation from home and family, home worries...[and] the pressure of tasks, physically, intellectually or temperamentally beyond them.’¹³⁰ This failure was regarded as the fault of the individual rather than events or the environment, and they were regarded as inferior. For example, in his study of neuropsychiatric ground personnel one RAF neuropsychiatric specialist established that only 15 per cent participated in what he considered ‘average’ hobbies and interests.¹³¹

The majority of medical officers had little training or knowledge in psychology or psychiatry and used Air Ministry guidelines for the treatment of ‘wavering’ air crew as a model for the treatment of ground crew.¹³² In one investigation into the psychological health of air crew, medical officers were advised to avoid asking questions about the patient’s ‘family or past history which might upset the patient or impair his confidence in himself’.¹³³ Less important ground

¹²⁹ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 62 - 63.

¹³⁰ Slater, ‘The Neurotic Constitution’, p.1. See also: Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 175.

¹³¹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 568. For a discussion of working class hobbies see: R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social relations in Britain 1880-1950*, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1994), pp. 139-166.

¹³² See for example: Air Ministry *Air Publication 1269: Manual for Medical and Dental Officers of the Royal Air Force* (London, HMSO, 1940), pp. 218-238, Air Ministry Pamphlet 100 ‘Notes for Medical Officers’ and Air Ministry Pamphlet 100A ‘Notes for the guidance of medical officers’ TNA, AIR 2/8591.

¹³³ Medical (Code B, 48): Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Registered Files Psychological disorders in flying personnel: occurrence reports, (1942-1945), ‘Investigation into Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel: Instructions to Medical Officers’ Appendix 33A, (1944), pp.16-17, TNA, AIR 2/6252. Less important ground personnel may have been more aggressively questioned.

personnel may have been more aggressively questioned however. Informed by contemporary beliefs, and assuming predisposition existed, specialists persisted in their investigations until they were satisfied a predisposing factor had been identified. Robert Gillespie, the psychiatric consultant for the RAF, found 60 per cent of air crew who broke down 'showed predisposition of at least a moderate degree' compared to the 80 per cent of ground personnel who exhibited 'considerable to severe' predisposition. He felt that the 'difference between the two groups in severity of predisposition is what might be expected in flying personnel compared with ground personnel.'¹³⁴

Bomber Command ground personnel were also compared to the reported bravery of Fighter Command personnel (including WAAF's) who were blitzed on fighter stations and in operation rooms during the opening stages of the 'Battle of Britain'.¹³⁵ After 1942 the Luftwaffe stopped intruder raids on bomber stations,¹³⁶ and ground personnel were often at less risk of death or injury than civilians living in large cities. In Britain, the number of armed forces personnel killed by enemy action did not exceed the number of civilians who died until 'two years of war had passed'.¹³⁷ Those diagnosed with hysteria or anxiety states were also regarded in opposition to mythological stoic civilians who displayed the Blitz spirit.

Consequently, neurotic reactions to fear were inexcusable in ground personnel. It is

¹³⁴ R. D. Gillespie, in: Lord Horder, D. Curran, J. R. Rees, R. D. Gillespie, W. M. Fairlie, H. B. Craigie, J. A. Hadfield, W. R. Reynell 'Discussion of Functional Nervous States in Relation to Service in the Armed Forces' *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* Vol.36, No. 5, 1943, p. 257.

¹³⁵ See for example: Anon, '3 Military Medals for W.A.A.F.s' *The Daily Mail*, 2 November 1940, p. 1, Anon, 'Military Medal for three W.A.A.F.s: Bravery during attack on R.A.F. station' *The Times*, (London), 2 Nov. 1940, p. 2 and Anon, 'Military Medal For Two Women' *The Times* (London), 11 Jan. 1941, p. 6.

¹³⁶ M. Hastings, *Bomber Command*, (London, Michael Joseph, 1980), p. 235.

¹³⁷ Titmuss, *Social Policy*, p. 335.

likely that such beliefs led to them being given a less than sympathetic reception when they presented to their medical officer with psychoneurotic symptoms.¹³⁸

RAF ground personnel were in uniform, but were only infrequently exposed to high levels of danger. In a continuation of industrial psychology and medical theories that rationalised the aetiology of shell shock as a function of inherited constitution and character, the patient's own weaknesses were responsible for their failings rather than external traumatic situations and events. As well as being subservient in rank, in the distinct hierarchy in the RAF, ground personnel were unfavourably compared against the heroic ideal of air crew, and stoic civilians. As Elaine Showalter has argued, men who broke down in the previous war were seen to display traits associated with hysteric women; they were regarded as 'simple, emotional, unthinking, passive, suggestible, dependant and weak'.¹³⁹ Ground personnel who broke down failed to maintain even a low standard of competence. In common with soldiers in the previous war they were thought to display feminine qualities, and they were further emasculated by being identified as having degenerate flaws or character traits. As will be seen in the next chapter, although neuropsychiatric specialists made the distinction between inherent and acquired predisposing factors, RAF medical officers frequently conflated the constitutional origins of predisposition with psycho-dynamic causes.

¹³⁸ For more on the creation of the myth of civilian stoicism see: Allwright, 'The war on London', p. 333.

¹³⁹ E. Showalter, 'Male Hysteria: E. H. Rivers and the Lessons of Shell Shock' in: E. Showalter, *The female Malady: Women Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*, (London, Virago, 1996), 175.

Neuropsychiatric ground personnel

As the majority of medical officers had been drawn from civilian practice, their knowledge of neuropsychiatric illnesses was largely influenced by their civilian rather than military training, although some guidance was given in how to recognise and treat psychoneuroses in air crew. Freudian theories were predominant,¹⁴⁰ and within the RAF it was accepted that neurosis developed ‘from the interaction of stress and a predisposed personality.’¹⁴¹ In the case of a member of air crew who was suspected of developing a neurosis or lacking in moral fibre, the medical officer was instructed to assess the patient’s medical history, looking for any domestic stress, any predisposition to neurosis, while also trying to judge the amount of flying stress the patient had endured. Flying stress could include ‘severe enemy combats, crash-landings, bale-outs [sic] or “shaky dos” in general.’¹⁴² Predisposing factors included ‘nightmares as a child’, introspection, ‘timidity’ psychological illnesses in the patient’s family, ‘headaches’ and ‘eyestrain’, or numerous other clues that would show that the patient was ‘a slightly unstable type’.¹⁴³ Although they could not be expected to form relationships with ground personnel as they could with the smaller numbers of officer air crew, the medical officer would have undertaken an assessment of the patient’s predisposition to psychoneuroses. As was discussed in chapter three, ground personnel often experienced traumatic and stressful events, but it is not known to what extent such experiences were taken into account by medical officers as their risk of death or injury were comparatively low. The neuropsychiatric

¹⁴⁰ H. Binnevelde, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress: A Comparative History of Military Psychology*, (Amsterdam, 1997), p. 89.

¹⁴¹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 567.

¹⁴² Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, AIR 49/357.

¹⁴³ Symonds and Williams, ‘Investigation Of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel By Unit Medical Officers’ *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1947, pp. 84 - 95.

specialist Squadron Leader D. N. Parfitt found that less than ten per cent of his patients with hysteria ‘had suffered bombing or serious threats’ and that only a quarter of those diagnosed with an anxiety state had undergone ‘terrifying experiences’.¹⁴⁴ Such experiences were familiar to doctors who had attended crashed aircraft. For instance, in figure 5.2 the commanding officer, a padre and a medical officer attempt to rescue the crew from a burning Mosquito after it crashed at Predannack, Cornwall.



Fig 5.2. Photographs. Royal air Force: Air Defence of Great Britain, 1943-1944, IWM, CH 18732.

For medical officers, risking their lives to rescue crewmen from aircraft with the inherent danger of aviation fuel and unexploded munitions was not an unusual

¹⁴⁴ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, pp. 570 - 573.

occurrence, and dealing with the dead and injured was common.¹⁴⁵ Medical officers could experience terrifying and traumatic events as part of their everyday duties. Some (like Parfitt above) subsequently had little patience with personnel who developed symptoms of hysteria or anxiety without experiencing any risk or danger to themselves.

As is the case with air crew, many potential cases of neuropsychiatric casualties amongst RAF ground personnel may have been averted and unrecorded by an imaginative and understanding medical officer. Recruits often found the rapid change from civilian life to a military regime hard to cope with and medical officers were forced to undertake a role similar to an 'industrial welfare worker'.¹⁴⁶ It was possible for the medical officer to find himself organising the exchange of ill-fitting clothing and equipment that was considered detrimental to their patient's well-being.¹⁴⁷ Although diagnoses were defined by the Air Ministry, a wide variety of treatments and outcomes were still available to the medical officer, and unlike civilian doctors, the medical officer had recourse to military discipline. However, Stafford-Clark believed that it was more effective to rekindle the patient's enthusiasm through a 'pep talk' as the threat of military discipline was often insufficient, no matter how 'just' it was. He hoped to remind his patients of the 'nature of their obligations' while giving them an 'insight... into the shallow inadequacy of their symptoms'.¹⁴⁸ Patients exhibiting somatic manifestations of neuropsychological problems could be given medical treatment for their symptoms,

¹⁴⁵ Dean, *The Touchstone*, pp. 37–39.

¹⁴⁶ Binneveld, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress*, p. 161.

¹⁴⁷ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁸ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

or even a placebo.¹⁴⁹ Frustrated and depressed patients who complained that certain tasks seemed ‘trivial and inappropriate’ could be reassured that their work, however tedious, was important to the war effort,¹⁵⁰ and if caught early hysterics could be successfully encouraged to carry on with their duties.¹⁵¹ The medical officer was authorised to enforce sick leave, either in the patient’s quarters or in the station sick quarters, or to recommend short periods of leave.¹⁵² If necessary, after consultation with the patient’s immediate superiors, the medical officer could recommend to the commanding officer that the ‘misemployed’ [sic] were remustered or given a more suitable occupation.¹⁵³ Parfitt admitted that ‘treatment aimed at resolving the immediate strains produc[ed] satisfactory results from the point of view of the continuation of service duties.’¹⁵⁴ However, as this may have often entailed a downgrading in medical category, reposting or remustering to a new trade,¹⁵⁵ or other changes in duties, the dilemma confronting medical officers was whether to prioritise the needs of the individual or the service. There was a risk that, by deceiving the medical officer, some individuals could shirk their duties and possibly escape military service entirely. The medical officer was not able to downgrade the patient’s medical category or invalid them from the service, but they were able to begin this process by referring them to specialists at RAF hospitals and NYDN centres. The treatment of patients referred to RAF hospitals as both in or out-patients will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵⁰ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 34, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁵¹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 572.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 577.

¹⁵³ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 34, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁵⁴ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 566.

¹⁵⁵ Remustering was the administrative term for re-assignment and retraining in a new trade. A downgrading in medical category could only be authorised by a medical board. Both remustering and downgrading involved convoluted bureaucratic processes and, apart from his original recommendation, were beyond the influence of the medical officer.

The medical officer was a cog in the military medical machine, he was expected only to perform as a general practitioner, and awkward cases were to be referred to centralised specialists. Although it is likely that many patients with early symptoms of neuropsychiatric illness may not have been recognised, influenced by their training on the psychological treatment of air crew, more imaginative medical officers tried to prevent neuropsychiatric illness rather than attempt a cure later. Neuropsychiatric illness was seen to be a function of the patients' ability to cope with stress and how predisposed they were. Ultimately, the amount of stress it was felt personnel had suffered and the amount of predisposition recorded for any given patient was dependent on the subjective opinion of the doctor, the openness of the patient, the time available, and the questions the doctor asked.

WAAFS

Dislocated from the masculine heroism of air crew by their gender, WAAFs were also found to be more prone to sickness including neuropsychiatric illnesses.¹⁵⁶ Although it varied during the war, statistically women were twice more likely to report sick than their male counterparts, and more had illnesses lasting over forty eight hours. However, perhaps due to a larger proportion of minor physical ailments among women, the average length of treatment until return to duty was shorter.¹⁵⁷ A study of absences lasting more than three days among 10,000 civilian workers in 1943 and 1944 found similar findings; males lost twice as much time from work due to accidents, but women were absent for more days during the year, and were over five times more likely to have time off due to what was diagnosed as 'nervous

¹⁵⁶ S. I. Ballard, and H. G. Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties in a Women's Service', *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4387, (1945), p. 293.

¹⁵⁷ Mellor, *Casualties and Medical Statistics*, pp. 601 - 604.

debility.¹⁵⁸ In addition, when WAAFs were referred to a neuropsychiatric specialist by their medical officer, only two fifths were returned to full duty, compared with three quarters of men.¹⁵⁹ The concept of a ‘suburban neurosis’, had been introduced to the medical profession by Stephen Taylor in *The Lancet* in 1938. Taylor believed that factors including financial concerns, boredom, a lack of community and an unfulfilling life, led to a psychological conflict that in turn caused neurosis in young middle class women.¹⁶⁰ He argued that a sense of purpose could distract them and lead to an improvement in their symptoms.¹⁶¹ It was acknowledged that recruits brought their established neurosis with them into the WAAF. For many however, the purpose and regimentation of military service did not provide relief from neurosis as may have been expected. One RAF specialist thought that the WAAF attracted women who were ‘emotional or impulsive types’ and that their ‘inability to adjust’ to service life heightened such psychological failings.¹⁶² In his study of 2000 female auxiliary service personnel, the psychiatrist, William Linford Rees, stated that women had particular problems adapting to military life. Women found the loss of individuality brought about by conforming to military discipline, wearing uniforms and the lack of privacy disturbing.¹⁶³ Women were regarded as conversely either ‘solitary, shy individuals’ or were affected negatively by the breakup of ‘strong

¹⁵⁸ Anon, ‘Proceedings of the Association of Industrial Medical Officers’ *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 3, 1, (1946), pp. 50-51.

¹⁵⁹ S. I. Ballard, and H. G. Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre: an Analysis of 2,000 Cases’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4357, 1944, p. 42.

¹⁶⁰ S. Taylor, ‘The Suburban Neurosis’, *The Lancet*, 231, 5978, (1938), pp. 759-761. See also: R. Hayward, *Desperate Housewives and Model Amoebae: the invention of suburban neurosis in inter-war Britain* in M. Jackson (ed.), *Health and the Modern Home* (London: Routledge, 2007): 42-62.

¹⁶¹ Taylor, ‘Suburban Neurosis’, p.760.

¹⁶² Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 32, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁶³ W. Linford Rees, ‘Neurosis in the Women’s Auxiliary Services’ *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 95, No. 1192, 1949, p. 887. See also Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre’, p. 42.

emotional attachments' caused by posting.¹⁶⁴ Medical officer Flight Lieutenant M. Hamilton stressed the importance of service personnel's 'emotional development', exchanging their 'dependence on the family for dependence on the community.'¹⁶⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, groups of WAAFs formed strong friendship groups and emotional communities. One WAAF wrote:

the last few days I've felt a bit fed up with everything. I think the fact that quite a few of the crowd we know have been posted, may account for this. One gets so used to everything... - then suddenly bang - & off everyone seems to go.¹⁶⁶

The importance of a strong esprit de corps was emphasised in all the services, however it was acknowledged that amongst ground personnel this could be hard to achieve, as personnel were posted as individuals rather than redeployed as complete units. It was felt that for this reason, in addition to unit morale, women especially suffered emotional upsets as their 'strong individual emotional ties' were broken.¹⁶⁷ Medical officers made further assumptions based on gender stereotypes, and the patriarchal belief that men were rational while women were emotional.¹⁶⁸ Some women were described as 'aggressive' psychopaths; they were 'vivacious, attractive and intelligent' but spoilt and prone to 'rebellious antisocial activity.'¹⁶⁹ Women were also more likely to be diagnosed as hysterics than men.¹⁷⁰ Rarer psychosomatic symptoms took the form of headaches, 'rheumatic pains' and 'gynaecological

¹⁶⁴ Ballard, and Miller, 'Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre', p. 42.

¹⁶⁵ M. Hamilton, 'Correspondence: War Neurosis, Morale, and Social Psychology' *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4295, (1943), p. 549.

¹⁶⁶ Private Papers of Miss P. Willmott, IWM, Documents. 7199.

¹⁶⁷ Ballard, and Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties in a Women's Service', p. 294.

¹⁶⁸ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), p.164.

¹⁶⁹ Ballard, and Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties in a Women's Service', p. 293.

¹⁷⁰ Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel', p. 571.

complaints especially related to menstruation.¹⁷¹ Despite the fact that many women in the WAAF were active sexually, as can be seen in the numbers treated for venereal disease or who left the service due to pregnancy, it was expected that serving in the WAAF had a 'psychobiological significance' as 'traditional female values' and 'primary biological functions' had to be ignored.¹⁷² Bomber Command had the second highest rate of recorded venereal disease amongst WAAF's at 3.1 per thousand in 1942.¹⁷³ In 1945 almost 2000 WAAF's left the service due to pregnancy. (13.26 per thousand.)¹⁷⁴ In comparison, the rate of venereal disease amongst men in the entire service peaked at 18.6 per thousand in 1945,¹⁷⁵ while the highest rate was amongst Bomber Command air crew at 34.5 per thousand in 1942.¹⁷⁶ Although a minority of older women could perhaps be thought of as maternal figures who cared for the flyers, as discussed in chapter one, it was easier to understand women who wanted to serve as a sexual predators. The social and cultural assumptions which contributed to the construction of the hierarchy of WAAF trades were widely accepted and were later reproduced in the official history:

a large proportion of patients had a low standard of intelligence... the highest rates occurred in the trades of A.C.H., waitress, batwoman, sparking-plug

¹⁷¹ Ballard, and Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties in a Women's Service', p. 293.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁷³ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume I*, p. 473. Flying training and maintenance commands had more at 3.9 per thousand.

¹⁷⁴ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume I*, p. 474.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁷⁶ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume II*, p. 73. For more on VD in military and civilian populations see: L. A. Hall 'War always brings it on: War STDs, the Military, and the Civilian Population in Britain, 1850-1950', and M. Harrison, 'Sex and the Citizen Soldier: Health, Morals and Discipline in the British Army during the Second World War', in: Cooter, Harrison, and Sturdy, *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, pp. 205-249.

tester and fabric worker, whereas trades such as radio operator, special duties clerk and teleprinter operator had a very low incidence.¹⁷⁷

Although the hedonistic excesses of air crew explained and excused their high incidence of VD, the rates of disease amongst different WAAF trade groups was seen as evidence of the quality of the women in these roles.

The incidence of Women reporting for sick parade for what were regarded as spurious reasons was believed to increase after 1942 and the conscription of women to the services (see chapter two). Philipp noticed the ‘deterioration in the type of girl entering the Service.’¹⁷⁸ It was found that men and women who failed to cope had frequently ‘joined the service for poor or inadequate reasons.’¹⁷⁹ As discussed in chapter two, spurious motives for women joining the WAAF included the glamour of serving with air crew, to avoid domestic problems, or an attempt to forget bereavement. Others may have enlisted to overcome feelings of inadequacy or to meet their ‘desire for masculine identification.’¹⁸⁰ Rollin found that in his study of women who failed their trade training almost a quarter had ‘selfish rather than patriotic’ motives for volunteering for the WAAF. These reasons included wanting an ‘open air life’, wishing to avoid working in a munitions factory, thinking it ‘would take her out of herself’ and ‘to spite her husband.’¹⁸¹ It was accepted that for servicemen RAF discipline enforced a ‘social responsibility’ but that the ‘less stringent’ discipline of the WAAF was ‘inadequate’; women could not be pushed as

¹⁷⁷ Rexford-Welch, *Medical Services: Volume I*, p. 461.

¹⁷⁸ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 567. See also: TNA, AIR 49/357. Jewesbury ‘Work and Problems’, p. 32.

¹⁸⁰ W. Linford Rees, ‘Neurosis in the Women’s Auxiliary Services’, p. 888. This study included up to 300 WAAFs.

¹⁸¹ Rollin, ‘Trade Training failures’, p. 73.

‘vigorously.’¹⁸² In the early days of the WAAF, being absent without leave or even desertion was not a punishable offence,¹⁸³ and until 1944 a WAAF could not be disciplined by incarceration, detained on camp for more than a fortnight, punished by heavy duties or have her pay withheld for long.¹⁸⁴ Many women who struggled to cope with the discipline and demands of a military life may have been invalidated from the service. The service had invested less in them and they were easier to replace. Even by the end of the war, neurotic women were thought to be more of ‘a menace to unit morale and discipline’.¹⁸⁵

In summary, the treatment of women in Bomber Command was determined by discourses that socially constructed ideological gender differences. With the expansion of the WAAF and after conscription was introduced, women’s motives for joining up were questioned. Women were likened to children; they were overtly emotional and selfishly individualistic. It was expected that many would struggle to adapt to the strict regime of a military environment. Medical officers’ diagnoses and treatment of women were influenced by all these preconceptions.

