



BOLDON CAMP HERITAGE GROUP

East Boldon Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot during WW2

Rita's Story

Very recently, Mr. Adam Bell of the South Shields Museum and Art Gallery in Ocean Road, kindly passed on a lead to the "Boldon Camp Heritage Group" regarding the daughter of Mr. William Henry Carney, who was the most senior civilian (Foreman i/c) of Boldon Camp from 1939 to 1960. Mr. Bell advised us that Mr. Carney's daughter "Rita" was alive and well, living in York and wanting to meet members of our group.

Philip Moore, Secretary of Boldon Camp Heritage Group travelled to York on 5th October 2019 to meet and interview Mrs. Rita Ewart (nee Carney) who is now 88 years old.

Mr. Carney (Rita's father) and his family moved into No.74 Anti-Aircraft Ordnance Depot in 1939, just a few months before the outbreak of hostilities with Germany.



Rita at home in York

Rita takes up her story:

"In 1938, my dad William Henry Carney was working for York Ordnance when a new post at East Boldon Depot was offered to him. The Depot was under construction including a new bungalow to accommodate dad and our family which consisted of wife Emma and four children, James (12), Jean (9), Rita (6) and Pam aged 13 months."

“Dad accepted the post even though he knew war with Germany was imminent and which I realised many years later was a very ambitious thing to do. In May 1939 we said good-bye to grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and boarded a train to our new home in East Boldon.

The first objective was to get all us children into school. We were all Roman Catholic and as there was no RC school in Boldon, we had to travel three miles by train to Tyne Dock to attend St Peter and Paul’s RC school. I was later allowed to attend the Church of England school in East Boldon as did my little sister Pam when she became school age.

On 3rd September 1939, everyone was gathered around the radio set to hear Neville Chamberlain give the news to the nation that Britain was now at war with Germany. From then on, Boldon Camp became a hive of activity, day and night. Dad was always busy sending guns and ammunition to the various local Ack-Ack gun sites. Convoys of army trucks and utility vans were a constant stream, going up and down the road.

Eventually, the air-raids started and there wasn’t very many nights when we didn’t end up in the air-raid shelter, sometimes all night. It would appear that the Germans knew about the existence of Boldon Camp and took every opportunity to bomb it! There were many “near misses“ but never a direct hit. In the field only about 30 yards from our bungalow was a searchlight and an anti-aircraft gun, so when we had a raid, the noise was very loud, but we got used to it. One night, an aircraft crashed behind the camp in adjacent fields, but I don’t know whether it was a German bomber or a damaged RAF aircraft. One night we came out to go into the air-raid shelter and we were surrounded by incendiary bombs. That same night, a land mine exploded just a few hundred feet from the magazines. The only damage caused was to “blow out” all the bungalow windows which were repaired very quickly as dad had many tradesmen at his disposal.*

During the WW2 period, Boldon Camp concentrated on the defence and support of the South Tyne area. There was constant activity supplying ammunition, storing and repairing anti-aircraft guns, storing and repairing barrage balloons, storing medical supplies plus searchlight and vehicle storage and repair.

My sister and I spent many happy times sitting on a bench in the cook-house where cook would give us a nice bowl of custard and prunes or rice pudding.....lovely!

In 1945 when peace was declared, there was still plenty to do at the depot, an additional use being a German P.O.W. camp. The prisoners had a brown diamond shape sewn into the back of their overalls to denote their German P.O.W. status. I seem to recall two of the prisoners being called Heinz Poulter and Tony Rupp?

Sometime during the 1950’s, I recall a field at the camp being used by Cleadon Archers.

My eldest sister Jean married one of the depot soldiers and then moved to his home in Scotland. My brother James married a local girl from Jarrow where they lived the rest of their lives. I too was married in 1953 and in 1954, our little daughter was born in the bungalow. For the next two years, I worked in the canteen and offices at the depot, then we were given a new council house in West Boldon, only two miles away. My sister Pam had just married, so she and her husband lived at the bungalow where their first baby was born.....same bed, same mid-wife, marvelous!

After East Boldon Camp, dad worked at an Ordnance Depot at Longtown, Cumbria (near Gretna Green) and from there was posted to a depot in Hollywood, Co. Down in Northern Ireland. After retiring, dad and mam and my sister Pam and family returned to York and I and my family returned to York in 1969. We made a few sentimental journeys back to East Boldon, but, it was very sad to see the dilapidation of the site. It would be really lovely to see the East Boldon Depot returned to its former glory, especially as a heritage museum, and, with this in mind, I wish Boldon Camp Heritage Group the very best of luck.”



Top left, Rita, Mr. & Mrs. Carney and Pam in front garden 1953.

Top right, Rita's mother Mrs. Carney in front garden of the Boldon Camp house with the see-saw and greenhouse.

Middle left, Mr. Carney and Moira in the front garden April 1956.

Middle right, Brother George and Moira in the garden 1954.

Bottom right, Mr. & Mrs. Carney with Lena and Ted who were office staff at Boldon Camp (photographed in front of the camp office).



Top left, Mr. & Mrs. Carney in front of the camp bungalow.

Top right, Rita and baby Maria at 5 months old in front of the camp bungalow.

Bottom right, Mr. Carney and Pam. April 1954.

Family photographs of life on Boldon Camp in the 1950's, kindly provided by Rita.

The Boldon Camp Heritage Group would like to thank Rita for providing her cherished family photographs and a unique glimpse into her life as a school girl during wartime and as a young woman from just after the end of the war to the 1960's.

The group would also like to thank Adam Bell from Tyne & Wear Museums (South Shields) for passing on Rita's details to the group and Rita's niece Ms. Lesley Chambers for providing a vital link between Rita and the Group.

* Note: During WW2, many aircraft crashed/had accidents due to the close proximity of RAF Usworth. One such crash that could have been mistaken for a German bomber was that of a Handley Page Hampden, serial number X2895 of 83 Squadron. On returning from a raid on Berlin on Sunday 25th/Monday 26th August 1940, it ran out of fuel and crashed at Down Hill Road, West Boldon and was badly damaged, killing four lambs in the process. It was probably heading for RAF Usworth. Two of the four crew were slightly injured; PO Bunker DFC (inj.), SGT Vivian (unhurt), SGT Thomas (inj.) and SGT Haste (unhurt). A Lockheed Hudson aircraft from RAF Thornaby was also known to have crashed in this vicinity as well.