

# **The Bombing of Norwich Training College: 1942**

**by Elizabeth Crouch** (1941-43)

This article first appeared in the Keswick Hall Old Students' Club  
magazine December 2004

5

## **THE BOMBING OF NORWICH TEACHER'S TRAINING COLLEGE ON THE 29TH APRIL 1942**

I was a student at Norwich Training College for teachers from 1941-43 and was there during the bombing of April 1942. The College was a large institutional type building on College Road, off Earlham Road. Our Principal was Miss Duff and as we had to do a two year course there were eighty first and second year students. The second year girls lived in hostels on College Road and also Recreation Road. The first year girls lived in dormitories in the College, the cubicles like wooden stalls, about 8x8.

We had returned to College from our Easter break when the night-bombing started. As our dormitories were five flights up stone stairs, on the night of 29th April we were told to bring our mattresses to the ground floor and to sleep in the long corridor which ran from the front to the back of the College. All we had with us were dressing gowns and slippers and two blankets and a pillow.

The sirens sounded at just past eleven and shortly the bombing began. There were anti-aircraft in Heigham Park on the Avenues and although I had seen them under camouflage netting I had never imagined the ear-splitting noise they would make in action. Soon College was hit by incendiaries. We had a beautifully thatched chapel which blazed quickly and our science laboratory which contained much woodwork was soon well alight. We forty girls were in the corridor between these two infernos.

Miss Duff vainly rang for a fire engine, saying 'This is an emergency'. My uncle, Frank Horsley, was Chief Fire Officer for Norwich at the time, I expect he was overwhelmed with emergency calls that night. College was now well alight so we had to vacate it hurriedly. We crossed the garden and found that the high garden fence was also alight. We passed through a door and onto Recreation Road. Shrapnel was falling all around us making a metallic sound as it struck the pavement.

We went onto the Recreation ground and into an air raid shelter. It was like a large rabbit burrow with wooden benches against the walls. Pit props held up a planked wooden ceiling. The heavy thud of bombs falling nearby caused soil to trickle through the gaps in the planks. Miss Duff called the register and asked if we had any injuries. She had a first aid box. We were all present and amazingly unhurt. I have to own up that all our knees were knocking and we felt clammy cold.

Burnt pages from our now useless text books came to us on a current of air passing through the burrow. We grabbed them and laid claim to them. It suddenly dawned on me that eight months paperwork was gone forever, as well as my new shoes, dress and coat, for which I had hoarded coupons and money to buy.

The noise of bombing faded and at 1.15 the all clear sounded. We left the shelter and were marshalled into a crocodile to walk to a rest centre on Colman Road still in our nightwear and slippers. We passed small groups of people who either wept at the sight of us, or waved miniature Union Jacks and cheered us on.

At the rest centre there were more tears at the sight of us from the white-coated ladies who gave us each a very large mug of very sweet cocoa and a huge doorstep of bread overflowing with golden syrup. I presume all the sweetness was an antidote for shock. We were given a grey army blanket to wrap ourselves in, and we lay on the classroom floors hopefully to sleep.

At seven o'clock we gathered at the school gate to make the return journey to College Road. We were to be kitted out by the senior girls living in the hostels. We juniors each had a "mother" in the senior year who would perhaps lend us clothes to go home in. We would also be provided with travel vouchers.

However, I didn't take the journey to College Road. At the rest centre gate a tall, uniformed, sooty figure grabbed me and held me tight. He said "Thank God you are safe". He was my cousin Bill, also in the Fire Service. He had heard about the College burning and had tracked us down to Colman Road. After speaking to Miss Duff he packed me and three friends into his car and drove us to his home on George Borrow Road. I felt very sorry for his wife Enid who had a two-week old baby girl. She gave us breakfast, porridge, toast and marmalade. The cup of tea was the best ever! She took us upstairs and clothed us all respectably. After thanking her we all packed into Bill's car and went to poor old College Road. College was still burning. Firemen had to come every day for a week to saturate the ruins. A stick of bombs had hit houses on College Road, which were now heaps of rubble

I knew I could get a lift to my home town of Aylsham with my Uncle Gordon, who lived on Earlham Road. Bill left my three friends at a hostel on College Road and took me to Uncle Gordon's house. In less than an hour I was home, being

hugged by my Mother and Father. They had watched Norwich burning from Aylsham Market Place and having two daughters living in Norwich, wondered if they would survive the Norwich inferno. Cousin Bill had checked that my sister Angela was safe after a traumatic night at her aunt's house in Essex Street, having spent the night in an Anderson shelter, during which time the chimney of the house had fallen onto her bed. We were given a week's break to gather together clothes and stationery to be able to continue our College life. Extra houses had been commandeered on College Road to accommodate the first -year girls and the small Junior school next door to our wreck of a College was taken over as our lecture rooms. The church hall of St. Thomas' on Earham Road became our canteen and we used the church for daily worship.

There was a very natural change in our reactions to all subsequent air raid sirens. Before the raids we had been quite content to snuggle down in our beds and go back to sleep. Now at the first wail, we sprang out of bed with alacrity, the memory of that terrible night of April 29th would be forever on our minds.

Elizabeth Crouch (née Jaques) 1941-43

# Pyjama-clad girls fight "Baedeker" fire bombs



One-armed Squadron Leader MacLachlan in his plane.

## One-armed pilot kept his promise

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

WHEN a shower of fire bombs crashed through the roof of a Norwich school during the city's second Baedeker raid, pyjama-clad girl students grabbed stirrup pumps and buckets of water and fought the flames.

The fires spread too quickly for them, however, and the girls were compelled to give up.

Before the main buildings became mere shells, the girls salvaged valuable furniture and records. They lost all their belongings.

"There was no panic among the girls," an official said. "They put out several fires on the top floor and even tried to tackle incendiaries on the roof. We couldn't stop them. Only when the flames were beyond control did the girls go to their shelter trenches."

Wednesday night's raid was effective only in a small way from the Baedeker three-star aspect. An ancient church was damaged, but a block of buildings was saved after fires started by incendiaries had got a good hold.

Instead of fulfilling the Germans' threat to bomb the city's historical buildings, the raid, in addition to destroying a small, modern section of a shopping centre, including a few big

## Admirals' homage to air V.C.

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

FIRST V.C. of this war to be