Identifying Malingering

As Ben Shephard argues, malingering had a long history, and following an unwritten code, soldiers differentiated between those who feigned symptoms to avoid danger or work that others would then have to do, and ‘swinging the lead’ to deceive doctors and experts when it did not affect their comrades.¹⁸⁶ In the RAF too, when it was

¹⁸² Ballard, and Miller, ‘Psychiatric Casualties in a Women’s Service’, p. 294. See also: Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 567.

¹⁸³ Escott, *Woman in Air Force Blue*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁴ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p. 44.

¹⁸⁵ Ballard, and Miller, ‘Psychiatric Casualties in a Women’s Service’, p. 293.

¹⁸⁶ B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000), p. 114.

appropriate, the crafty skill of a malingerer could be acknowledged.¹⁸⁷ (See Fig. 5.3.)



FIG. 5.3. D. Langdon, *All Buttoned Up! A Scrapbook of RAF Cartoons*, (London, Sylvan Press, 1944), p. 43.

Langdon's Latin translation of lead swinging gives the practice a humorous and believable medical name. Supposedly ill in bed, the character is smoking a cigarette and winking at the viewer. The audience shares the knowledge that he is deliberately avoiding work by feigning or exaggerating illness, and the humour is at the expense of the RAF military authority and the medical profession.

¹⁸⁷ In the Army 'rackets' to convince the medical officer that a soldier was still too ill to return to duty were shared by patients being treated at Regimental Aid Posts. See: M. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 264.

For those at the bottom of the hierarchy, malingering was a form of resistance and a way of reclaiming personal agency. In the book *Industrial Medicine*, Dr Donald Norris defined four types of malingering:

1. Exaggeration – Genuine symptoms are present, but the patient fraudulently makes these out to be worse than they are.
2. Perseveration – Genuine symptoms were formerly present, have ceased, but are fraudulently alleged to continue.
3. Transference – Genuine symptoms are fraudulently attributed to some cause which would entitle the patient to benefit, although he knows that in fact they are due to some other cause.
4. Invention – The patient has no symptoms, but fraudulently represents that he has.¹⁸⁸

Another doctor defined malingering as reporting purely invented symptoms, while ‘skrimshankers’ exaggerated an actual illness for deliberate gain.¹⁸⁹ Philipp believed in his experience that malingering was very rare, but that ‘a man... employed on duties... uncongenial to him... may exaggerate symptoms that will give... relief from... duties temporarily.’¹⁹⁰ As a form of fraud, it was understood that malingerers were often either of criminal persuasion, of ‘less than average intelligence’, or both.¹⁹¹ However, using Freudian theories, malingering had been increasingly medicalised throughout the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹² Certain symptoms

¹⁸⁸ D. C. Norris, ‘Malingering’ in: Rolleston, H. and Moncrieff, A. A. (eds) *The Practitioner Handbooks: Industrial Medicine*, (London, 1944), p. 99.

¹⁸⁹ Hadfield, ‘War Neurosis’, p. 284.

¹⁹⁰ Tempest, *Near the Sun*, p.62.

¹⁹¹ Norris, ‘Malingering’, p. 102.

¹⁹² R. Cooter, Malingering in Modernity: Psychological Scripts and Adversarial Encounters During the First World War’ in: Cooter, Harrison, and Sturdy, *War Medicine and Modernity*, p.135.

were regarded as illegitimate; individuals were discouraged from developing them at the risk of being ‘undeserving’.¹⁹³ An Army psychiatrist maintained that:

The malingerer is a psychopath with... a complete absence of guilt-feeling concerning his malingering... he consciously assumes and exploits symptoms of physical or mental illness...¹⁹⁴

Medical officers faced the problem of differentiating between those with a genuine physical complaint, and potential psychopaths who were malingering. As well as their dubious symptoms, Norris suggested that malingerers had a ‘tendency’ to ‘overact’ and, assuming they would not be believed, were often aggressive towards the doctor.¹⁹⁵ They also made the mistake of concentrating on one major symptom, often choosing to complain of unrealistic ‘constant unvarying pain’.¹⁹⁶ Others were concerned that, in common with theories regarding shell shock, if a patient with psychological disorders was given a diagnosis such as ‘a tired heart’ this would ‘fix his symptoms, in some cases for life.’¹⁹⁷ Although, as part of their treatment, they were encouraged to continue with their duties and not to report to the medical officer, neurotics also attended subsequent sick parades more often than people with other illnesses.¹⁹⁸ It is likely that some patients with genuine complaints were defined as neurotic or malingerers simply because the doctor had failed to treat them. Under service conditions a second opinion was the prerogative of the medical officer not the patient. By the end of the war, there was also growing concern that, through increased awareness of neuropsychiatric illness, malingerers knew the correct

¹⁹³ Shorter, *From Paralysis to Fatigue*, p. x.

¹⁹⁴ R. Good, ‘Malingering’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No.4264, 1942, p. 362.

¹⁹⁵ Norris, ‘Malingering’, p. 102.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁹⁷ Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre’, p. 42.

¹⁹⁸ Crocket, ‘Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses’, p. 100.

responses to the doctor's questioning to ensure an advantageous downgrading or discharge.¹⁹⁹

During the First World War, preventing malingering became a principal duty of medical officers.²⁰⁰ In industrial factories and workshops of the 1930s the 'neurotic worker' was identified by 'repeated illness and absenteeism, unsatisfactory home conditions and introversion.'²⁰¹ In civilian industrial medicine it was felt that, at least on their first consultation, every patient should be given a benefit of doubt,²⁰² and it seems as though this was the case in the RAF. The majority of medical officers certainly tried to rule out physical illness before labelling a patient as neurotic. 'Assessment [was] naturally difficult,'²⁰³ and usually, in the case of suspected neuropsychiatric patients, a physical examination was combined with an informal psychiatric interview, but it was 'sometimes hard to separate psychiatric symptoms from immorality.'²⁰⁴

The problem facing station medical officers was distinguishing those who were genuinely ill from those who were perceived to be 'swinging the lead' in order to 'work their ticket'.²⁰⁵ As Crocket discussed, 'two patients presenting... with almost identical symptom-complexes can show extreme differences in behaviour... one will quickly become totally incapacitated, while the other remains on duty, and apparently refuses to permit his disability to prevent him doing so.'²⁰⁶ Each case should have been taken on its own merits, and in each case the medical officer had to

¹⁹⁹ P. H. Perkins, 'Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services' *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4428, 1945, p. 706. See also: Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel', p. 570.

²⁰⁰ Cooter, 'Malingering in Modernity', p.125.

²⁰¹ Whitelaw, 'Industry and the interior life', p. 101.

²⁰² Norris, 'Malingering', p. 101 - 102.

²⁰³ Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses', p. 103.

²⁰⁴ A. Gregg, 'What is Psychiatry?' *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4346, 1944, p. 551.

²⁰⁵ Cooter, 'Malingering in Modernity', p.126. See also 'Reports and letters from LAC Papineau', (1941). MOA, SxMOA1/2/29/2/2/G.

²⁰⁶ Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses', p. 103.

make an informed, but almost entirely subjective decision. Faced with similar problems, W. E. Hick, an Army medical officer wrote:

As to the methods in vogue for separating the wheat from the tares, they fall into three classes:

- (1) “The Sign from Heaven,” otherwise known as clinical intuition or diagnostic acumen.
- (2) “The Geographical.” Certain parts of the British Isles seem to maintain steady streams of “bad eggs” to the Services. Wild horses would not induce me to name my own favourite black spots.
- (3) “The Police Method,” which relies on “information received” and on catching the accused out in contradictory statements.²⁰⁷

Crocket admitted that in an ‘ordinary psychiatric examination one uses rough and ready methods, often half unconsciously.’²⁰⁸ However, the methods described by Hick highlight some of the preconceptions and concerns prevalent at the time. Hick’s use of ‘clinical intuition or diagnostic acumen’ suggests the logic with which Stafford-Clark identified the ‘handful’ of patients who saw illness as an escape from disagreeable duties’ at RAF Waterbeach.²⁰⁹ They were discernible because their symptoms appeared unresponsive to treatment, or as in Crocket’s experience, they consistently and repeatedly attended sick parade ‘with melancholy and improbable tales of woe.’²¹⁰ The second of Hick’s ‘classes’, his ‘Geographical’ method of exposing ‘bad eggs’ illustrates the functioning of race and class prejudices and it

²⁰⁷ W. E. Hick, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4425, 1945, p. 583.

²⁰⁸ Crocket, ‘Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses’, p. 104.

²⁰⁹ Stafford-Clark, ‘Aspects of War Medicine’, p. 139.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139. See also: Crocket, ‘Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses’, p. 97. Crocket also thought neurotics could be characterised by the ‘frequency with which they attend sick parades, and the persistence of their symptoms.’

would be interesting to speculate where these ‘black spots’ were. In the case of the WAAF, gender stereotypes may also have influenced doctor’s diagnoses, while Hick’s ‘Police’ method, ‘catching the accused out in contradictory statements’, indicates a confrontational relationship between doctor and patient.

A debate in the *British Medical Journal* reveals differing views among medical officers on how psychiatry should be applied to the treatment or disposal of cases who reported on sick parade with various suspicious symptoms. Some medical officers felt ‘moral indignation’ at the perceived advantage to be gained by such illnesses.²¹¹ A vociferous proportion of RAF medical officers endorsed the assumption especially prevalent within the military that those, whose behaviour might now be explained and forgiven by modern diagnostic labels, were lazy, malingering, shirkers or skrimshankers.²¹² Medical officer Wing Commander Kenneth Bergin became cynical and suspicious of the use of psychiatry in the services and found specialists’ results unacceptable. Although he admitted he had once been more sympathetic, by the end of the war he felt the RAF laid ‘too much stress on psychological illness and not enough on a man’s responsibility to his fellows.’²¹³ Citing examples, Bergin implied that personnel knew the symptoms of anxiety states as well as he, and were attempting to achieve their aim of release from service ‘by conscious or unconscious deception.’²¹⁴ He claimed that acknowledging symptoms of such imagined or actual illnesses ran the risk of burdening the armed forces, the medical services and society; it was also detrimental to the patient as it

²¹¹ A. Harris, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4425, 1945, pp. 582 - 583.

²¹² Hadfield, ‘War Neurosis’, p. 284.

²¹³ K. G. Bergin, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Army’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No.4423, 1945, p. 508.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

caused ‘a chronic state of neurotic invalidism’.²¹⁵ G. F. Magurran agreed that many patients had no concept of duty and were ‘sickened only by selfish thoughts.’²¹⁶ Bergin saw recourse to neuropsychiatrists as ‘the refuge of the diagnostically destitute’ and admitted that he referred increasing numbers of potential neuropsychiatric patients for executive disciplinary action rather than medical treatment. Magurran also maintained that it was expedient to exhort personnel to: ‘Do your duty or take the consequence.’²¹⁷ In the short term at least, such methods may have been effective. As Bergin concludes, ‘a senior N.C.O. dealt with in this manner ... decided that hard work was more acceptable outside prison than inside.’²¹⁸ Wing Commander Philip Perkins agreed, and he described the practice of ‘substituting the neuropsychiatrist for the guardroom’ as a ‘calamitous folly’.²¹⁹ However, considering the conflict between individual freedom and state interests, others felt that insisting that ‘misfits’ continued to carry out their duties was reminiscent of the behaviour of totalitarian states liberal democracies had been fighting against.²²⁰ Hick believed it was ‘perhaps better to be fooled occasionally than to be unjust to an honest man.’²²¹ A squadron leader highlighted that a temporary downgrading in medical category ‘enable[d] many patients to carry on serving,’²²² and an Army medic also believed that a more sympathetic approach would have better results, arguing ‘it pays better to take what the man will give

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 508.

²¹⁶ G. F. Magurran, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4425, 1945, p. 583.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 583.

²¹⁸ Bergin, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Army’, p. 508.

²¹⁹ Perkins, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’, p. 706.

²²⁰ R. W. Durand, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4427, 1945, p. 669. See also J. L. Clegg, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4426, 1945, p. 624.

²²¹ Hick, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’, p. 583.

²²² J. Laurie, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4427, 1945, p. 669.

rather than break him because he will not give you all you want.²²³ Squadron Leader P. R. Kemp thought that ‘uncontrolled neurotics’ reduced efficiency and that the forces would be improved if they were invalided.²²⁴ In pre-war industry it was felt that workers could be problematic due to poor training or psychological unsuitability.²²⁵ However, in the RAF it was not easy to admit that training might be at fault.

In reply to Bergin, perhaps more in touch with contemporary psychiatric theories, a flying officer thought that very few of his patients were malingering. He saw physical symptoms as ‘psychoneurotic manifestations’ of ‘emotional illness’ that could be equally as debilitating as ‘organic illness.’²²⁶ Another medical officer was aware of follow up studies of discharged service personnel and doubted that the primary purpose of a malingerer’s symptoms was their eventual discharge. As Squadron Leader A. Harris pointed out, a patient’s neurotic symptoms did not disappear when they realised that downgrading or discharge would not be forthcoming.²²⁷

The identification of malingering was informed by social discourses of race, class and gender, and conscientious medical officers attempted to rule out organic illnesses before labelling patients as malingerers. However, medical officers may have become frustrated by patients’ lack of response to the treatment of physical symptoms, while those with suspected neuroses lost faith in the medical officer.²²⁸

²²³ Hick, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’, p. 583.

²²⁴ P. R. Kemp, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4428, 1945, p. 706.

²²⁵ Whitelaw, ‘Industry and the interior life’, p. 75.

²²⁶ A. Balfour-Sclare, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4427, 1945, pp. 668 – 669.

²²⁷ Harris, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’, pp. 582 - 583.

²²⁸ M. Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake: The Diary of a Wartime WAAF 1940-1942*, (Bangor, University of Wales, 2005), p. 82.

Patients who failed to respond to the treatment of their physical symptoms ran the risk of being accused of malingering. In the First World War immorality had been medicalised.²²⁹ By the Second World War malingering had therefore come to be addressed as a psychological problem, but in the case of the RAF and its hierarchy of ground personnel in particular it was tackled as a disciplinary issue. In parallel to the lack of moral fibre policy for the treatment of air crew with no medical reason for their refusal to fly, ground personnel who were believed to have exaggerated or invented symptoms were still defined as malingerers. It was acknowledged in civilian practice during this period that the doctor's prejudices concerning class, race or religion led to mistakes in correctly identifying a malingerer.²³⁰ That some medical officers were concerned that similar errors were made in the RAF is evident from correspondence in medical journals.

The medical officer's role was defined and constrained by the military.²³¹ To an extent, diagnoses and treatments available to medical officers were regulated by the Air Ministry consultants. The adversarial relationship between patient and doctor has been noted by historians studying the First World War and this conflict continued into the Second World War.²³² Rather than the individual's interests, military doctors had to prioritise the interests of the state.²³³ Although it was mediated by the necessities of the war, at the time some doctors themselves also recognised a conflict between their Hippocratic oath and military authority. Rather than subject his patients to punitive military discipline, one doctor hoped that medical officers could

²²⁹ Cooter, 'Malingering in Modernity', p.135.

²³⁰ Norris, 'Malingering', p. 99.

²³¹ Binneveld, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress*, p. 83.

²³² Cooter, 'Malingering in Modernity', p.142.

²³³ M. Harrison, 'Medicine and the Management of Modern Warfare: an Introduction' in R. Cooter, M. Harrison, and S. Sturdy, (eds) *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1999), p.11.

‘remain clinicians primarily, seek... cures first through the science of medicine... [and] retain the spirit of detached sympathy’.²³⁴ However, an article discussing the role of the medical officer in the *BMJ* suggested that a logical approach to ‘man-mastership’ was crucial; the medical officer should take ‘a strong line’ to ensure the ‘efficiency of the unit’.²³⁵ In his article in the *BMJ*, Stafford-Clark expressed his belief that the medical officer’s duty lay in preserving the strength of his unit, and that the health and efficiency of the unit took precedence over his obligation to individual patients.²³⁶ Totally immersed in the culture of the RAF, he spent as much time as he could with air crew officers. At Waterbeach, he even flew as a passenger with them on several bombing operations.²³⁷ He felt terrible when his friends were killed or injured and thought that the loss of air crew was ‘Bloody tragic.’²³⁸ Stafford-Clark’s brother was killed in February 1941 and his role as a medical officer during the war became ‘a deeply personal as well as a professional crusade.’²³⁹ He believed that the war effort took precedence over many other considerations, and being more aware of the strain air crew endured than other medical officers, it is unsurprising that he had limited sympathy for ground personnel with apparently lesser emotional upsets. He ensured that a ‘dead beat’ medical orderly was remustered as an aircraft hand,²⁴⁰ and he believed that the ‘reality of war need[ed] emphasizing to many whose nearest approach to it was the sound of a bomb ‘in civvy

²³⁴ G. A. Jamieson, ‘Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4426, 1945, p. 625.

²³⁵ Anon, ‘Army Medical Officers and Man-Mastership’ *British Medical Journal* Vol. 1, No. 4178, 1941, p. 167.

²³⁶ Stafford-Clark, ‘Aspects of War Medicine’, p. 139.

²³⁷ Dean, *The Touchstone*, p. 33. See also: D. Stafford-Clark, *Diary 1940-1945*, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2, p. 97. The medical officer at Elsham Wolds few on operations too. See: D. Charlwood, *Journeys into Night*, (Victoria, Hudson, 1991), p.108.

²³⁸ Stafford-Clark, *Diary 1940-1945*, p. 109, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2.

²³⁹ D. Stafford-Clark, ‘Perspective: An Hour of Breath’ *Psychiatric Bulletin*, Vol. 11, 1987, p. 218.

²⁴⁰ Stafford-Clark, *Diary 1940-1945*, pp. 18-19, WL, PP/DSC/A/2/2.

street'.²⁴¹ Crocket believed that neurotic ground personnel were more demanding on doctors' time than any other patients.²⁴² To maintain efficiency, the service demanded swift diagnoses and either medical or disciplinary treatment. Squadron Leader P. R. Kemp RAFVR pointed out that neurotics hindered the service and for the sake of efficiency it was expedient to invalid or discharge them.²⁴³ As mentioned above, some malingerers were caught out by 'police methods', and Stafford-Clark believed that such individuals could be given a more acceptable sense of perspective by 'belligerent medicine': a mixture of a pep talk and military discipline.²⁴⁴ In a similar way to persuading air crew in the early stages of breakdown to continue flying,²⁴⁵ some medical officers forced male personnel to carry on by threats of making their life worse if they did not. Ground personnel therefore usually continued working on until their symptoms became undeniable, their work suffered and they became detrimental to the efficiency of the unit. Treatment was then inevitably more protracted with less hopeful prognosis.

Stafford-Clark felt that people at the Air Ministry took for granted that a qualified doctor had an understanding of the effect of stress on morale, and of how to treat it. In his opinion they were mistaken; medical officers had to learn about psychiatry 'on the job.'²⁴⁶ It was only those with psychiatric qualifications or a strong interest in the subject who published in journals about servicemen and women with neuropsychiatric symptoms. Originally a surgeon,²⁴⁷ Stafford-Clark qualified in

²⁴¹ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

²⁴² Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses', p. 101.

²⁴³ Kemp, 'Correspondence: Psychiatry in the Services', p. 706. See also: Crocket, 'Observations on the Incidence of Neuroses', p. 101.

²⁴⁴ Stafford-Clark, 'Aspects of War Medicine', p. 139.

²⁴⁵ Jones, 'LMF', p.445. See also: Shephard, 'Pitiless Psychology', pp.491-524 and Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, p. 77.

²⁴⁶ Stafford-Clark, 'Perspective', p. 219.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

psychiatry after the war, publishing his book *Psychiatry Today* in 1951. Other medical officers were likely to investigate physical aetiology for their patient's symptoms. As Ballard and Miller highlighted, hysterical symptoms regularly confounded the 'organically minded investigator.'²⁴⁸ However, for both psychiatrists and general practitioners, before a diagnosis of neurotic illness could be made, organic causes had to be discounted. It was common practice for medical officers to refer patients to neuropsychiatric specialists at NYDN centres as either in-patients or out-patients, and the specialists at such centres frequently highlighted that medical officers with little understanding of neurology or psychiatry tried too hard to find organic causes for the presented symptoms. One 'problem' WAAF spent eight days in the sick quarters as the medical officer 'delighted in jabbing everywhere as hard as he could' in an attempt to prove she had appendicitis. Suffering from 'a complete lack of appetite, & a lack of energy', it was later decided that she 'had nothing at all wrong' with her 'other than a bad attack of mental un-settledness'.²⁴⁹

In summary, medical officers had varied opinions that depended on their view of the war and their opinion and knowledge of neuropsychiatry and psychology. At least some doctors persisted in treating physical symptoms, before referring patients to RAF neuropsychiatric specialists. Others, like Stafford-Clark, were more confident in their knowledge of psychology and attempted to persuade neurotic patients of their duty. However, for many medical officers the dilemma they faced was not whether to put the needs of the patient or the RAF first, but whether retaining or expelling malingerers would be most effective for the war effort.

