

The Woman's Land Army 1942 as told by Margaret Price.

The Woman's Land Army was started in World War 1, to ease the pressure on the farming industry caused by the call up of men to serve in the armed forces. The wages were £1- 2s- 0d , with 15 shillings of this going to the farmers wives, for board and lodgings. This continued into World War 2.

Now for Margaret's account of the period.

When I left school I went into service at the big house, when the war came it was a dreary place. I was the "3rd cook" (posh title) my job was nearly impossible as the rationing made what to cook a problem. Everything was in short supply. I saw a poster advertising the need for girls to work on the land, I was 17 ½, the right age so I applied. I filled in my papers, and was told I could be posted any where in the country after my medical. Along with other girls and women we all had interviews to make sure we knew what we were letting ourselves in for. The old pompous lady across the table was enough to put anybody off. " You do realize what you are getting into" she said. We all said yes, but we hadn't a clue at the time. I was posted to "Wheathill Farm" near Dorrington in Shropshire in 1942, it meant that I had to leave home and live at the farm. I chose to go in the dairy side of the army we were permitted some choice as to what to do. Horticulture, (market gardening) Tractor driving, Dairy Farming, or the Timber Corps. Our uniforms were the same which ever we chose.

Looking back it was hard work, but it was fun as well. The first morning was a shock, 4am up with the birds, no one told me about that. It was July, so it wasn't too bad, I had never milked a cow before so it took a bit to get going. I soon got the hang of it and would be in automatic pilot for the first hour. I remember the farmer buying two new cows from the market, and never thought about it the next morning until I snuggled up to one of them and thought how warm it was. As I reached under to pull the teat it kicked and I went flying, then I got another shock, it was a bull not a cow, I had not been told he was in the shed.

Training was given to those who needed it. We had to learn to plough the land, and I was supervised for the first few days then left to it after that. Some of my new friends went to college in Devon to learn how to dismantle a tractor engine, and then rebuild it as there were very few mechanics around, most were serving in the forces, where there skill was more urgently required. While there they were also taught how to use the new machinery.

Hay making was fun it was a real break from the hard work of sowing and thinning the seed crops.(singleing) Harvesting the corn was fun as well, even though it was a bit dusty and dirty, you needed a full strip wash at the end of the day. There was no bath to lie and soak in, unless you used the horse trough, which a couple of the girls did on occasions, (when it was dark)

Next came the hard work again harvesting the root crops, turnips, potatoes, etc. Anyone over the age of 40 will tell you what that was like in their days.

We did have POW'S (Prisoners of War) to help but they refused to work when it rained, it meant we had to work harder.

Double summertime (daylight saving time) was the hardest to get used too, so we solved it by never looking at a clock. We got up at dawn and went to bed when it went dark.