²⁴⁸ Ballard, and Miller, 'Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre', p. 41.

²⁴⁹ Private Papers of Miss P. Willmott, IWM, Documents. 7199.

Conclusion

Besides his role as an emergency doctor, the medical officer was responsible for practising preventative medicine and maintaining morale, and he was predominantly concerned with the physical and mental health of flying personnel. It was easy for him unobtrusively to observe the emotional and mental state of air crew officers; he had less opportunity or incentive to observe ground personnel. Individual WAAFs and ground personnel members sometimes served on the same station for months, if not years, but because they were not usually subject to the attrition of combat, until they reported at sick parade, they were made invisible by their ubiquity and perceived relative unimportance. Medical officers had even less opportunity to assess the morale and emotional resilience of the members of the WAAF they were responsible for. The majority of medical officers were civilians commissioned for the duration of the war as part of the RAFVR, and their limited additional training focused on peculiarities of aviation medicine, with perhaps one lecture on the psychology of air crew. Only a small minority had any further training in psychology, psychiatry or neurology. As Stafford-Clark suggested, they were unprepared for their role as psychiatrists in attempting to maintain the morale of their station. Informed by pamphlets from the Air Ministry on how to treat air crew who were 'wavering' in their ability to continue to fly, medical officers applied social hygienist, hereditarian and Freudian theories of predisposition and stress when attempting to diagnose potentially neuropsychiatric ground personnel. Illness was thought to be 'the outcome of an individual's behaviour, his or her genetic inheritance, together with a range of social and environmental factors'.²⁵⁰ Unable to

²⁵⁰ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, pp. 5-6.

explain a range of bewildering symptoms, some medical officers concluded that patients were malingering rather than suffering from neuropsychiatric illness. Such decisions were often influenced by social and cultural preconceptions and ideologies, which caused doctors to consider certain patients to be more predisposed to neuroses or more likely to malingering. Correspondence in medical journals highlights that, for some medical officers at least, the conflict between the interest of the individual and the state was problematic, and that attempting to uncover malingerers and enforce military discipline, could prompt a confrontational relationship between doctor and patient. For many medical officers, the treatment of neuropsychiatric patients and malingerers became a disciplinary problem. Second opinions were available from colleagues and the neuropsychiatrists at NYDN centres, but ultimately it was the medical officer who had to make a subjective choice about the diagnosis and treatment of his patients.

Medical and cultural discourses were employed to explain neuropsychiatric breakdown. Medical officers were influenced by, and played a role in maintaining, the constructed binary between weak and strong. However, the hierarchical and patriarchal culture of the RAF was also important in determining the treatment of neuropsychiatric casualties. Air crew epitomised the pinnacle of hegemonic, heroic masculinity all other personnel were measured against. Informed by such beliefs, medical officers expected ground personnel to be less resilient and more likely to breakdown. It was expected of WAAFs because they were female. Emasculated by their lowly rank and status, male ground personnel were also effectively feminised. Although Shapira and Shephard disagree on how compassionately neurotic civilians and soldiers with battle exhaustion were treated by the medical profession, in RAF

Bomber Command, both male and female ground personnel were regarded and treated entirely differently to civilians, soldiers, or flyers in the RAF. While in the culture of the RAF it was considered normal for air crew to feel fear, succumbing to it was stigmatised; because they had less reason to be afraid, ground personnel who broke down were treated with little sympathy.

THE TREATMENT OF GROUND PERSONNEL IN NOT YET DIAGNOSED NEUROPSYCHIATRIC CENTRES

The very existence of NYDN centres attracts thither an appalling crowd of mal-adapted, unstable, homesick, humourless and inadequate personalities who are the despair of their unit medical officers. Much more difficulty is created by these individuals than by any of the neurological problems that arise.¹

Medical officers on operational stations referred personnel they thought might be suffering from neurosis, anxiety, hysteria or other mental illnesses to the RAF's Not Yet Diagnosed Neuropsychiatric (NYDN) centres attached to RAF hospitals throughout the country.² By 1942, there were eleven neuropsychiatric diagnostic centres in the United Kingdom: the main hospital at the Central Medical Establishment in London, four centres for operational squadrons and six for non-operational personnel.³ In 1943, this figure had risen to thirteen with an additional four in Scotland.⁴ NYDN centres were primarily concerned with diagnosis and disposal of neuropsychiatric cases. These centres predominantly functioned as short

¹ E.C.O. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems of an R.A.F. Neuropsychiatric Centre' (1943), p. 32, *Neuropsychiatry: miscellaneous reports and publications, (1941-1945)*, TNA, AIR 49/357.

² An alternative to the acronym was 'not yet diagnosed, nervous'. See: *Ibid.*, p.1. See also Expert Committee on Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services (1942 – 1943), *Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry in the Royal Air Force Expert Committee on Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services 1942 – 1943*, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

³ 'Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry', p. 3. TNA, AIR 2/5998. These were at: Halton, Littleport, Rauceby, Blackpool, Wilmslow, Cosford, Gloucester, St. Athan, Yatesbury and Gleneagles. (see p.1).

⁴ Appendix A, Air Ministry letter A.351518/42/M.A.2. 7 January 1943, TNA, AIR 2/5998. By 1943 the RAF no longer differentiated between operational and non-operational centres.

stay and outpatient units; cases that required treatment for more than three weeks were transferred to other RAF or Emergency Medical Service (EMS) hospitals.⁵ By 1942, as well as the three neuropsychiatric consultants - Air Commodore H. L. Burton (neurology and psychiatry), acting Air Commodore Charles Symonds (neurology) and acting Group Captain Robert Gillespie (psychiatry) - there were 20 other neurological or psychiatric specialists at the NYDN centres and a further six in special hospitals.⁶

The study of shell shock has dominated the historiography of war, medicine and psychiatry during the twentieth century. Studies often use a longitudinal approach to examine both world wars and change over time.⁷ Work that does address the Second World War tends to focus on either military or civilian casualties rather than both together. As Michal Shapira points out, following Angus Calder's re-examination of the official history by Richard Titmuss, historians have debated whether mass neuroses among civilians during the war was a myth or a reality, and have attempted to quantify whether anxiety or morale on the home front was high or low.⁸ Ben Shephard considers how the Ministry of Pensions used the medical profession to limit the number of people eligible for both military and civilian

⁵ Ibid., p. 2. The exceptions were at Torquay and Matlock (which had beds for long term air crew patients), Rauceby in Lincolnshire, which had 'limited accommodation for cases of mild psychosis or severe neurosis', and Halton in Buckinghamshire which had beds 'for cases of mental disorder requiring observation'.

⁶ 'Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry', p. 1-3, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

⁷ See for example: E. Jones, and S. Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*, (Hove, Psychology Press, 2005), or Croft, H. 'Emotional Women and Frail Men: Gendered Diagnostics from Shellshock to PTSD, 1914-2010' in: Carden-Coyne, A. (ed) *Gender and Conflict since 1914*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 110-123.

⁸ M. Shapira, 'The Psychological Study of Anxiety in the Era of the Second World War' *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, 1, (2013), p. 32. See also: R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, HMSO, 1950), A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, (London, Pimlico, 1994), A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, (London, Pimlico, 2008), S. T. Casper, 'The Origins of the Anglo-American Research Alliance and the Incidence of Civilian Neuroses in Second World War Britain' *Medical History*, 53, (2008), pp. 327-346, E. Jones, R. Woolven, B. Durodie, and S. Wessely, 'Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-examined, *Social History of Medicine* 17, 3, (2004), pp. 463-479.

pensions.⁹ Although in *A War of Nerves* he largely focuses on the treatment of military personnel, he also examines civilian responses to war.¹⁰ Shephard highlights that civilian resilience was partly explained by their freedom to ‘trek’ from city centres to the relative safety of the countryside and by the support of their families and community.¹¹ Shephard also examines the military medical profession’s response to the number of neurotic casualties following Dunkirk, new treatments developed in the western desert, psychological testing and selection of recruits, and considers neuropsychiatry in the RAF.¹² In *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*, Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely argue that during the Second World War military psychiatrists’ exaggerated the success of their ‘treatments and outcomes’ in order to justify their place in military medicine.¹³ As well as the specific studies of LMF and RAF psychiatry highlighted in the previous chapter, other detailed studies of specific groups have been made. Peter Hobbins has examined Australian psychiatric casualties in Malaya and Singapore,¹⁴ and more recently Edgar Jones and Stephen Ironside studied battle exhaustion cases after the D-day invasion.¹⁵ The historiography of RAF psychiatry and neurology focuses on the work of Symonds and Gillespie.¹⁶ Although they had worked together before

⁹ B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology’: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4, (1999), pp. 491-524.

¹⁰ B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000), pp. 174-182.

¹¹ B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology’: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4, (1999), p. 516.

¹² Shephard, *War of Nerves*. Chapters 13-19.

¹³ Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, p. 67-99.

¹⁴ P. G. Hobbins, ‘Living in Hell But Still Smiling: Australian Psychiatric Casualties of War During the Malaya-Singapore Campaign, 1941-1942’ *Health and History*, 9, 7, (2007), pp. 28-55.

¹⁵ E. Jones and S. Ironside, ‘Battle Exhaustion: the dilemma of psychiatric casualties in Normandy, June-August 1944’, *Historical Journal*, 53, 1, (2010), pp. 109-28.

¹⁶ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 288-297, Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp.15-20, See also: A. D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew, 1939 – 1945*, (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), E. Jones, ‘LMF: The Use of Psychiatric Stigma in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War’ *The Journal of Military History*, 70 (2006), pp. 439-458, J.

joining the RAF, the two specialists frequently disagreed with each other.¹⁷ Symonds had served in the First World War and became the RAF's consultant neurologist with the eventual rank of air vice marshal.¹⁸ He maintained that that psychotherapy could be practiced by any doctor without any expert training,¹⁹ Gillespie had been a student during the First World War, but worked with shell shocked soldiers in the inter-war period. Together with David Henderson, he wrote *A Text-Book of Psychiatry for Students and Practitioners*, which ran to several editions.²⁰ Rather than seeing the war as 'a test of character' and heredity, he was more interested in the effect of the environment and events.²¹ However, as Shephard discusses, the pragmatic theories endorsed by Symonds had a stronger appeal to the RAF and the Air Ministry. As a consequence, neurology rather than psychiatry became dominant,²² and this was revealed in the prevalent RAF use of the compound noun 'neuropsychiatry.'²³ Symonds was knighted in 1946. Gillespie attained the rank of air commodore, but suffering from depression and a peptic ulcer, he resigned his commission. He took his own life in October 1945.²⁴

McCarthy, 'Air crew and 'Lack of Moral Fibre' in the Second World War' *War and Society*, Vol.2, 1984, pp. 87-101, S. Brandon, 'LMF in Bomber Command 1939-45: Diagnosis or Denouncement?' in Freeman and Berrios (eds) *150 Years of British Psychiatry, Vol. 2: The Aftermath*, (Athlone, 1996), pp. 119-129.

¹⁷ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 289-290. See also: R. D. Gillespie, 'Neurosis or Psychosis' *The Lancet*, 234, 6053, (1939), p. 576.

¹⁸ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, p. 291.

¹⁹ C. P. Symonds, 'Neurosis or Psychosis' *The Lancet*, 234, 6054, (1939), pp. 622-623.

²⁰ D. K. Henderson, and R. D. Gillespie, *A Text-Book of Psychiatry for Students and Practitioners*, fifth edition, (London, Oxford University Press, 1940).

²¹ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, p. 290.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 290 - 291.

²³ H. R. Rollin, *Festina Lente: A Psychiatric Odyssey*, British Medical Journal, London, 1990, p. 32.

²⁴ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, p. 297. B.M.J. 'Obituary: R. D. Gillespie, M.D., F.R.C.P.' *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4427, (1945), pp. 670-671. For more on the relationship between Symonds and Gillespie see: Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 288-297, and Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp.15-20.

Largely concentrating on the example of the RAF hospitals at Rauceby and Matlock, this chapter discusses the everyday running of a NYDN centre. The opening sections of the chapter consider the numbers of ground personnel who were seen at NYDN centres and how patients were treated by the RAF medical profession in these centres, and the theories behind this treatment. In an examination of the work carried out at NYDN centres, the chapter discusses the unavoidable comparisons made by the specialists between the sick and the healthy. In accordance with the hierarchy of the service, air crew were contrasted with ground personnel, and men with women. Later sections discuss the diagnosis and treatment of patients, before finally focussing on patients' pension prospects and their downgrading or disposal due to psychoneurotic symptoms through medical boards held at the hospitals. This chapter expands on the binary between heroic, stoical air crew, and cowardly, malingering ground personnel illustrated by the epigraph and discussed in the previous chapters.

As Martin Francis recently highlighted, the lives of flyers treated at Matlock for neuropsychiatric illnesses still remain 'highly obscure.'²⁵ Few historians have considered RAF NYDN centres,²⁶ and indeed in his article on LMF, Jones confuses NYDN centres with Air Crew Reselection Centres and Air Crew Disposal Units.²⁷ As well as having some provision for long-term care of psychotic patients, Rauceby catered for the numerous operational Bomber Command stations in the 'Bomber County' of Lincolnshire. There are few first person narratives that tell of their experience in NYDN centres. However, unlike similar establishments, Rauceby's operational record books (ORBs) preserved in the National Archives contain several

²⁵ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p.152.

²⁶ Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 97-98 and Jones, 'LMF', pp. 444-453.

²⁷ Jones, 'LMF', p. 445.

useful reports, while the centre's neurologist Eric Jewesbury submitted a 42 page report entitled 'Work and Problems of an R.A.F. Neuropsychiatric Centre' to the Air Ministry in July 1943.²⁸ Each centre was overseen by a 'Neuropsychiatric specialist... as far as possible with adequate training in both neurology and psychiatry.'²⁹ Larger centres, such as Rauceby, had two specialists, one from each discipline.³⁰ Although staff changed throughout the war, in 1942 the NYDN centre at Rauceby was overseen by the Canadian psychiatrist, Squadron Leader T. A. Sweet and the neurologist, acting Squadron Leader Eric Jewesbury.³¹ RAF Rauceby was created shortly after the beginning of the war when the Air Ministry commandeered the South Kesteven Mental Hospital. Staff and 75 patients from nearby RAF Cranwell moved into part of the hospital in April 1940 and, displacing more than five hundred patients who were evacuated to asylums in other counties, the RAF took over the entire hospital in June the same year. N. K. Henderson, the asylum's resident medical superintendent, was commissioned in the RAF as the new hospital's commanding officer.³² Like squadron medical officers, neuropsychiatric specialists at NYDN centres were usually civilians commissioned in the RAFVR. The main hospital buildings became the general hospital, and there were annexes for the burns, orthopaedic and tuberculosis units.³³ The number of cases passing through the NYDN centre at Rauceby increased during the hospital's first three years. From an

²⁸ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems' TNA, AIR 49/357.

²⁹ 'Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry in the Royal Air Force', p.1, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Operations Record Books, Miscellaneous Units R.A.F. Hospital, Matlock, Rauceby, Torquay and Convalescent Depot Haldon Sept 1939 - Apr 1945, TNA, AIR 29/764. The neurologist Redvers Nowell Ironside who later co-authored a book *Aviation Neuropsychiatry*, published in 1945, was briefly attached to the centre in June 1941.

³² G. M. Stratten, *Rauceby Reflections: The story of a mental hospital 1902 – 1992*. (G. M. Stratten, 1993), p.28. See also G. M. Stratten, 'RAF hospital Rauceby' *Lincolnshire Poacher* (2000), 1, 4, p.13-17.

³³ Stratten, *Rauceby Reflections*, p.29. Expanding rapidly, the hospital could eventually provide for over 1000 in-patients.

average of 47 cases being seen per month in 1941, the following year the average was 141.³⁴

The RAF hospital at Matlock Derbyshire was established in September 1939 at 'Rockside Hydro', 'Oldham house, and Prospect Hydro', nineteenth century hydrotherapy centres. With three squadron leader neurologists and twenty female nursing staff, it had provisions for 50 in-patients with the potential to expand to 200 beds.³⁵ Sometimes referred to as the 'Hatter's Castle' by the airmen, it became a long stay convalescent centre for neuropsychiatric NCOs and other ranks.³⁶ The nickname has all the connotations of Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter, but perhaps more tellingly to the 1942 film *The Hatter's Castle*, in which Brodie, a more sinister mad hatter, lives in a pretentious crenellated house not dissimilar to the sanatorium at Matlock.³⁷ It is possible that the patients saw the film as a metaphor for their time at Matlock as well as a nickname for the hospital. The RAF's psychiatric consultant, Robert Gillespie and the neuropsychiatrist, Squadron Leader D. N. Parfitt worked there during the war.

The scale of the problem

Both in and out-patients were seen at NYDN centres, and an idea of how busy NYDN centres were can be seen in official war-time reports on RAF psychiatry held in the National Archives. Over the twelve months beginning September 1940, there

³⁴ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 1, TNA, AIR 49/357.

³⁵ RAF Hospital Matlock, September 1939, TNA, AIR 29/764.

³⁶ D. Wiltshire, *Per Ardua Pro Patria: Autobiographical Observations of a World War Two Airman*, (Bognor Regis, Woodfield Publishing, 2000), p. 62.

³⁷ L. Comfort, *The Hatter's Castle*, (Paramount British Pictures, 1942). In the film Brodie drinks to excess and suffers a mental breakdown before committing suicide.

were 859 admissions to Matlock, and 543 of these were ground personnel.³⁸ At Rauceby in 1942, Jewesbury and Sweet interviewed 1,647 new neurological and psychotic cases as out-patients,³⁹ and over 600 similar in-patients.⁴⁰ Between June and December 1942, there were on average over 1200 new neuropsychiatric cases seen as out-patients by specialists at NYDN centres each month (See Fig: 6.1).⁴¹

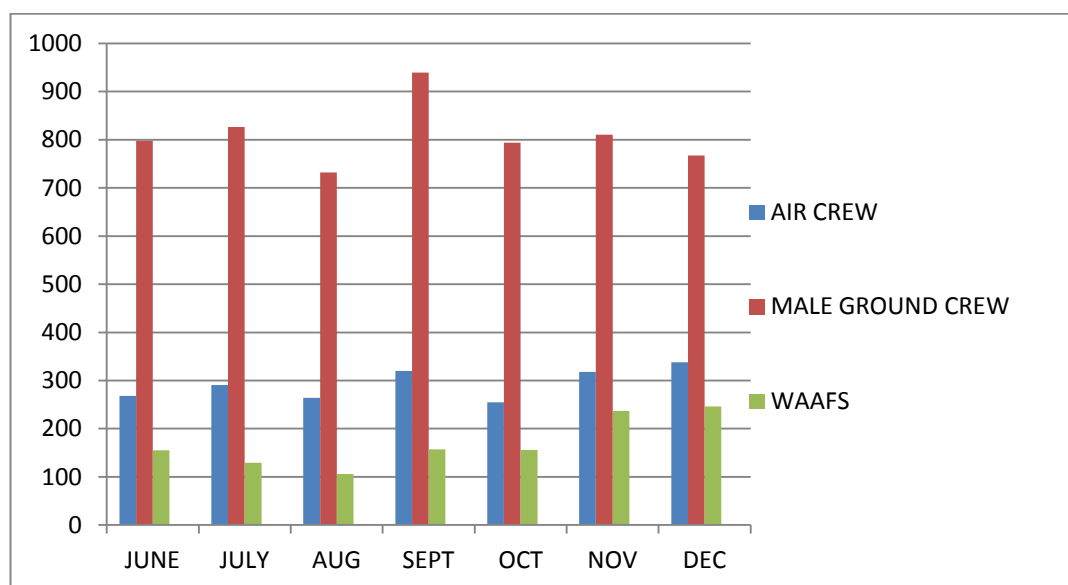


Fig: 6.1. Attendance of new neuropsychiatric out-patients at NYDN centres during 1942. Taken from: Expert Committee on Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services (1942 – 1943), ‘VIII RAF Psychiatry: Attendances of new neuro-psychiatric cases at NYDN centres’ TNA, AIR 2/5998.

These figures consisted of an average of 809 male ground personnel (64 per cent), 293 air crew (23 per cent) and 169 WAAFs (13 per cent) as new patients per month.⁴² Most of the work at NYDN centres involved out-patient consultations,

³⁸ Report on the work of the RAF hospital Matlock for the period 1 September 1940 to 31 August 1941, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

³⁹ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 1, TNA, AIR 49/357. Of these patients 667 were air crew members.

⁴⁰ Summary of work done RAF Rauceby 1 January 1942 to 31 December 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁴¹ ‘VIII RAF Psychiatry: Attendances of new neuro-psychiatric cases at NYDN centres’ TNA, AIR 2/5998. These figures exclude Torquay, Northern Ireland and ‘Scotland North’, but include ‘patients seen in other wards in consultation.’

⁴² Ibid.

although there were some referrals from other wards, and a limited number of beds were available for in-patient investigation and treatment of suitable cases.⁴³

Although in the entire air force the ratio of ground personnel to air crew was around 7:1,⁴⁴ as can be seen in the graph, there were approximately only three times more male and female ground personnel than air crew seen at NYDN centres. This can be explained by the medical officers' preoccupation with the mental health of air crew, as only the very worst ground personnel cases were referred to NYDN centres. Seeing only the worst cases in the service, the neuropsychiatric specialists continued to believe that the incidence of neuroses amongst ground personnel was disproportionately high and the quality of personnel was worryingly poor.

Neuropsychiatric specialists were also influenced by the hierarchy of RAF personnel, but in addition, the neuropsychiatric specialists at NYDN centres had little concept of the numbers of fit and healthy personnel. Working at Rauceby on the weekly medical boards responsible for downgrading or discharging personnel, Squadron Leader G. Chambers reported how an exchange visit to an operational station helped to redress this:

Meeting, as I do almost daily the Grade IV personnel of the Royal Air Force, I was inclined to take a rather jaundiced view of the general morale and I found it most stimulating to realise how small a fraction of the whole force this category form.⁴⁵

⁴³ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 1, TNA, AIR 49/357. See also: 'VIII RAF Psychiatry', TNA, AIR 2/5998.

⁴⁴ J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line*, (Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 1997), p. 4. In a force of over a million men, 17.5 per cent were air crew. This does not include the 157,000 WAAFs who were serving in 1945.

⁴⁵ G. Chambers, 'Training Medical Officers: Attachment at RAF Coningsby' April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

In his report, Jewesbury quoted an article 'The Psychopathic Tenth' from *The Lancet* at length. He agreed with the author, Stephen Taylor, that 'the uniformity of their behaviour' made neurotics and psychotic personalities visible 'as a coherent group' who 'flood[ed] the service psychiatric hospitals.'⁴⁶

As discussed throughout this thesis, hierarchical assumptions of class and gender were reinforced throughout the war, within the RAF, by the other armed forces, and by the medical profession. Specialists like Jewesbury expected to find mental health problems in at least ten per cent of the population, and as part of the distinct cultural hierarchy within the RAF, the stereotypical image of ground personnel influenced the staff at NYDN centres. There was also a marked difference in how the specialists at NYDN centres regarded air crew and ground personnel; because of their 'original selection' it was assumed that air crew were 'of a better type of personality and unlikely to harbour in their midst the many constitutional neurotics who form the bulk of ground-staff patients.'⁴⁷ To a certain extent, social factors which restricted an individual's role in the RAF to unskilled ground trades also effectively feminised men from poorer backgrounds. WAAFs who suffered from nervous breakdown were regarded as weak in comparison to the public image of WAAF plotters who carried out their duty while under attack in the early days of the Blitz, but also to the stoic housewife or factory worker portrayed in the popular media and discussed in medical journals. In addition, the staff at NYDN centres

⁴⁶ S. Taylor, 'The Psychopathic Tenth' *The Lancet*, 237, 6132, (1941), p.323. Quoted in Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 42, TNA, AIR 49/357. Taylor was the author of the article on suburban neurosis cited in the previous chapter. See S. Taylor, 'The Suburban Neurosis', *The Lancet*, 231, 5978, (1938), pp. 759-761.

⁴⁷ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 3. Even as late as 1944 it was thought in the Army that the original selection of personnel would reduce the number of break downs. See: Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 251.

prioritised the early diagnosis and prophylactic treatment of psychological disorders in air crew.⁴⁸ They were far less concerned with ground staff.

Reporting on a visit to RAF Scampton, Wing Commander R. W. B. Ellis, a doctor stationed at Rauceby, referred to ground personnel airmen as ‘A.C. Plonk’ who would, if allowed, ‘eat 3 dinners consecutively!’⁴⁹ Conforming to the class bound stereotypes discussed in chapter one, in displaying greed and self interest the airman failed to live up to the cultural ideal of discipline and duty.⁵⁰ In an article for the *Journal of Mental Science* written during his time at Matlock, Parfitt regarded ground personnel diagnosed as suffering from hysteria in similar, but even stronger terms:

The hysteric... remains egotistically puerile and has the child's selfishness... the hysteric is lazy... and ready to lie unhesitatingly to avoid work and danger... He lacks morality, conscience and the sense of duty which drives man to conquer his laziness.⁵¹

At Rauceby, Jewesbury discovered that many ground personnel cases admitted selfish motives behind their decisions to join the RAF or WAAF rather than the other services. Many men were attracted to a ‘less military type of life’ and the chance to avoid combat duties, others who confessed they had always been ‘delicate’, thought that the RAF and the ‘fresh air’ would be beneficial to them.⁵² Although she had a successful and healthy, if short lived, career in the WAAF, Patricia Lockitt admitted

⁴⁸ ‘Organisation of Neurology and Psychiatry’, p. 2, TNA AIR 2/5998.

⁴⁹ R. W. B. Ellis, ‘Training Medical Officers: Attachment at RAF Station Scampton, Lincs’, April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁵⁰ S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 105, 108.

⁵¹ D. N. Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’ *Journal of Mental Science*, Vol. 90, 1944, p. 572.

⁵² Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 32, TNA, AIR 49/357.

she did not join the WAAF in September 1943 for ‘very altruistic’ reasons, but because she felt stuck in ‘an extremely boring job.’⁵³

Echoing Jewesbury’s patriarchal expectations of individuals’ capabilities based on assumptions regarding class and gender, S. I. Ballard and H. G. Miller felt that a ‘contributory factor’ to many WAAF cases was the female tendency to form strong hetero- or homo-sexual emotional attachments, which in conjunction with repostings and other ‘exigencies of the service’ often caused ‘neurotic conflicts.’⁵⁴ In their study of almost a thousand RAF and WAAF cases referred to them as ‘temperamentally unstable’, Ballard and Miller described 11 per cent of male but 28 per cent of female patients as ‘only children.’ Over a quarter of women as compared to one tenth of men were recorded as of below average intelligence.⁵⁵ Women were also expected to have a higher degree of ‘constitutional emotional instability and neurotic predisposition.’⁵⁶ They also found evidence of ‘psychosexual immaturity’ in 73 per cent of WAAFs, but in less than 40 per cent of airmen.⁵⁷ Ballard and Miller also more frequently diagnosed men with anxiety and women with hysteria. This follows a similar pattern to the difference between diagnoses of officers and other

⁵³ Interview with P. Lockitt, Reel 1, IWM, 27207. Working as a pension clerk for the Paymaster General’s Office, Lockitt was in a reserved occupation and had to use her influence as a Trade Union representative to enable her to volunteer. She then had a successful career in the WAAF as a radio mechanic, rising to the rank of sergeant before she was demobbed in 1947.

⁵⁴ S. I. Ballard, and H. G. Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry at a Royal Air Force Centre: an Analysis of 2,000 Cases’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4357, 1944, p. 41.

⁵⁵ S. I. Ballard, and H. G. Miller, ‘Psychiatric Casualties in a Women’s Service’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4387, 1945, p. 294.

⁵⁶ Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 42.

⁵⁷ Ballard and Miller, ‘Psychiatric Casualties’, p. 294.

ranks suffering from shell shock in the previous war,⁵⁸ and in the RAF between pilots (often officers) and gunners (often NCOs),⁵⁹ (See Fig: 6.2).

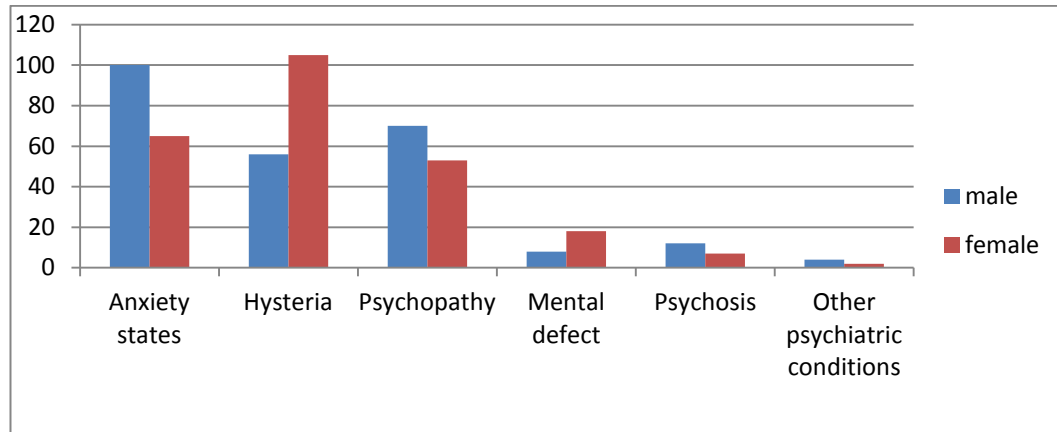


Fig: 6.2 Diagnosis of 250 psychiatric consecutive male and female cases. Taken from: I. Ballard, and H. G. Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties in a Women's Service' *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4387, (1945), p. 293.

The graph shows that almost twice as many women than men were diagnosed with hysteria. Given that it was more socially accepted, women tended to display hysterical symptoms if they began to suffer emotionally. More constrained by military authority and their gender stereotypes, it was felt that men suffering from neuroses were more likely to present symptoms of amnesia or fugue states or become a disciplinary problem by going absent without leave or deserting.⁶⁰ The disruption of the family unit was felt to be a contributory factor in the breakdown of those who were weak and predisposed to psychoneuroses.⁶¹ Following gender stereotypes, the

⁵⁸ F. C. Bartlett, *Psychology and the Soldier*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 188. See also: B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, (London, Jonathon Cape, 2000), p.57.

⁵⁹ C. P. Symonds and D. J. Williams, 'Clinical and Statistical Study of Neuroses Precipitated by Flying Duties: FPRC Report 547 August 1943', in: E. J. Dearnaley and P. B. Warr, *Aircrew Stress in Wartime Operations*, (London, Academic Press, 1979), p.35. The mean incidence of hysteria was found to be 12.8 per cent. In pilots it was 11 per cent but in air gunners 16.9 percent. Anxiety states were most commonly diagnosed in 79 per cent of air crew with psychoneurotic symptoms.

⁶⁰ Lancet 'War and the Nerves' *The Lancet*, 240, 6208, (1942), p. 222. See also: Ballard and Miller, 'Psychiatric Casualties', p. 293, and Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel', p.571.

⁶¹ Lancet 'War and the Nerves', p. 222.

security of home and family was seen to be more important for women because of their role as a home-maker. However, in the military, the service itself was expected to play the role of the family. Individuals who failed to overcome their homesickness, or misfits who struggled to be accepted, were more prone to emotional problems. It was the consensus of opinion in the medical profession and among the RAF neuropsychiatric specialists that fear was the main cause of anxiety neuroses.⁶² With non-combatants, an individual's subjective emotional conflict between their duty and their individualism were made less excusable because, as discussed previously, in comparison to air crew, and even some civilians, they were less exposed to danger.

Jewesbury drew distinctions between those who were doing what they could for the war effort, whether in the air or on the ground, and those who struggled to cope with service life although they were not necessarily in any peril. His impression of the binary between air crew and ground personnel was strengthened when he took part in an exchange visit to RAF Cranwell. Whereas before he had 'little or no understanding of the controls of an aircraft,' he spent some time practising in the cockpit of a link trainer, and shown over several aircraft he was also able 'to gain a clear idea of the position and function of each member of the crew.'⁶³

Jewesbury saw an injustice in the contrast between the service's policy towards the disposal of neurotic air crew and neurotic ground personnel who had not 'in either case been exposed to exceptional stress.' He had little patience with personnel who suffered breakdowns without just cause, especially after only a short

⁶² C.P. Symonds, 'Anxiety Neurosis in Combatants' *The Lancet*, 242, 6278, (1943), p. 786.

⁶³ E.C.O. Jewesbury, 'Training Medical Officers: Report on attachment at (FTS) RAF College. Cranwell', TNA, AIR 29/764. Before returning to Rauceby, he flew on test flights and experienced aerobatics and a spin in a trainer flown by an instructor.

period of service. They had breached the unwritten contract between the citizen and the state, that they would receive medical care in return for their time and effort in the services.⁶⁴ While air crew could be ‘disgraced’ and ‘ignominiously reduced in rank or removed from the service’ following the LMF procedure, ground personnel with similar symptoms were ‘customarily regarded as purely medical cases’. As will be discussed later in this chapter, once invalided, such cases may also have been entitled to a pension ‘for aggravation of their condition by war service.’⁶⁵

Diagnosis

Medical science had changed tremendously in the aftermath of the First World War. It has been argued that the concept of shell shock enabled doctors of the relatively new practice of psychiatry to legitimate their profession within industrialised nations. It also became accepted that, in addition to ‘hysterical’ females, males were also susceptible to neuroses.⁶⁶ The inter-war period saw a decline in the number of diagnoses of ‘old fashioned hysteria’, but an ‘increase in psychosomatic disorder and anxiety states.’⁶⁷ However, there was still no consensus of opinion; even the terminology was disputed in medical journals during the inter-war period and during the war. Although Symonds encouraged RAF doctors to limit their diagnoses of mental disorders amongst air crew to anxiety, hysteria, fatigue syndrome, and depression, with regard to ground personnel, specialists at NYDN centres used

⁶⁴ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 281.

⁶⁵ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 31, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁶⁶ Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, p. 49.

⁶⁷ R. Hayward, ‘Desperate Housewives and Model Amoebae: the invention of suburban neurosis in inter-war Britain’ in M. Jackson (ed), *Health and the Modern Home* (London, 2007), 47.

different nomenclature.⁶⁸ Parfitt argued that while the meanings of the terms anxiety, hysteria, obsession, psychopathy and depression were accepted, there was considerable disagreement on the ‘proportionate incidence of various psychoneurotic syndromes’ and each specialist could find evidence to justify his diagnosis.⁶⁹ Military medical diagnoses were influenced by the political situation as, officially at least, there was no such thing as ‘war neuroses.’ As discussed in the previous chapter, the term ‘shell shock’ was not to be used and even NYDN or DAH were best avoided in case, becoming ‘catch-words’ with the same connotations as shell shock, they led to an increase in casualties.⁷⁰ In the Army, because of its more positive connotations, the term ‘exhaustion’ began to be applied to neuropsychiatric casualties.⁷¹ However, trying to police language was futile. For air crew, LMF or ‘wavering’ gained all the negative connotations the Air Ministry had been trying to avoid.⁷² The phrase ‘the wind up’ was the accepted euphemism for nervous disorders among air crew at the start of the war,⁷³ and the RAF psychiatric specialist was referred to as the ‘trick cyclist’.⁷⁴ New pseudo-medical diagnoses such as ‘Morse

⁶⁸ C. P. Symonds and D. J. Williams, ‘Investigation of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel By Unit Medical Officers.’ Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, (His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1947), p. 86. See also Medical (Code B, 48): Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence: Registered Files Psychological disorders in flying personnel: occurrence reports, (1942-1945), ‘Investigations into Psychological Disorders of Flying Personnel Review of reports submitted to Air Ministry since outbreak of the war’ April 1942, Appendix 8B, TNA, AIR 2/6252. In 1942 it was recommended that the nomenclature for psychological disorders in flying personnel should consist of: Anxiety, Depression, Elation, Fatigue syndrome, Hysteria, Obsessional, Schizophrenia, Organic acute and Organic chronic.

⁶⁹ Parfitt, ‘The Psychoneurotic Spectrum and Dual Diagnosis’ *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 91, (1945), p. 477.

⁷⁰ B.M.J. ‘Neuroses in War Time: Memorandum for the Medical Profession’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4119, (1939), p. 1200. DAH was the acronym for disordered action of the heart.

⁷¹ See: Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 255. Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 122. Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 229-230.

⁷² Jones, ‘LMF’, p. 440.

⁷³ Air Ministry Pamphlet 100 ‘Notes for Medical Officers on the Psychological care of flying personnel’ May 1939, p. 15, TNA, AIR 2/8591.

⁷⁴ T. Sawyer, *Only Owls and Bloody Fools Fly at Night*, (London, William Kimber, 1982), p. 136, See also: C. Muirhead, *The Diary of a Bomb Aimer*, (Tunbridge Wells, Spellmount Ltd, 1987), p.124.

Headache and Telegraphist's Cramp' or even 'Morse Shock' were created and attained popular acceptance.⁷⁵

Nationally, the numbers of personnel in the RAF who were diagnosed as suffering from nervous or mental illness increased throughout the war. Peaking in 1944, over 10,000 male and female personnel serving in the United Kingdom were diagnosed with diseases of the nervous system or mental diseases. Almost 6,500 of these were diagnosed as suffering from psychoneuroses. However, expressed proportionally against the total number serving in the RAF, this figure remained less than 2 per cent per annum.⁷⁶ In comparison to both the general population and neuropsychiatric casualties among combat troops, this figure is surprisingly low. Among the Army in the campaigns in Italy and Northern France 10 per cent casualties from 'exhaustion' was acceptable,⁷⁷ and as discussed previously, a similar proportion of the wider population were thought to have mental health problems. This low figure can be explained due to the fact that they were not under the strains of front line combat, and as discussed in chapter two, personnel had been through a selection process.

Around three quarters of over 800 ground personnel out-patients seen at Rauceby in 1942 were diagnosed with anxiety and depressive states due to their 'inability to cope with service life.' This included 'seven cases of homosexuality, sufficient to produce marked anxiety symptoms'. The rest of those seen at Rauceby were classified as hysteria, obsessional neurosis, psychopathic personality, mental

⁷⁵ See: Jewesbury, 'Training Medical Officers', TNA, AIR 29/764, and M. L. Settle, *All the Brave Promises*, (London, Pandora Press, 1984), p.115.

⁷⁶ W. F. Mellor, *History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics*, (London, 1972), p. 494.

⁷⁷ Shephard, *War of Nerves* p.250.

deficiency and nocturnal enuresis.⁷⁸ 12 per cent of ground personnel out-patients were diagnosed with organic conditions including epilepsy, migraine and head injuries.⁷⁹ The diagnoses of samples of patients seen at RAF Rauceby during 1942 and from Matlock over an earlier twelve month period can be seen below. (See Fig: 6.3 and 6.4).

The difference in the categorisation of psychoneurotic illnesses between Matlock and Rauceby can easily be explained. Firstly, Rauceby dealt with men and women of all ranks, while Matlock was solely for male NCOs (both air crew and ground personnel). Secondly, each hospital's resident specialists had different experiences and particular interests. It was admitted that there was a fine line between a diagnosis of hysteria or anxiety. Some doctors diagnosed mixed states,⁸⁰ and, as in the First World War, it was possible for doctors to disagree, and to make different diagnoses of patients with the same symptoms.⁸¹ Anxiety was understood to be an obsession with distinct fears, while hysteria was understood as the conversion of often unconscious psychological conflict to physical symptoms. Those with 'psychopathic personalities' included the 'constitutionally timid' or 'aggressive, schizoid psychopaths', and those with interests such as 'astrology, spiritualism and yoga', and homosexuals.⁸²

⁷⁸ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 2, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ D. N. Parfitt, 'The Psychoneurotic Spectrum', p. 477–480. See also: Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 33, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁸¹ E. Jones, I. Palmer, and S. Wessely, 'War Pensions (1900 -1945): Changing models of Psychological Understanding' *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 180, (2002), p. 378.

⁸² Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel', p. 575.

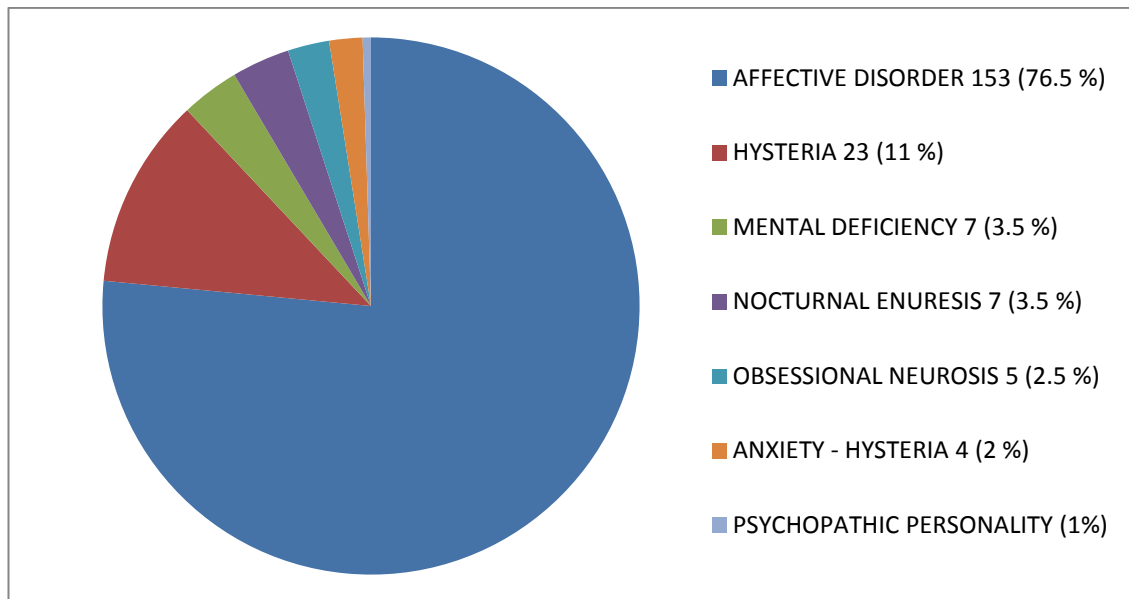


Fig: 6.3. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems' p.4. Diagnosis of 200 consecutive cases of psychological disorder observed at RAF Rauceby 1942, TNA, AIR 49/357.

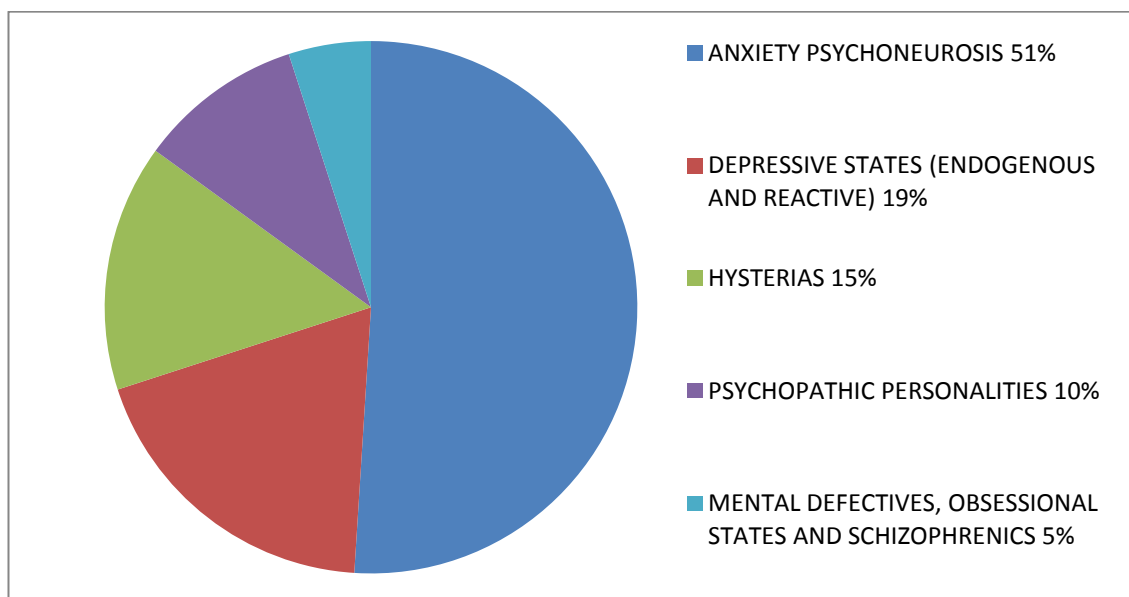


Fig: 6.4. Report on the work of the RAF hospital Matlock for the period 1 September 1940 to 31 August 1941. p. 3, TNA, AIR 49/357.⁸³

Jewesbury included anxiety state, effort syndrome, gastric neuroses and depression among affective disorders. Hysterical conditions included fugues and

⁸³ See also: S. C. Rexford-Welch, *History of the Second World War: The Royal Air Force Medical Services: Volume I Administration*, HMSO, London, 1954. p.226.

paralysis, while his small group of ‘Anxiety-Hysteria’ cases had symptoms of both hysterical and affective disorders.⁸⁴ However, it can be seen that, in both hospitals, around three quarters of cases were diagnosed with anxiety or depression, while between ten and fifteen per cent were diagnosed as hysterics. In common with the findings of unit medical officers, few cases of ‘simple malingering’ were discovered at NYDN centres, but ‘intentional exaggeration of mild symptoms’ were prevalent.⁸⁵ The outcome of the cases recorded at Rauceby was not recorded but of the 530 seen at Matlock, 271 were invalided and 259 returned to duty.⁸⁶ At Rauceby, because a diagnosis of malingering would result in a Court Martial, and the line between malingering and hysteria was so fine, neither Sweet nor Jewesbury gave a diagnosis of malingering.⁸⁷

Following an exchange visit to RAF Cranwell, Jewesbury observed the effects of poor lighting and pressure on those working on teleprinters and the problems of eyestrain and headaches suffered by WAAF’s working with radar, and was made aware of problems such as ‘Morse Headache’ and ‘Telegraphist’s Cramp’.⁸⁸ However, at Rauceby he found that:

most of the psychological disorder in ground-staff occurs in hardened constitutional neurotics who are unable to adapt themselves to service life and in spite of repostings and remusterings, remain medical liabilities and have to be invalided, as much in the interests of the service as of themselves.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 33, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁶ Report on the work of the RAF hospital Matlock for the period 1 September 1940 to 31 August 1941. p. 3, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁸⁷ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 41, TNA, AIR 49/357.

⁸⁸ Jewesbury, ‘Training Medical Officers’ TNA, AIR 29/764.

⁸⁹ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’ p. 2, TNA, AIR 49/357.

Diagnosis and medical treatment at NYDN centres were affected by the Ministry of Pensions and military policy. It was the ‘hardened constitutional neurotics’ who were the most numerous among ground personnel cases. Rather than taking into account their work conditions or any traumatic events they may have witnessed or been involved in, the most important factor in making a diagnosis was regarded as the individual’s predisposition to psychoneurotic illness.

To Parfitt, previously established causes of psychoneurotic symptoms including separation anxieties, ‘economic difficulties’ and ‘sex problems’ were less important causes of illness than the more ‘immediate strains’ of ‘hardship and danger,’ or adapting to unfamiliar technical tasks and RAF authority.⁹⁰ The RAF psychiatric consultants, S. Ballard and H. Miller, also maintained that service was a catalyst for predisposed illnesses, but suggested that such tendencies were exacerbated by ‘boredom, monotony and separation from home’ rather than ‘real or anticipated exposure to physical danger.’⁹¹ The specialists agreed that, unlike air crew, danger was not an important cause of psychoneuroses in ground personnel. It was personnel employed in repetitive and less prestigious trades at the lowest end of the service hierarchy who were prone to boredom and less likely to adjust to service life. In civilian practice, it was felt that monotony and boredom was not the fault of the industrial process, but of the individual and their inability to ‘think pleasant thoughts’ rather than dwelling on negatives.⁹² In the RAF, as in civilian industry, it was the perceived inability or unwillingness of selfish individuals to ‘do their bit’

⁹⁰ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 566.

⁹¹ Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 41.

⁹² B. E. Whitelaw, ‘Industry and the interior life : industrial ‘experts’ and the mental world of workers in twentieth century Britain’ Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Warwick, 2009), p. 113.

and fulfil their obligation to the service and the state as an active citizen that was problematic.⁹³

As Mark Harrison argues, in Britain, wartime psychiatry ‘was predicated on the assumption that... certain individuals were predisposed, by virtue of [their] heredity or upbringing, to suffer from mental breakdown.’⁹⁴ Predisposing factors included what were considered to be inherited constitutional weaknesses or psychological defects involving the doctor’s interpretation of the patients’ upbringing, experiences and behaviour. However, these factors were interconnected through social, economic and environmental differences including education and opportunities.⁹⁵ RAF medical officers and specialists also sought the origins of patients’ neuroses and mental illnesses in inherited weak character traits and early childhood events that shaped their personalities. When considering the mental health of air crew, as well as gauging the patient’s ‘bodily constitution’, and ‘innate tendencies or instincts’, medical officers were advised to assess their ‘character... acquired tendencies,’ and ‘the sentiments and habits which have been developed.’⁹⁶ Gillespie acknowledged the importance of acquired psycho-dynamic causes, and Jewesbury felt that teachers were problematic because they displayed ‘artificial self-importance’ while ‘professional gymnasts, boxers and P.T. instructors’ tended to be hypochondriacs.⁹⁷ Inherited predisposition was also found. Studies of military neuropsychiatric patients found around half of their subjects had parents or siblings

⁹³ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 42, TNA, AIR 49/357. For the concepts of ‘social responsibility and ‘equality of sacrifice’ see: Rose, *Which People’s War*, p. 19, 29-71, 105, 108, 292.

⁹⁴ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 58-59. See also: H. Binneveld, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress: A Comparative History of Military Psychology*, (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 87 - 89.

⁹⁵ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁶ Air Ministry Pamphlet 100 ‘Notes for Medical Officers on the Psychological care of flying personnel’, p. 8, TNA AIR 2/8591.

⁹⁷ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, pp. 32-33. TNA, AIR 49/357. PT instructors were physical training instructors.

with similar neuropsychiatric illness.⁹⁸ In the RAF, Parfitt discovered in interviews that on average his patients had at least one family member with a ‘psychopathic defect’.⁹⁹ Although he admitted his methods were a ‘rough estimation’ and a ‘general clinical impression’, he found that ‘many’ had a ‘low level of intellectual capacity.’¹⁰⁰ A quarter had left school at fourteen without reaching the ‘standard’ and a quarter of those who were referred to a specialist had criminal records.¹⁰¹ Parfitt argued that ‘confusion... would be largely reduced if constitution was always distinguished from reaction type’.¹⁰² However, in common with Symonds, Gillespie, and Jewesbury, he felt diagnoses were largely dependent on the recognition of constitutional or psychologically acquired predisposing attributes such as a ‘chronic cough’ or a ‘liking for quiet jobs.’¹⁰³ In investigations into psychological disorders of flying personnel, medical officers were required to grade air crew predisposition as either ‘nil, mild [or] severe’ regardless of cause.¹⁰⁴ It was also acceptable for medical officers and specialists to conflate both types of predisposition in their search for factors to explain ground personnel patients’ breakdown. Predisposition was found in so many cases because the doctors were expecting to find it; they probed and

⁹⁸ Sutherland found 53 per cent reported ‘emotional instability’ in their parents or siblings. J. D. Sutherland, ‘A Survey Of One Hundred Cases Of War Neuroses’ *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4210, 1941, p. 366. The Canadian study found 56 per cent. See: H. H. Hyland, and J. C. Richardson ‘Psychoneurosis in the Canadian Army Overseas’ *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Vol, 47, No. 5, 1942, p. 436.

⁹⁹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 568. Another study found ‘a positive family history of psychological disorder in 51 per cent of cases. See: Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 568. Mental defect was found in 7 per cent. See also: D. C. Norris, ‘Malingering’ in: H. Rolleston, and A. A. Moncrieff, (eds) *The Practitioner Handbooks: Industrial Medicine*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1944. p. 102. Ballard and Miller found ‘significant educational backwardness’ in 15 per cent. See: Ballard, and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, pp. 568-569.

¹⁰² Parfitt, ‘The Psychoneurotic Spectrum’, p. 479.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

¹⁰⁴ D. J. Williams, ‘Predisposition to Psychological Disorder in Normal Flying Personnel: FPRC Report 516, February, 1943’ in: Air Ministry, *Psychological Disorders in Flying Personnel of the Royal Air Force Investigated During The War 1939-1945*, (London, 1947), p. 185.

questioned their patients until convincing evidence was uncovered. As will be discussed below, because of the RAF's pension policy, the severity of any predisposition identified was regarded as more important than its classification.

Treatment

Out-patients were seen daily by the neuropsychiatric specialists. Appointments were made in advance, although air crew took precedence over ground personnel and special cases were moved up the waiting list. After the interview, if required, the specialists gave their opinion as to whether cases were fit to undergo court martial or detention or, in cases of theft or absence without leave, whether they were responsible for their actions.¹⁰⁵ All neuropsychiatric specialists were informed by the case's history supplied by the medical officer on official forms,¹⁰⁶ and questioning the patient about their home life, education and work history, the specialist looked for evidence of constitutional or psychological predisposition. After the interview, a copy of the specialist's recommendation was sealed in an envelope and returned with the patient to their unit.¹⁰⁷ In-patients were admitted directly from their unit following a telephone consultation with their medical officer, or were transferred from the out-patient clinic on the recommendation of the specialist.

While the treatment of out-patients was often limited to a brief interview, in-patients could undergo a variety of treatments including occupational therapy, narcoanalysis and narcotherapy.¹⁰⁸ However, Parfitt believed that for many patients,

¹⁰⁵ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 5, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6. There was space on one form for 'eye-witness accounts' of attacks or odd behaviour. It was envisaged that this was to be used in cases of suspected epilepsy or similar.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Narcoanalysis was a technique that aimed to recover repressed memories more efficiently than hypnosis by using barbiturates to produce a dream like state. See: J. F. Wilde, 'Narco-Analysis in the Treatment of War Neurosis' *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4252, 1942, p. 4. Using similar drugs,

a period of leave was more effective than hospital treatment.¹⁰⁹ Theoretically, psychoanalysis was avoided in the services because it was thought to be too time consuming.¹¹⁰ As Mark Harrison suggests, a quick ‘psychiatric interview’ was ‘the basis of all psychiatric treatment in the British Army’,¹¹¹ and in the RAF an interview with the neuropsychiatric specialists performed a similar psychotherapeutic role. Depressed about her imagined inability to carry a child, worrying about her husband on operations, and debilitated by rheumatic fever, Marjorie Bevan-Jones fondly remembers being treated by Gillespie over several sessions at Torquay. They talked together ‘about dreams and things’, her personal life and favourite outdoor pursuits. He told her she would probably be given a ‘long leave pending discharge’¹¹² The goals of any treatment at NYDN centres focussed on symptoms and was intended to return the patient to the state they were in before their breakdown, or to enable the patient to continue to play a ‘valuable’ part in society, either in the military or as a civilian.¹¹³

Both Gillespie and Parfitt explained practical psychotherapy in similar terms. Gillespie felt that during interviews with a patient after careful history taking, and a ‘lucid explanation’ of the origin of the patient’s symptoms, the patient was ‘sooner or later confronted with the need to drop his symptoms... and face the prospect of

narcotheraphy aimed to create distance between the patient and any traumatic events. See: W. Sargant, ‘Physical Treatment of Acute War Neurosis’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4271, 1942, p. 575.

¹⁰⁹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 577.

¹¹⁰ Stafford Cripps et al. ‘The Use of Psychologists and Psychiatrists’, p. 7, TNA, CAB 66/27/10. See also: G. Debenham, D. Hill, W. Sargant, E. Slater, ‘Treatment of War Neurosis’ *The Lancet*, 237, 6126, (1941), p. 107.

¹¹¹ Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 178.

¹¹² M. Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake: The Diary of a Wartime WAAF 1940-1942*, (Bangor, University of Wales, 2005), p. 144-145.

¹¹³ G. Debenham, et al. ‘Treatment of War Neurosis’ p. 108.

return to duty.’¹¹⁴ Parfitt thought that any psychotherapy for ground personnel consisted ‘of simple exploration and persuasion’.¹¹⁵ Many patients were ‘treated dogmatically’. The patient’s trust had to be gained, sometimes over several sessions, and Parfitt found it best to allow the patient to talk and express his or her ‘inner worries’ before explaining their problem in ‘psychological terms’.¹¹⁶ At Matlock, ‘reassurance and suggestion’ that their mental health was improving was thought to be of great importance.¹¹⁷ Gillespie believed that neuroses caused by ‘normal’ fears were likely to be successfully treated in this way. However he felt that unless the patient was ‘sufficiently intelligent’, the prognosis was bad for a patient with a ‘constitutional’ fear due to a faulty upbringing.¹¹⁸

As in station sick quarters, at both Matlock and Rauceby patients were treated with sedatives such as Nembutal or Luminal.¹¹⁹ Parfitt used barbiturates as sedatives for sleeplessness,¹²⁰ and Jewesbury helped patients to adjust to service life with the use of ‘a simple sedative or hypnotic’.¹²¹ Specialists at NYDN centres also experimented with the newest treatments in an attempt to speed up a return to duty. Electro Convulsive Therapy, (ECT) was introduced in 1939, and, by the end of the war, it was a routine treatment for depression in some Army hospitals.¹²² While ECT

¹¹⁴ R. D. Gillespie, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier*, Chapman and Hall Ltd, London, 1942, p. 202.

¹¹⁵ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 577.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

¹¹⁷ R. Stafford Cripps, A. V. Alexander, P. J. Grigg, A. H. M. Sinclair ‘The Use of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services’ National Archives, (1942), p. 4, TNA, CAB 66/27/10.

¹¹⁸ Gillespie quoted in Symonds and Williams, *Investigation of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel: Review of reports Submitted to The Air Ministry Since The Outbreak of War April 1942*. p. 11.

¹¹⁹ The Army also found the sedation of ‘exhaustion’ cases successful. See Harrison, *Medicine and Victory*, p. 123, 251. See also: Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 85-86.

¹²⁰ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 578.

¹²¹ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 33, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹²² Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 336. See also Henderson, and Gillespie, *A Text-Book*, p. 261. Shock therapy using cardiazol and insulin was also experimented with See: Henderson, and Gillespie, *A Text-Book*, pp. 246-262.

was used at RAF Matlock on at least one air crew member,¹²³ there is no evidence that ECT, or other experimental treatments were carried out on ground personnel patients at Rauceby. However other treatments were. Working with Army patients, William Sargant discovered that hysterical paralysis and amnesia could seemingly be cured by an injection of sodium amytal, while three weeks sleep enforced by intravenous barbiturates was effective in cases of ‘acute neurosis.’¹²⁴ Narcotherapy, continuous sleep treatment, or ‘Prolonged Narcosis’, aimed to ‘procure 20 hours of sleep out of the 24... and to see that during the 7 to 10 days the treatment is being continued the patient receive[d] 3 to 4 full meals a day.’¹²⁵ Based on the treatment of the previous war’s shell shock patients, this treatment aimed to give patients a distance from their traumatic experiences and to replace the weight they lost through stress.¹²⁶ Parfitt successfully used narcosis for ground personnel cases diagnosed with ‘depressive conditions’ and ‘acute battle cases’, but found it of little use for anxiety states and long standing psychoneuroses.¹²⁷ Other specialists used

¹²³ Interview with D. Wiltshire, Reel. 1, IWM, 28561. See also: Wiltshire, *Per Ardua Pro Patria*, pp. 60 – 62, and Henderson, and Gillespie, *A Text-Book*, pp. 246-262.

¹²⁴ Sargant, ‘Physical Treatment of Acute War Neurosis’, pp. 574 - 576. See also: Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, pp. 208-209 and Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 72-74.

¹²⁵ Sargant, ‘Physical Treatment of Acute War Neurosis’, p. 575.

¹²⁶ Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, p. 73. Insulin-coma therapy was also experimented with as an alternative method of prolonged narcosis therapy to both sedate patients and to assist them in regaining weight lost before their breakdown. Insulin was given to patients on an empty stomach; the patient was woken from the resultant coma and given sweet tea and large quantities of potatoes. The insulin increased the appetite of the patient and further helpings of potatoes were often eaten as well as a full lunch. The treatment was successful in improving the appetite of neurotic subjects and they often gained a stone or more in a few weeks. However as Gillespie highlighted, this treatment was unsuccessful in curing long standing neurotic traits, anxiety or depression. See: Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, pp. 205-206, J. S. McGregor, ‘Insulin Treatment of Schizophrenia in Wartime’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4157, (1940), pp. 310–312, Sargant, ‘Physical Treatment of Acute War Neurosis’ p. 575, and Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 72-74.

¹²⁷ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 578.

‘continuous narcosis’ in a minority of ‘very tense and distressed’ air crew patients, and they also used ‘suggestion in the lighter states of drowsiness.’¹²⁸

Narcoanalysis, as such suggestion was called, was used by Gillespie at Torquay, at Rauceby by Jewesbury and tried by Parfitt at Matlock.¹²⁹ It was indicated if, after normal analysis, the patient’s repressed memories could not be penetrated,¹³⁰ and it often seemed to achieve results faster than hypnosis.¹³¹ Various barbiturates were slowly injected to render the patient ‘drowsy’ but without ‘reaching the stage of incoherence,’¹³² and once ‘reduced to a semihypnotic state... the man [wa]s forced to re-live the frightening experience which precipitated breakdown.’¹³³ Narcoanalysis was used as a shortcut in cases which had not responded to more conventional treatment, to aid relaxation, to facilitate hypnosis and as an attempt to discover the causative factors of problematic cases.¹³⁴ It was found to be especially useful in recovering memories in cases of hysterical amnesia.¹³⁵ Although it gives ‘an overwhelmingly positive view of outcomes’,¹³⁶ the 1946 US Army training film, *Let*

¹²⁸ R. F. T. Grace, quoted in C.P. Symonds and D. Williams, *Investigation Of Psychological Disorders In Flying Personnel: Review of reports Submitted to The Air Ministry Since The Outbreak of War* April 1942, p. 11, TNA, AIR 2/6252.

¹²⁹ See: A. M. G. Campbell, Report on Fourty-Four [sic] cases of Nervous Disorder. p. 8, TNA, AIR 49/357 and Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 35, TNA, AIR 49/357. See also: Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 578.

¹³⁰ Wilde, ‘Narco-Analysis’, p. 4. Narcoanalysis was also used in hospitals without trained psychiatrists.

¹³¹ Gillespie, *Psychological Effects*, p. 201.

¹³² Wilde, ‘Narco-Analysis’ p. 5 - 6. Drugs used included Sodium Pentothal, Nembutal and Evipan.

¹³³ B.M.J. ‘Progress in the Psychiatry of War’ *British Medical Journal*, 1, 4408, (1945), p. 914. In North Africa the American psychiatrists Roy Grinker and John Spiegel called the treatment ‘narcosynthesis.’ See: R. R. Grinker, and J. P. Spiegel, *War Neuroses in North Africa: The Tunisian Campaign (January- May 1943)*, (New York, The Air Surgeon Army Air Forces, 1943), p. 157. See also Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 212-216.

¹³⁴ C. Lambert, and W. Linford Rees, ‘Intravenous Barbiturates in the Treatment of Hysteria’ *British Medical Journal*, 2, 4385, (1944), p. 70.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72. See also: Wilde, ‘Narco-Analysis’, pp. 4 – 6, Debenham, Hill, Sargant and Slater, ‘Treatment of War Neurosis’, p. 108, and Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 209-210.

¹³⁶ E. Jones, ‘Neuro Psychiatry 1943: The Role of Documentary Film in the dissemination of Medical Knowledge and Promotion of the U.K. Psychiatric Profession’, *Journal of The History of Medicine*

There Be Light, shows the process of narcoanalysis. In cases of hysteria, sodium amytal was used as a 'short cut to the unconscious mind' and to 'bring to the surface the emotional conflict which is the cause of the patient's distress.' The use of the drug also reinforced the doctor's suggestion that the patients' conditions would improve and their symptoms would disappear.¹³⁷ At NYDN centres, narcoanalysis using intravenous sodium amytal was used to recover the memories of amnesiacs, hysterical fugues, and those with separation anxiety who had been AWL.¹³⁸ Parfitt tried narcoanalysis using intravenous pentothal but did not find it to be very effective.¹³⁹ He maintained that while he had observed some 'patients benefit from emotional catharsis during treatment', 'abreaction as usually described' occurred in only a very small number of cases.¹⁴⁰ Although ostensibly for orthopaedic and medical patients, neuropsychiatric patients were also persuaded to participate in sport and physical activities, as the 'enthusiasm' and 'high morale' of physical training instructors was thought to exemplify 'deportment and zest'.¹⁴¹ It was felt that such a regime of 'carefully graduated exercises, games, and physical training' would reinforce the psychotherapy that was an important part of their treatment.¹⁴² It was argued that the presence of nervous cases had a detrimental effect on the recovery of other patients, but that contact with 'mentally normal' patients was beneficial to

and *Allied Sciences*, 69, 2, (2012), p. 321. The film also ignores the practice of ECT. See also: Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 277-278.

¹³⁷ Huston, J. *Let There be Light*, PMF 5019, (US Army, 1946).

¹³⁸ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 35, TNA, AIR 49/357. Gillespie carried out narco-analysis at Torquay. See: J. J. R. Jenkins 'Some examples of common neuroses occurring upon an operational station' p. 2, TNA, AIR 2/5998. Squadron Leader Jenkins was the medical officer at RAF Wick. (Coastal Command).

¹³⁹ Parfitt, 'Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel', p. 578.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 578- 579.

¹⁴¹ Ballard and Miller, 'Neuropsychiatry', p. 43.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 42. For a more detailed discussion of occupational therapy for psychoneurotic civilian and service patients in an EMS hospital see: K. Cameron, 'Occupational Therapy for War Neuroses' *The Lancet*, 236, 6117, (1940), pp. 659-660.

them. At Rauceby, a new NAAFI building was built with a supper room and two rest rooms, and the lighting, internal decorations and furniture were intended to create an ‘artistic and “non-barrack room atmosphere.”’¹⁴³ Men were encouraged to mix with WAAFs,¹⁴⁴ and including visits by ENSA concert parties,¹⁴⁵ there was ‘something on’ every night of the week’.¹⁴⁶ Occupational therapy was ‘fully utilized’ and proved ‘most beneficial and popular,’¹⁴⁷ at Rauceby, patients were given instruction in handicrafts such as leather work, clay modelling, rug making, book-binding and model-plane making.¹⁴⁸ Parfitt found occupational therapy including gardening to be ‘the best form of ancillary treatment’.¹⁴⁹ Fresh air and physical activity were considered beneficial to personnel and activities such as gardening or occupational therapy were regarded as slow and calming pastimes.

In summary, treatment of in-patients at NYDN centres was decided by the specialists according to the patients’ symptoms, their diagnosis, best practice, and the doctor’s own experience. The majority of in-patients were treated by being given a rest and a break from the pressures that had led to their symptoms. The use of sedatives, occupational therapy, and leave can all be regarded in this manner. For ground personnel, a speedy diagnosis and quick resolution was of paramount importance. Particularly where the patient was found to be severely predisposed to psychoneuroses, invaliding from the service was the most efficient way to deal with the worst cases. For out-patients, NYDN centres largely performed as diagnostic centres where patients’ behaviour and illness was investigated in an interview with

¹⁴³ RAF Hospital Rauceby ORB, April 1943, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Summary of work done in RAF Hospital during 1942’, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁴⁵ RAF Hospital Rauceby ORB, 29 July 1941, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Summary of work done in RAF Hospital during 1942’, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁴⁷ Ballard and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 42.

¹⁴⁸ RAF Hospital Rauceby ORB, Appendix A, Occupational Centre, August 1941, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁴⁹ Parfitt, ‘Psychoneuroses in R.A.F. Ground Personnel’, p. 579.

the specialist, and explained in terms of their predisposition. NYDN centres offered a range of treatments for in-patients, but most treatments consisted of the change of environment and activity, together with interviews with the specialist. Together with the severity of their illness, their importance in their trade, and their position in the hierarchy dictated whether they were given treatment and retained in the service or whether they were quickly invalided. Predisposition explained their breakdown, and for those who were invalided it determined their chances of receiving a pension.

Disposal

In a combatant service in wartime, the interest of the individual is overwhelmed by that of the group. Every effort must be made to make the individual into a useful component of the group, but if it becomes evident that this is impossible, then the individual must be discarded without further delay.¹⁵⁰

There were three outcomes available to the neuropsychiatrists interviewing cases at NYDN centres. The patient could be helped to ‘adapt or readjust’ to their role in the service, be downgraded to grade three (which rendered them unsuitable for overseas service), or to grade four (invalided from the service).¹⁵¹ A main part of helping patients to adapt to service life involved ‘removing square pegs from round holes’ and finding suitable employment for them. Jewesbury maintained that ‘if men and women feel that the best and most appropriate use is not being made of them, a spirit of criticism and discontent is liable to be engendered.’¹⁵² He cited a case of an AC2 who had been in the service for over two years who continually missed promotion,

¹⁵⁰ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 42, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 34.

not because of a lack of ability, but because of the lack of vacancies. It seems that he did not want to be reposted as his wife and family lived nearby. Jewesbury felt that such cases were best solved at a local level by the unit medical and commanding officer.

Other cases required immediate invaliding from the service. Nafsika Thalassis maintains that 'psychiatric illness was frequently thought to be incurable within a military context',¹⁵³ and that soldiers were invalided for either 'low intelligence' or 'inadequate personalities'.¹⁵⁴ Anxiety caused by separation from home was a common example of this. In his report on a twenty-two year old unskilled aircraftsman, Jewesbury wrote:

This man is suffering from symptoms of an affective disorder consequent upon removal from his home environment. He showed nervous traits as a child and he and his whole family have always been very seclusive. When sent as an apprentice 30 miles from home in civil life he felt so homesick that he had to return after 2 weeks. He began to feel ill when he was awaiting his call-up and the death of his brother (upon whom he was very dependent) was an additional blow to him. He has nervous dyspepsia, depression, temporal headaches, trembling attacks, insomnia and lack of concentration. He is frequently tearful.

I do not think that he will be capable of adapting himself to service life and I recommend that he be invalided, Grade 4.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ N. Thalassis, 'Useless Soldiers: The Dilemma of Discharging Mentally Unfit Soldiers during the Second World War' *Social History of Medicine*, 23, 1, (2010), p. 103.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁵⁵ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 35, TNA, AIR 49/357.

This man was found to have both constitutional and psychologically acquired predisposing factors to neuroses. Being ‘homesick’, ‘dependent’ and ‘frequently tearful’ effectively feminised him, and, as the lowest possible rank in the RAF, he was also perhaps unfavourably compared to his brother who made the ‘supreme sacrifice’ for his country. By 1942, Jewesbury admitted that he himself sometimes found his work ‘exacting and disheartening’,¹⁵⁶ and he became ‘sceptical’ of the validity of treating patients only to be forced to invalid them at a later date.¹⁵⁷ The patient had to want to get better, and this could create a conflict if their being cured meant their return to military service.¹⁵⁸ For this reason, in the worse cases it was thought better to tell the patient that they would be discharged from service.¹⁵⁹ In his report, Jewesbury gave six other examples of male and female ground personnel (including an officer) who he felt he had no option but to recommend invaliding. In these cases, he saw those who had ‘failed to respond to every effort that has been made on their stations either to encourage them or to obtain useful work from them.’¹⁶⁰ Like the medical officers on operational stations discussed in the previous chapter, specialists at NYDN centres had to consider the war effort and the good of the service before that of the individual. Jewesbury believed that neurotics or those that were felt to be predisposed to neurosis should be downgraded to ensure against their potential and costly breakdown overseas.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵⁸ For further discussion of secondary gain see: E. Jones, and S. Wessely, ‘A Paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of psychological trauma in the 20th century’ *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 21 (2007), pp. 164-175.

¹⁵⁹ Debenham, Hill, Sargant and Slater, ‘Treatment of War Neurosis’, p. 108.

¹⁶⁰ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 36, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 35. Only those graded grade one or two were eligible for overseas service.

It was thought that cases of malingering should be dealt with firmly ‘pour decourager les autres’, but that it was most efficient to find an alternative occupation in which they could perform satisfactorily.¹⁶² Reviewing cases of absence without leave was equally problematic. In cases of psychopathic or depressed individuals, Jewesbury highlighted that punishment had no effect.¹⁶³ A twenty-two year old airman who had been in the service for a year had only done eight weeks full duty. The rest of the time had been spent AWL, under arrest or in detention. Rather than ‘make it too easy for the lazy or spineless’ and jeopardise morale, Jewesbury recommended that cases be invalided from the service immediately after they had completed their punishment.¹⁶⁴ Many of the cases cited by Jewesbury had done such little service before they were referred to him, that the conditions in the RAF were not thought to be a contributory factor in their break down.

Jewesbury was more lenient in cases displaying symptoms of anxiety with an identifiable social reason. He gave the examples of a NCO considered for a commission who was anxious because of his chances of promotion, and of a recently married WAAF who was unhappy in the service as she was anxious to have a child. His recommendations were that the man be promoted, and that the WAAF might ‘be of more value to the community in the capacity of a mother in civil life.’¹⁶⁵

At the beginning of the war, a memorandum from the Ministry of Pensions was circulated to members of the medical profession informing them that in most cases of war neuroses a ‘congenital or acquired predisposition’ would be found, and that psychoneurosis or mental breakdown was to be recorded as a sickness or disease

¹⁶² Stafford Cripps et al. ‘The Use of Psychologists and Psychiatrists’, p. 8, TNA, CAB 66/27/10.

¹⁶³ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 38, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 38, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

rather than a battle casualty.¹⁶⁶ In a study of 164 consecutive cases, Jewesbury found that 90 per cent were predisposed to neurosis as they admitted to a previous history of ‘nervous instability’ and over 70 per cent had a ‘family history of nervous or mental instability.’¹⁶⁷

Many patients were found to be so predisposed that it was thought best to invalid them from the service as soon as possible.¹⁶⁸ ‘Exposure to enemy action played practically no part in the origin of these conditions’; it was the individuals’ existing weaknesses or nervous instabilities that were ‘brought to light under service conditions.’¹⁶⁹ At Matlock, just over half of those invalided had been in the RAF for less than a year,¹⁷⁰ which was considered too short a time to develop legitimate war neuroses. Concluding his report, Jewesbury wrote:

‘In our dealings with them [psychoneurotics] in the service we must display sympathy – but not too much sympathy, firmness but not victimisation, understanding linked with common-sense, realism rather than idealism, reasonableness and much patience.’¹⁷¹

The decision to invalid or retain a patient in the RAF was difficult and subjective. For cases who failed to respond to treatment, or for those whose treatment was likely to be prolonged, invaliding was the preferred option. On the recommendation of the specialist a medical board was held, and three medical officers of the rank of

¹⁶⁶ B.M.J. ‘Memorandum for the Medical Profession’, p.1200.

¹⁶⁷ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 32, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰ Report on the work of the RAF hospital Matlock for the period 1 September 1940 to 31 August 1941, TNA, AIR 2/5998.

¹⁷¹ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 42, TNA, AIR 49/357.

squadron leader or above examined the evidence and interviewed the patient before reaching a decision.¹⁷²

Medical boards were time consuming, and had to be held for all downgradings including invaliding. Most boards were for ground staff,¹⁷³ and the number of boards held for neuropsychiatric patients exceeded the number held for other groups of patients.¹⁷⁴ At Rauceby, Sweet and Jewesbury sat on boards for neuropsychiatric out-patients weekly.¹⁷⁵ 43 per cent of invaliding medical boards were held for in-patients with psychological conditions, while 35 per cent of out-patients invalided were for similar reasons.¹⁷⁶ Each case was to be assessed on its own merits, their medical and service records were examined and the applicant was ‘interrogated’ and given another physical examination.¹⁷⁷ They were not supposed to be ‘influenced unduly’ by the conclusions of earlier boards.¹⁷⁸

At Rauceby, Jewesbury found that almost half of his ground staff out-patients were invalided, about a quarter were medically downgraded, while the remainder were returned to duty. Many of these were recommended for remustering to a different trade or occupation.¹⁷⁹ The diagnostic reasons for invaliding patients from Rauceby can be seen below (see Fig. 6.5).

¹⁷² Air Ministry *Air Publication 1269: Manual for Medical and Dental Officers of the Royal Air Force* (London, HMSO, 1940), p. 16.

¹⁷³ Chambers, ‘Training Medical Officers: Attachment at RAF Coningsby’ April 1942, TNA, AIR 29/764.

¹⁷⁴ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 7, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Pensions, *Instructions for Medical Boards*, (London, HMSO, 1941), pp. 41, 55-60.

¹⁷⁸ Air Ministry, *Manual for Medical and Dental Officers*, p.20.

¹⁷⁹ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 3, TNA, AIR 49/357.

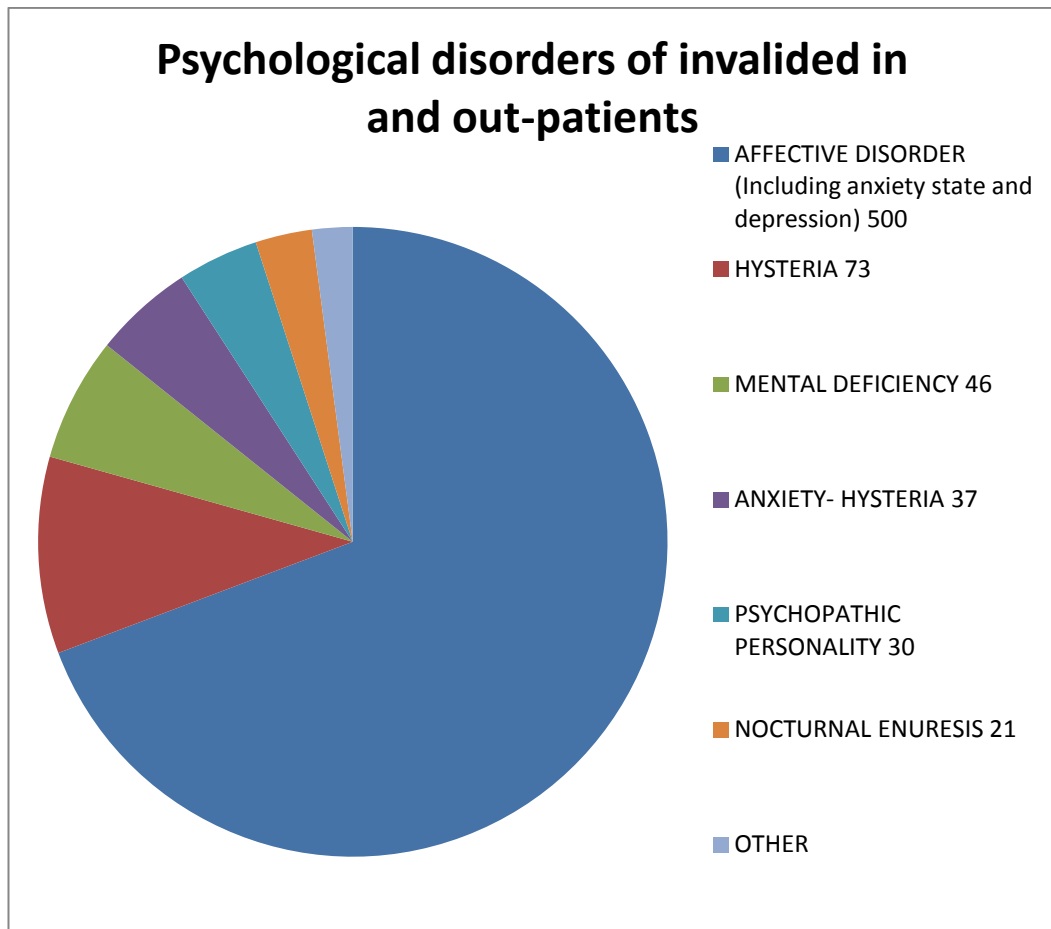


Fig: 6.5. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems' p. 9, TNA, Air 49/357. Types of psychological disorder in 722 in-patient and out-patients invalided from RAF Rauceby during 1942.

The diagnostic groups are slightly different to other doctor's distinctions, but it can be seen that together anxiety and depression account for around 75 per cent of the invalidings from Rauceby and hysteria around 10 per cent. Enuresis cases were automatically invalided once it had been established they were not doing it deliberately as a form of malingering.¹⁸⁰

Proportionally more WAAFs were treated and invalided from the RAF than male ground personnel. (See Fig: 6.6).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

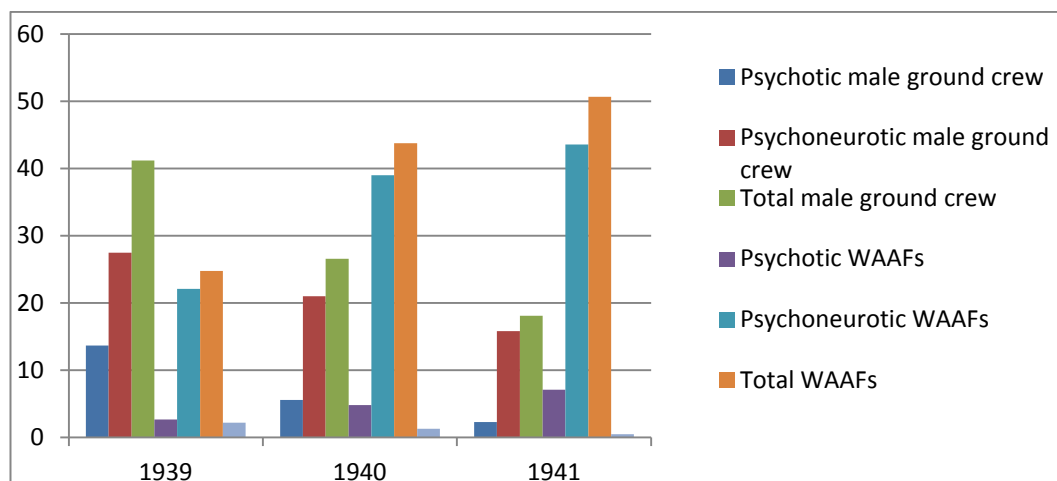


Fig: 6.6. Numbers of men and women invalided from the RAF on the grounds of mental disorder as percentages of total medical discharges. Expert Committee on Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services (1942 – 1943), TNA, AIR 2/5998.

As can be seen in the graph, the number of WAAFs who were invalided for psychoneuroses increased over the first years of the war while the numbers of male ground personnel fell. This is partially explained by the increase in numbers of WAAFs, however this is before the mass enforced conscription of women in 1942, and may also be explained in part by the social and cultural construction of women as weaker than men. By 1941, most WAAFs were invalided because of psychoneuroses. It was felt that female cases showed ‘an appreciably higher degree of constitutional emotional instability and neurotic predisposition.’¹⁸¹ As discussed in chapter four, many believed men followed ‘a sterner social and emotional code.’¹⁸² This was also a self-fulfilling prophecy; because they were perceived as less important and more easily replaced, women were found to be more prone to illness and invalided.

¹⁸¹ Ballard and Miller, ‘Neuropsychiatry’, p. 41.

¹⁸² Ballard and Miller, ‘Psychiatric Casualties’, p. 293.

Mental patients were further categorised as either ‘dangerous or harmless’, and it was to be decided at their medical board whether they were to be placed in a civilian mental hospital, or handed over to a family member.¹⁸³ As shown above, the president of the medical boards at Rauceby, Squadron Leader R. Chambers, effectively measured those appearing at medical boards in contrast to his opinion of both air crew and normal ground personnel.¹⁸⁴ Crucially, much of the work at medical boards was deciding the cause and origin of a patient’s disability, which impacted on the payment of service pensions.

Pensions

The pension records that still exist remain secret and unavailable. The Ministry of Pensions policies were originally geared to save the government money and to avoid a repetition of the expensive pension claims for war neuroses, neurasthenia or shell shock that occurred during the previous war.¹⁸⁵ There are no figures for the RAF or the Royal Navy, but between 35 and 41 per cent of discharges were for psychiatric illnesses,¹⁸⁶ and 109,000 neuropsychiatric cases were discharged from the British Army between September 1939 and August 1945.¹⁸⁷ The policy towards RAF service pensions was laid out in by the Ministry of Pensions in 1940 and amended in 1943; only recorded injuries, diseases or illnesses attributable to or aggravated by

¹⁸³ Air Ministry, *Manual for Medical and Dental Officers*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁴ Chambers, ‘Training Medical Officers: Attachment at RAF Coningsby’ (1942), TNA, AIR 29/764. Chambers was a Radiologist.

¹⁸⁵ Jones, Palmer and Wessely, ‘War Pensions’, p. 376. See also: B. Shephard, ‘Pitiless Psychology’: the role of prevention in British military psychiatry in the Second World War’ *History of Psychiatry*, 40, 4, (1999), pp. 491-524.

¹⁸⁶ Mellor, *History of the Second World War*, p. 439.

¹⁸⁷ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, p. 328.

war service were to be eligible for a pension.¹⁸⁸ By February 1941, over 12,000 men had been invalided from all three services due to ‘nervous disorders.’ Less than 400 of these were eligible for a pension.¹⁸⁹ As has been discussed earlier, the majority of neuropsychiatric cases invalided from the RAF were found to have been predisposed to neuroses and many had past history of such disorders. The Ministry of Pensions instructed medical boards that psychoneuroses and psychoses were due to the interaction of factors including ‘constitutional factors and pre-war illnesses’, ‘self advantage’ and ‘special stress’ from war service. ‘Constitutional factors’ included both ‘innate endowments’ and psychological ‘adaptations’, and covered those who were evidently feeble-minded, psychopathic, depressive, paranoid, hypochondriacs or exhibited a ‘tendency to individualism.’¹⁹⁰ ‘Self advantages’ covered those diagnosed with hysteria,¹⁹¹ while in some cases of ‘special stress’, it was accepted that for some, witnessing ‘horrifying sights’ was regarded as enough to precipitate ‘emotional shock’.¹⁹²

After an amended pensions warrant white paper in July 1943, the pensions became more lenient. In cases where an illness was attributable to, or aggravated by military service, ‘the benefit of the doubt... [was] to be given to the claimant.’¹⁹³ Attributed pensions were to be paid for life, while pensions for aggravated illnesses

¹⁸⁸ Ministry of Pensions, *Order by His Majesty For: Retired Pay, Pensions, and Gratuities for Members of the Air Force and of the Nursing Auxiliary Services thereof Disabled, and for the Widows, Children and Dependants of Such Members Deceased, in Consequence of the Present War*, (London, HMSO, 1943), pp. 4-10 This was in parallel to the policy for other services, the merchant navy and civilians. See: Jones, and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 118-146.

¹⁸⁹ Neurosis attributable to war Service: treatment of men discharged from Services, (1941-1942), Neurosis: Treatment of Members of the Fighting Forces Invalided on Account of Neuro-Psychiatric Disorders, TNA, PIN 15/2405.

¹⁹⁰ Ministry of Pensions, *Instructions for Medical Boards*, p. 23.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.26. See also: B.M.J. ‘Memorandum for the Medical Profession’, p.1201.

¹⁹³ Lancet, ‘Service Pensions’ *The Lancet*, 242, 6256, (1943), p. 105. See also: Jones, Palmer and Wessely, ‘War Pensions’, p. 377.

ended after the effect of the war was deemed to have passed.¹⁹⁴ Shephard maintains that no one was paid a pension for psychoneurotic illness until 1944,¹⁹⁵ but Edgar Jones, Ian Palmer and Simon Wessely disagree with Shephard's figures. They maintain that around 30,000 pensions (somewhere between 2.3 and 10 per cent) were awarded for neuropsychiatric disorders.¹⁹⁶ However, constitutional neuroses could not be considered attributable to service conditions.¹⁹⁷

In the RAF, invaliding medical boards had to decide whether a patient's illness was 'directly attributable to service' during the war, or whether a pre-existing complaint had been aggravated by service. If so, the panel had to conclude whether the disability had been aggravated to a 'slight' or 'material extent.'¹⁹⁸

Psychoneuroses were not attributable to the war unless there was '*clear evidence that the member has been subjected to special stress or strain beyond that normally arising in active service in wartime.*'¹⁹⁹ Rarely exposed to enemy action, the breakdown of Bomber Command ground personnel was not often thought to be attributable to service conditions. Consequently, few of those invalided for these reasons were likely receive pensions. In addition to this, those that were granted a pension were unlikely to receive the full amount. The extent that their illness was disabling was defined as a percentage in comparison to a 'normal healthy person of the same age and sex' with total disablement being expressed as 100 per cent. If a pension was given, the amount of disability was expressed as a percentage of the full

¹⁹⁴ Jones, Palmer and Wessely, 'War Pensions', p. 376.

¹⁹⁵ Shephard, 'Pitiless Psychology', p. 513.

¹⁹⁶ Jones, Palmer, and Wessely, 'War Pensions', p. 377.

¹⁹⁷ Lancet, 'Service Pensions', p. 105.

¹⁹⁸ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 40, TNA, AIR 49/357.

¹⁹⁹ Ministry of Pensions, *Instructions for Medical Boards*, p. 23. (Emphasis in the original.)

pension.²⁰⁰ The least that was given was a twenty per cent pension, rising in multiples of ten per cent to the maximum.²⁰¹ Scales were drawn up for the amount to be allocated for specific physical injuries, such as the loss of an eye or a limb, but there was no such chart for mental disabilities.²⁰²

The pension policy led to further conflict between the RAF medical profession and their patients. That their future pension and financial comfort was at stake, led many patients to insist that their symptoms were caused by their service. Marjorie Bevan-Jones remembers that at her board the doctors wondered aloud how she had passed her initial medical. Wanting to qualify for a pension, she told them that when she joined up she was ‘as fit as a fiddle... could climb Snowdon, and run a mile easily.’ She insisted that it ‘was the wear and tear of winter life in the services that had finished... [her] off’.²⁰³ As well as suffering from depression, Bevan-Jones was diagnosed with a heart murmur, but it is unclear whether she was granted a pension. Jewesbury objected to granting pensions to ‘constitutional neurotics’ who could not cope with service life. He felt that to give ‘pensions to constitutional neurotics who fail to cope with the ordinary conditions of service is to offer rewards to all the inadequate personalities who are called up.’²⁰⁴ Jewesbury saw one solution to be stricter discipline, and thought it ‘unfortunate’ that there was not something in place to deter neurotic ground personnel who were aware that by being ‘troublesome enough or useless enough’ they were ‘likely to be invalidated, with the possibility of a

²⁰⁰ Ministry of Pensions and successors: War Pensions, Registered Files (GEN Series) and other records. Air Force Order 1940 amendments, (1940-1943), Ministry of Pensions, *Order by His Majesty*, p. 10. TNA, PIN 15/2218.

²⁰¹ Ministry of Pensions, *Instructions for Medical Boards*, p. 36.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰³ See for example: Bevan-Jones, *Pieces of Cake*, p. 145.

²⁰⁴ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 40, TNA, AIR 49/357.

pension and a more lucrative job in civil life.’²⁰⁵ In his report, he cited the case of a 36 year old airman, a ‘medical nuisance’, who had been in the RAF for eight months but was previously a branch manager for the Ministry of Labour. It incensed Jewesbury that the man would probably be allowed to return to his civilian job and a salary six times that of his service pay, and he would rather have had him ‘shot for cowardice’ if he could.²⁰⁶

In the context of the political struggle with the Air Ministry over the treatment of LMF air crew,²⁰⁷ Jewesbury’s report can be read as a political lever. Like others in the RAF medical services, Jewesbury felt strongly that the policy of granting pensions to neurotic ground personnel who may then be employed in a ‘more lucrative job in civil life’ was unjust when air crew with similar symptoms could be transferred to the Army.²⁰⁸ He points out that wartime neuroses among civilians was not pensionable, and was especially exasperated by the case of the above airman.

Throughout the twentieth century, it was felt that the payment of pensions for neuropsychiatric symptoms could lead to ‘shirking or even cowardice.’ Pressure for more liberal pension policies were met with arguments that payments hinder the patients’ recovery, and were countered by emphasising claimants’ constitutional weaknesses.²⁰⁹ During the war, there were very few follow up studies of people with ‘war neuroses’, and there is no follow up study specifically of invalided RAF personnel. However, a limited number of studies on personnel from all three services

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Jones, ‘LMF’, pp. 447-448.

²⁰⁸ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 40, TNA, AIR 49/357.

²⁰⁹ Jones, Palmer and Wessely, ‘War Pensions’, p. 378.

and from the Army were carried out.²¹⁰ The studies showed that the antisocial ‘bad personality’ was less likely to do well in or out of the forces.²¹¹ Around three quarters had ‘marked neurotic traits’ before they enlisted,²¹² and consequently most were not entitled to a pension.²¹³ Contrary to the debate in the *British Medical Journal* discussed in the previous chapter, patients could appear cured, but specialists admitted they were prone to a relapse if they were returned to the same environment in which their original breakdown had occurred.²¹⁴ The War Cabinet stated there was little evidence that patients who had been discharged for mental health reasons had been incorrectly diagnosed, as it was understood that:

a genuine case of mental illness, may on return to civil life and to his family rapidly become normal and may be able to keep the illness completely under. So long as he remains in these conditions. This does not mean that he would have “got well” in the conditions in which he became ill.²¹⁵

However, Jewesbury maintained that he had seen several cases of ground personnel being invalided who then re-enlisted only to be invalided once more.²¹⁶ Their motives for rejoining the services cannot be known, whether it was because they had a sense of patriotic responsibility, because they were unsuccessful in civilian life, and

²¹⁰ See for example: Sutherland, ‘A Survey Of One Hundred Cases Of War Neuroses’, pp. 368-369. A. Lewis and E. Slater, ‘Neurosis in Soldiers: A Follow-Up Study.’ *The Lancet*, 239, 6191, (1942), p. 496-498. A. Lewis, ‘Social Effects of Neurosis’ *The Lancet*, 241, 6232, (1943), pp. 167-170. H. Stalker, ‘Psychiatric States in 130 Ex-Service Patients’ *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 90, (1944), pp. 727-738. E. Guttman, and E. L. Thomas, *Public Health and Medical Subjects: The Re-adjustment in Civil Life of Soldiers Discharged from the Army on account of Neurosis*, (London, HMSO, 1946).

²¹¹ Guttman and Thomas, *Public Health and Medical Subjects*, pp. 39-40.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.40. See also: Stalker, ‘Psychiatric States’, p. 728, 735. See also: Debenham, Hill, Sargent and Slater ‘Treatment of War Neurosis’, p.108.

²¹³ Stalker, ‘Psychiatric States’, p. 737.

²¹⁴ Sutherland, ‘A Survey of One Hundred Cases’, pp. 368-369.

²¹⁵ Stafford Cripps et al. p. 9, TNA, CAB 66/27/10.

²¹⁶ Jewesbury, ‘Work and Problems’, p. 35, TNA, AIR 49/357. One study found that almost a quarter expressed a wish to rejoin the services. See: Stalker, ‘Psychiatric States’, p. 735.

needed the security of service life and pay, or whether this was a manifestation of their illnesses.

The majority of the wartime medical journal articles that consider war neuroses highlight that, due to predisposing factors, many who experienced mental health issues should not have been accepted into the service.²¹⁷ As many have discussed, in all services, neuropsychiatric specialists emphasised the importance of the psychological selection of personnel.²¹⁸ Attempts were made to reject recruits who were felt to be predisposed to neuroses. As discussed in chapter two, trade selection tests were extensively used in the RAF and the WAAF from 1942. However, an individual might say one thing in an interview in order to be accepted into the forces; equally a disillusioned individual might admit to anything to facilitate their release from the service. As is the case with the Army and RAF flyers, psychological testing and interviews failed to limit the numbers of male and female ground personnel who were seen at NYDN centres and invalided from the RAF.

Conclusion

The staff at NYDN centres concentrated on helping air crew and the war effort. Ground personnel were of secondary importance, and the exigencies of the service took precedence over the individual. The centres performed an important diagnostic function, and specialists attempted to explain illnesses in terms of predisposition. Around three quarters of ground personnel seen by specialists were diagnosed with anxiety or depression, and around ten per cent with hysteria. Taking into account the

²¹⁷ Stalker, 'Psychiatric States', p. 737. See also: Lewis, 'Social Effects of Neurosis', p. 169, and Slater, 'The Neurotic Constitution', p.1.

²¹⁸ Shephard, *War of Nerves*, pp. 187-203, Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, pp. 87-97. In the case of air crew selection see Wells, *Courage and Air Warfare*, pp. 4-26 and English, *The Cream of the Crop*, pp. 17-40.

severity of their illness, predisposing factors, and their position in the hierarchy of the RAF, specialists assessed whether it would be best to treat problem personnel or whether to invalidate them.

Treatment was as efficient and effective as possible; creating physical and mental distance from the stresses that had precipitated breakdown was found to most effective. After the interview with the specialist, treatments included rest, (sometimes assisted by sedatives) occupational therapy, and leave. For a minority of cases, narcoanalysis was carried out at NYDN centres with mixed results. There was an emphasis on the importance of a quick turnaround of patients. Acute cases, those who were deemed highly predisposed to psychoneuroses, and the unskilled, were quickly invalidated. This included a high proportion of women. Medical boards to downgrade or invalidate personnel were held at NYDN centres, and these effectively decided the fate of patients and their entitlement to a service pension. Around three quarters were invalidated from the service.

To a large extent, diagnosis and medical treatment was dictated by the Ministry of Pensions and military policy. Establishing the patient's character, constitution and predisposition to psychoneuroses was seen as critical in order to avoid the payment of expensive pensions. Predisposition was seen as important in the follow up studies of invalidated service personnel too, and only those whose illness was proved attributable to or aggravated by service were eligible to a pension. Even then, it was likely that only a percentage of the full pension was granted, and any identifiable predisposition reduced their chances of a pension.

Informed by official publications, the culture of the RAF, medical journal articles and the media, the doctors' stereotypical impression of ground personnel was

constructed through discourses of class, gender, and predisposition (including constitutional and acquired psychological weakness), together with their place in the hierarchy. Many ground personnel who were referred to NYDN centres were regarded by the specialists as the worst possible degenerates. They were 'mal-adapted, unstable, homesick, humourless and inadequate'.²¹⁹ Ground personnel were measured in comparison to the model of heroic air crew, and, within the culture of the RAF, the further removed an individual was from the business of keeping the aircraft flying, the more likely they were to be susceptible to the weakness of psychoneuroses.

²¹⁹ Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems', p. 32, TNA, AIR 49/357.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the lives and emotions of RAF Bomber Command ground personnel during the Second World War. I have considered the selection and training of personnel, their living and working conditions and the medical treatment of those who were unable to cope with the pressures of wartime service life. This thesis has brought a significant group of the wartime population into focus, and in doing so has shed new light on the understandings of the wartime experience, work and citizenship, as well as Bomber Command and the RAF medical service.

The central theme of this thesis is the gendered hierarchy within Bomber Command. The RAF was regarded as an elite; a technically advanced force that promised to defeat the enemy while avoiding the bloodshed of the previous war. Air crew were the epitome of hegemonic masculinity, and with their aircraft, they were the heart of the RAF. Ultimately the focus of every ground trade was to keep the maximum number of aircraft and crew available. This thesis has unpacked the importance of wartime discourses in the construction of the RAF hierarchy, and its importance in explaining the experiences of ground personnel. It was constructed in part by specific idiosyncrasies of RAF culture, its dialect, pay scale, trade tests and rank, as well as social and cultural discourses prevalent in civilian life: the interconnected discourses of class, race and gender, the medicalisation of fear and understandings of heroism and stoicism.

As discussed in chapter one, the culture of the RAF influenced, and was influenced by, wider society, and as Paul Fussell, Joanna Bourke and others have

discussed, fear was expected to be the dominant emotion during the war.¹ However, whatever their position in the hierarchy, all ground personnel were measured against the flyers, and in comparison to air crew, they had little to fear. Ground personnel were less likely to face imminent danger, or to be forced to confront their own mortality. Their concerns had more in common with those of civilians. They worried about family members, about flyers they had a relationship with, and about aircraft they worked on. For them grief, guilt and anxieties were more legitimate emotions; they lost friends, boyfriends, fiancés and family members. If an air crew managed to complete their tour they would be on an operational station for a matter of months, but ground personnel could serve on the same station for years. Consequently they had a clearer picture of the losses and attrition of aircraft and air crew. It is this that made ground personnel such fierce defenders of air crew, and bombing policy during and since the war. Some WAAFs like Pip Beck felt a connection with flyers in their last moments, and ground crews grieved for their aircraft when they failed to return.²

It was understood that fear was countered by the discourses of heroism and stoicism, and in the culture of the RAF by euphemism and superstition. However, except in rare circumstances, ground personnel had little need or opportunity to be heroic. Horrific accidents involving revolving propellers, explosions and aircraft fires left lasting impression on witnesses, but such accidents were regarded as unfortunate events. These tales could not be romanticised in the same way as the heroic deaths of air crew, or even WAAFs who remained at their posts while being attacked. Ground personnel were more likely to be injured in traffic accidents or playing sports. The

¹ J. Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, (London, Virago Press, 2006), p.199. P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 273-283.

² P. Beck, *Keeping Watch: A WAAF in Bomber Command*, (Manchester, 2004), pp. 53-54.

forces' penchant for understatement also meant that ground personnel were forced to conform to the model of stoicism. Keeping 'a stiff upper lip', they had to endure years of intense work in hard conditions. Illnesses, the cold, and fatigue had to be stoically accepted, and personnel could not complain when they were told 'you've had it!' Evidence of the effects of traumatic events can be seen in the sources used, in the poetry and cartoons, but also in oral histories and archived testimony. However, following contemporary medical understanding, personnel who suffered a breakdown were also unfavourably compared to civilians who lived through the Blitz without succumbing to the expected mass neurosis.

Although the term shell shock was still in common use, in the hope of preventing a repeat of large numbers of neuropsychiatric casualties, it was forbidden as a military diagnosis. As discussed in chapter five, medical officers and specialists were informed by the RAF consultants that there was no such thing as war neuroses; all neuroses were the same, and were caused by a conflict between duty and self preservation in a predisposed and weak individual. Social and cultural patriarchal assumptions linked psychodynamic and constitutional predisposition to class, intelligence and gender. By 1942, psychological testing and trade selection attempted to eliminate recruits who were expected to either fail their training or succumb to psychoneuroses after only months of service. Proportionally more women than men were rejected. The tests legitimised the role of military psychologists, but the numbers of personnel with psychoneurotic symptoms who attended sick parades on operational stations or were invalided from the service, show that these tests were not altogether successful.

Most medical officers were newly qualified. They therefore had little experience of mental health problems, were given little training and were likely to search for physical illness or organic causes first. The health and well being of the flyers took precedence, and apart from a minority of 'problem' cases who repeatedly reported at sick parade, the medical officer gave ground personnel scant consideration. However, as chapter six shows, the perception of neuropsychiatrist specialists at NYDN centres was different. They saw a disproportionately large group of poor quality personnel, the majority of whom were ground personnel diagnosed with anxiety or depression. Although exchange visits to operational stations went some way to redress their understanding of the numbers involved, it also reinforced the hierarchical dominance of the flyers. At Rauceby, Jewesbury thought the difference between the treatment of air and ground personnel was unfair. Air crew risked the stigma of LMF, while ground personnel were routinely given medical discharges.³

For both medical officers and the NYDN specialists, unit morale took precedence over the individual, and this could lead to a confrontational relationship with patients, particularly with those diagnosed as psychopaths, and suspected malingerers. The official policy was to assess the patient's predisposition to psychoneuroses. As they were also responsible for attending crashes, dealing with dead and treating wounded air crew, medical officers were familiar with traumatic events. They therefore had little sympathy for those who fell short of the stoic ideal. Such individuals could be given a 'pep talk', be granted leave, have their duty changed, or be referred to a specialist. At NYDN centres, various experimental

³ E.C.O. Jewesbury, 'Work and Problems of an R.A.F. Neuropsychiatric Centre' (1943), p. 31, TNA, AIR 49/357.

treatments using sedatives were used for the worst cases, however the best treatment was thought to be rest and exercise. Neuropsychiatric specialists found predisposition in around 80 per cent of ground personnel; many had only served for a short length of time, and were regarded as constitutional neurotics, criminals, psychopaths, or simply unintelligent and inadequate. Such individuals were blamed for their own failure to adapt to RAF life and were either medically downgraded or invalided from the service. Medical boards were a main function of NYDN centres. The majority were held for ground personnel, and most were for psychological reasons. Only personnel with illness attributable or aggravated by the war received pensions, and evidence of a predisposition to neuroses negated the possibility of any compensation. Medical officers and neuropsychiatric specialists were influenced by, and played a role in maintaining, the constructed binary between weak and strong, and the RAF hierarchy.

The RAF was a microcosm of wider society, and the hierarchy among ground trades was a continuation of the distinction between air crew positions from the supremacy of the pilot to the flight engineer and gunners. Together with the RAF intelligence tests, pay scale and ranks, the hierarchy of trades was socially and culturally constructed by a combination of patriarchal assumptions about race, class and gender. From 1942 onwards, personnel's trade selection and their subsequent pay scale, rank and place in the hierarchy, was partially dictated by the GVK intelligence tests. The tests perpetuated social divisions and biologised the perceived superiority of those who had received the best education.

Including rank, there were multiple signifiers of status within the RAF hierarchy. The ultimate symbol was the air crew's wings, however for ground

personnel, their proximity to aircraft and their perception of their involvement with the *raison d'être* of Bomber Command was crucial. Personnel's uniform and physical appearance was an important signifier of trade and status. When first issued, it marked the end of civilian identity, and rather than being an attempt to express their femininity or individuality, the changes WAAF personnel made to their uniform were intended as a sign of proficiency and belonging. Trousers were only issued to WAAFs in technical trades, and worn and faded uniforms denoted long service and suggested stoicism and competence. Carrying out physical labour in dirty and environments exposed to the elements, ground crews and trades such as armourers were of necessity 'scruffy Erks.' They were insulated from the authority of official discipline and 'bull'. At the opposite end of the hierarchy, a smart uniform and an excess of 'square bashing' and 'bull' supervised by administration officers was a signifier of low status. Trades were also gendered. Some trades diluted by WAAFs were regarded as 'cissy jobs', while to ground crews working on the flights, all other trades were feminised as 'gash trades.' In this way the hierarchy of trades was also reinforced by language.

In chapter four I considered three distinct levels of the hierarchy: mechanics and fitters who worked on the flights, those in ancillary trades, and those at the bottom of the hierarchy who worked 'beyond the perimeter track.' Often shorthanded and lacking tools, spares and equipment, mechanics and fitters stoically accepted the necessity of working long hours, losing sleep and missing meals. They 'owned' the 'kites' they worked on and mourned their loss. As can be seen in the meticulous note books saved in the archives, from the beginning of their trade training they took great pride in their role. Those who worked in some 'gash' trades also took great pride in

the work they undertook in similar conditions; armourers earned the respect of others because of the risk of catastrophic accidents, while personnel in trades like the compass adjusters were secure in the knowledge that the aircraft would not be able to navigate to the target without their input.

For some who worked beyond the perimeter track their contribution to the war effort and the *raison d'être* of Bomber Command was harder to justify. It was not problematic for WAAFs who worked in trades that brought them into contact with air crew, or in prestigious and 'hush hush' radar trades, however, the morale of general duties AC2s, ground defence personnel and others was seen as a problem for by RAF officers. It was thought that men in trades such as gunners, mess stewards, and general duties personnel could be doing more for the war effort. The work of kitchen staff was gruelling, they received little reward, and resented the fact that many of their tasks were used as 'jankers.' Those at the bottom of the hierarchy shared the same living and working conditions as others, but were disillusioned by the difference between their expectations and the reality of service. They were 'browned off,' and aware that they were of little importance. For those at the bottom of the hierarchy RAF authority was an 'other' they shared in common with those in a similar position; rather than feeling part of Bomber Command they resisted the regime of the RAF.

When contrasted to civilians in comparable trades and industries, life in the RAF was more demanding, underpaid and strictly disciplined. As well as their hours of work, the RAF controlled personnel's social life by regulating passes off the station and periods of leave. Bomber Command stations were not closed sites, but RAF authority extended to uniformed personnel in the surrounding civilian areas.

Following the example of the hedonistic air crew, ground personnel used humour and alcohol as coping mechanisms, and early on in their Air Force careers, the most successful personnel learnt to bend the rules without being caught.

The hierarchy of trades was interlinked with identity and gender, and to an extent it was self imposed and regulated by the emotional communities that were formed by different groups of personnel. Like civilian wartime society, Bomber Command was a rigid emotional regime that conformed to the 'hydraulic' model of emotions. After suppressing emotional displays and attempting to maintain a 'stiff upper lip', feelings were thought to burst out. Male and female personnel belonged to smaller emotional communities formed around common qualities including their trade and place in the hierarchy. Night workers effectively belonged to separate emotional communities, but because of their responsibility to set an example, officers followed a stricter emotional regime. They at least had more privacy to release their emotions, while others struggled to find an emotional refuge. Mutually supportive groups helped members to cope with service life, but could pressure individuals to conform. As RAF medics noted, it was isolated, antisocial individuals who were more likely to suffer from neuroses and succumb to genuine or contrived illnesses.

Failures were found to be the wrong personality 'type' who had joined for the wrong reasons. Men volunteered in order to avoid serving in the Army, and after women were conscripted, large numbers of women joined the WAAF to avoid less appealing service. The fact that proportionally more women than men were discharged from the service confirmed patriarchal assumptions about class and gender. These assumptions were reinforced by evidence that unintelligent WAAF recruits were more likely to have head lice, or that those in low status trades had a

higher incidence of venereal disease. WAAFs struggled against the virgin or whore dichotomy, and they were thought of as weaker than men. Because they were perceived as less important and more easily replaced, women were also found to be more prone to illness and more frequently invalided.

The Second World War is often examined as a time of social change in which gender roles were redefined, however in many of the sources examined for this thesis WAAFs were two dimensional stereotypes, women were marginalised and patriarchal assumptions were reinforced. Although Tessa Stone maintains that Higonet and Higonet's 'double helix' model did not fit the experiences of the WAAFs she interviewed for her examination of WAAF dilution, women were seen to be inferior in all but sedentary and repetitive roles.⁴ More roles were open to women, but they were paid two thirds of the male wage, and often the most technical trades were diluted and simplified. Competence at trades and skills which were coded as feminine (or, as Stone studied, in Balloon trades at the bottom of the RAF hierarchy) did not challenge masculinity. As discussed in chapter one, the double helix model fits better than Stone suggests, and any crisis of masculinity caused by dilution was experienced predominantly by airmen at the bottom of the RAF hierarchy in trades that were hard to reconcile with the heroic masculine ideal.

As Sonya Rose and Lucy Noakes have argued, the secure performance of masculinity during wartime was largely dependent on being in the forces.⁵ However,

⁴ T. Stone, 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War' *Women's History Review*, 8, 4, (1999), pp. 605-624. See also: M. R. Higonet & P. L-R. Higonet (1987) 'The Double Helix' in: M. R. Higonet, J. Jenson, S. Michel, and M. C. Weitz, (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the two World Wars*, (London, Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 34-35.

⁵ S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 153, 160. L. Noakes, "'Serve to Save": Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937—41' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47, 4, (2012), p. 752.

in the RAF, only the flyers were the epitome of masculine ideal; for all other personnel their masculinities had to be constructed in other ways. Following the model of masculinity proposed by Raewyn Connell,⁶ those in the higher levels of the hierarchy of ground personnel were able to construct their masculine identities around their technical skills, their association with the aircraft and air crew, and their stoicism. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy were more likely to define their masculinity in opposition to the female other. In the specific culture of Bomber Command, an individual's trade and their place in the hierarchy was more important than their gender. Some WAAFs saw themselves as more part of the military than the lowest men in the hierarchy, and some men certainly felt more like civilians in uniform.

This thesis has uncovered nuanced divisions in this previously unstudied group of wartime society. The hierarchy in the RAF was created by discourses of class and gender, together with medical theories and the wartime understanding of fear, bravery and stoicism. More than the power and authority that came with rank and civilian social class, in Bomber Command the hierarchy was constructed by the proximity of different trade groups to the aircraft and air crew and their importance in the war effort. Their shift patterns, and amount of autonomy, their pay scale, the dialect of the RAF, and the visual signifiers of uniforms all contributed. The hierarchy also affected the construction of individual identities and mutually supportive emotional communities. These were crucial in helping people cope with the uncertainties of war; it was those who became isolated who were more at risk of

⁶ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities (Second Edition)*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), pp.73-74.

succumbing to an emotional breakdown. Those who did suffer from neuroses were feminised and regarded as weak.

This thesis examined how male and female Bomber Command ground personnel were viewed by the wartime society, and how they saw themselves. In doing so, it has contributed to the historiography of the RAF and the Second World War by bringing a substantial but neglected part of the wartime population into focus. Ground personnel's position in the hierarchy of the RAF made them believe that their stories were less important to narratives of the war than those of the flyer. That this stereotypical perception of ground personnel has continued to the present day can inform studies of memory and commemoration. This study has also shown that there were important divisions in this seemingly homogeneous group, and in doing so, it provides the history of emotions with new examples of small emotional communities. As the hierarchy of ground personnel was constructed within the wider society, this study is also pertinent to social histories of the Second World War, including those that address issues of class and gender. The peculiarity of the RAF in having women perform many of the same roles as men makes this case study particularly significant to gender history. Finally, by using the appreciation of the lives and emotions of ground personnel developed in the first four chapters, unlike many other studies, the last third of this thesis offers a new understanding of psychological problems and treatment during wartime by placing mental breakdown in the wider context of social history.

Despite the volume of work that already examines the history of the RAF during the Second World War, there is still room for more study. As we approach the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war, more oral histories should be

undertaken while they still can, and this thesis has shown that there is room for a further examination of the RAF hierarchy, encompassing the flyers and ground personnel, and all commands of the RAF.

Located in wartime culture and society between the stoic civilian population and the heroic fighting man, ground personnel came together as part of the hierarchy of the RAF in order to 'do their bit' for the war effort. The Erks and WAAFs of RAF Bomber Command knew their place behind the flyers, but they were also aware of their importance. I have attempted to add their memories to the choir of voices that tell of wartime experience. 'Three cheers for the man on the ground.'

APPENDIX A

BOMBER COMMAND STATIONS IN ENGLAND



APPENDIX B

RAF TRADES, VOLUNTEERS AND NATIONAL SERVICE RECRUITS (ALL COMMANDS)

Taken from: TNA, AIR 20/8992, Royal Air Force: General (Code 67/1): RAF recruiting: policy, (1939-1953), Appendix C & D. (This list is not exhaustive).

Trades	Volunteers	N SA Recruits	Total
Aircrafthand General Duties	59594	87567	147181
Arial Erector	25	29	54
Airfield Controller	378	163	541
Aircraft Finisher	52	288	340
Armament Assistant	456	776	1232
Armourer	11232	15935	27167
Balloon Personnel	17123	6880	24003
Barber	392	378	770
Batman	4182	4467	8649
Bricklayer	230	257	487
Carpenter	1804	4315	6119
Clerk Accts	2031	4443	6474
Clerk GD	6227	8730	14957
Clerk SD	1576	3231	4807
Compass Adjuster	374	249	623
Cook and Butcher	5807	7613	13420

Trades	Volunteers	NSA	Total
Dental Clerk Orderly	112	117	229
Dental Mechanic	126	144	270
Driver M T	10580	26606	37186
Electrician	11828	15986	27814
Equipment Assistant	5007	12448	17455
Fitter II Airframe or Engine	3952	2359	6311
Fitter Armourer	231	57	288
Fitter Torpedo	92	29	121
Flight Mechanic Airframe or Engine	80649	80704	161353
Ground Observer	1027	978	2005
Gunner	31013	25807	56820
Instrument Repairer	7377	7400	14777
Link Trainer Instructor	772	518	1290
Medical Orderly	4622	3492	8114
Metal Worker Blacksmith and Welder	1309	1263	2572
Coppersmith and Sheet Metal Worker	109	124	233
Maintenance Assistant	247	381	628
Meteorologist	1486	2193	3619
Motor Cyclist	456	610	1066
	580	898	1476

Trades	Volunteers	N SA Recruits	Total
M T Mechanic	2923	5903	8826
Musician	834	15	849
Packer	49	166	215
Photographer	1018	1730	3749
Physical Training Instructor	2031	1854	3885
Pigeon Keeper	6	5	11
Plant Operator	88	235	323
Plumber	105	328	433
Radar Mechanic	1855	823	2878
Radar Wireless Mechanic	10326	11341	21667
Radar Operator	3156	4579	7714
Radio Telephony Operator	3092	4135	7227
Station Police	7188	9220	16408
Shoemaker	480	275	755
Tailor	226	311	537
Telephonist	59	144	203
Teleprinter Operator	1153	1009	2162
RDF (Radar)	189	119	308
Wireless Mechanic	968	1220	2188
Wireless Operator	42068	32137	74205
Wireless Operator Mechanic	39	18	57

APPENDIX C

WAAF TRADES, VOLUNTEERS AND NATIONAL SERVICE RECRUITS (ALL COMMANDS)

Taken from: TNA, AIR 20/8992, Royal Air Force: General (Code 67/1): RAF recruiting: policy, (1939-1953), Appendix C & D. (This list is not exhaustive).

Trades	Volunteers	NSA Recruits	Total
Administrative	3798	261	4059
Aircrafthand General Duties	14784	4183	18967
Acetylene Welder	8	4	12
Armament Assistant	602	116	718
Armourer	51	2	53
Balloon Personnel	17026	1094	18120
Batwomen	7205	1581	8786
Bomb Plotter	200	109	309
Carpenter	151	13	164
Charging Board Operator	1083	305	1388
Cine Projectionist	245	29	274
Clerk Accounts	6015	1281	7296
Clerk GD	14187	3182	17369
Clerk Linguist	2	0	2
Clerk GD Maps	6	66	72
Clerk Personnel Selection	7	12	19
Clerk General Duties Post D	212	304	516
Clerk SD	9052	1655	10407

Trades	Volunteers	N SA Recruits	Total
Clerk Signals	98	20	118
Cook	22725	3913	26638
Dental Clerk Orderly	809	4	813
Driver MT	14409	2437	16846
Drouge Packer	97	0	97
Electrician	239	215	454
Equip Assistant	8123	837	8960
Fabric Worker Aero	1744	240	1984
Fabric Worker Balloon	2099	1	2100
Flight Mechanic	2551	1338	3889
Hairdresser	523	105	628
Instrument Mechanic	105	0	105
Instrument Repairer	176	196	372
Chiropodist	12	10	22
Dispenser	46	8	54
Laboratory Assistant	16	5	21
Masseuse	37	11	48
Medical Orderly	4312	323	4635
Operating Room Assistant	51	23	74
Radiographer	19	3	22
Maintenance Assistant	56	20	76

Trades	Volunteers	N SA Recruits	Total
Mess & Kitchen	2197	0	2197
Mess Steward	138	53	191
Meteorologist	1509	538	2047
Morse Slip Reader	117	1	118
M T Mechanic	62	143	205
Orderly	7002	1154	8156
Parachute Packer	911	184	1095
Parachute Repairer	80	0	80
Pattern Maker A	1	2	3
Photographer	382	22	404
Plug Tester	1677	70	1747
Radar			
Operative	3971	699	4670
Radio Telephone Operator	1581	531	2112
Radar Wireless Operator	93	541	634
Safety Equipment Assistant	28	33	61
Safety Equipment Worker	70	113	183
Service Police	133	43	176
Shoe Repairer	33	17	50
Tailoress	1128	45	1173
Telephonist	5074	469	5543

Trades	Volunteers	N SA Recruits	Total
Teleprinter Operator	5433	966	6399
Tracer	28	0	28
Waitress	9044	1134	10178
Wireless Mechanic	479	25	504
Wireless Operator	5211	3477	8688
Workshophand	1038	0	1038

APPENDIX D

TRADES AND PAY GROUPS

(Taken from: J. Hammerton, *ABC of the RAF: New & Enlarged Edition*, (London, Amalgamated Press, 1943), p. 12.)

Group 1

Electrician grade 1
Fitter, grade 1
Fitter, grade 2 (airframe)
Fitter, grade 2 (engine)
Fitter (armourer)
Fitter (armourer) (bombs)
Fitter (armourer) (guns)
Fitter (MT)
Instrument repairer, grade 1
Radio Mechanic
Wireless Mechanic
Wireless Operator Mechanic

Group 2

Armourer
Armourer (bombs)
Armourer (guns)
Electrician, grade 2
Flight Mechanic (airframe)
Flight Mechanic (engine)
Instrument repairer, grade 2
MT Mechanic
Photographer
Radio Operator
Wireless Operator

Group 3

Cook and Butcher

Motor Boat Crew

Shoemaker

Tailor

Group 4

Clerk (accounting)

Clerk, equipment accounting

Clerk, pay accounting

Clerk (General Duties)

Clerk (Special Duties)

Equipment assistant

Teleprinter Operator

Group 5

Aircrafthand

Aircrafthand u/t (trade)

Barber

Gunner

Motor Cyclist

Musician

Physical Training Instructor

Service Police

Telephone Operator

APPENDIX E

DAILY RATES OF PAY FOR GROUND PERSONNEL AND NCO AIR CREW

Taken from: Air Ministry, *King's Regulations and Air Council Instructions for the Royal Air Force*, (London, HMSO, 1943), addendums to p.1139-1140. AMO A.97/43 and AMCO A.72/43.

Ground personnel					
Rank	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
(Shillings and Pence)					
AC2	4 9	4 6	4 0	4 3	3 0
AC1	5 6	5 3	4 9	5 0	4 6
LAC	6 6	6 0	5 3	5 6	5 0
LAC (over three years service)	7 0	6 6	5 6	6 0	5 3
Corporal	8 6	7 6	6 0	6 6	5 9
Corporal (over four years service)	9 0	8 0	6 6	7 0	6 0
Sergeant	10 6	9 6	7 6	8 0	7 0
Sergeant (over four years service)	11 0	10 0	8 0	8 6	7 6
Flight Sergeant	12 6	11 0	9 0	9 6	8 9
Flight Sergeant (over four years service)	13 0	11 6	9 6	10 0	9 0
Warrant Officer	15 0	13 6	12 6	12 6	12 6
NCO Air Crew					
	Pilot Navigator Air Bomber	Wireless Operator Mechanic	Flight Engineer	Wireless Operator	Air Gunner
Sergeant	13 6	12 0	10 0	10 0	8 0
Flight Sergeant	16 0	13 0	12 0	12 0	9 0
Warrant Officer	17 6	15 6	13 6	13 6	12 6

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