

14<sup>th</sup> February 2003

Lillian,

Indeed I remember you writing. I hope you can read my writing. I have arthritis, which makes movement painful.

To answer our questions – I first discovered Weary Bones on the crash dump in the autumn of 1944. Her accident, as you know, was on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944, so it would have been shortly after that when she arrived in Cambridge.

The part of the crash dump where she was is about 1½ miles from my home. The dump was enormous and surrounded Marshalls Aerodrome. We are almost under their flight path. There were all types of aircraft there, fighters and bombers. I remember Typhoons, Stirlings, another B17, ‘Tugboat Annie’ – previously ‘Bat Outa Hell’ from the 303<sup>rd</sup>. The fighters were scary, because they moved about as you climbed on them, the aircraft were just dumped off the transports ‘higgeldy piggeldy’!

Some planes were complete fuselages like Weary Bones, others were small fragments. Weary Bones was down on her belly. I used to get in through the gash at the wing root where the propellers of the plane that did the damage cut into her, and sit in the pilot's seat and wonder what has happened to her to bring her here. She always felt very safe and I was sure she had always looked after her crews. Her tail, of course, was all but missing, the vertical stabilizer gone. I remember the big white letters B.O. and the dice painted on her nose. Many of the dials were still in the dashboard. I was absolutely fascinated.

I was born in May 1927, so was just 17, still at school although I started work about that time. I only ever had one job, we were sent to a selected employer, no choice. I was a medical secretary at the then military hospital near my home. It was an old workhouse, and had a few maternity beds and some of the old people who were left. We were the jaundice research unit and had prisoners back from the

Far East.

I still live in the same house, my parents moved her in 1932 when I was 4 or 5. I remember my father calling us to come and stand on the front doorstep to see the B17s forming up. The sky was full of them, it must have been late on during the war, because they were nearly all silver, natural aluminium finish. My mother used to put us to bed on a mattress under the stairs during the raid, as that was deemed to be the safest place. My brother was only 5 at the beginning of the war, I was just 12, and had just started at the grammar school. We moved to the new school building in 1940 or 1941. It was built close to a railway line and road bridge. We were machine gunned not bombed. I think the bomber crew thought it was a factory. We used to go into the same basement during the air raids. I remember going out onto the hockey pitch after that raid and finding it

all scuffed up by the machine gun bullets.

The boys who played on the planes often took souvenirs, perspex, etc. but I was a good little girl and didn't take anything. Of course, I wish now I had taken something from Weary Bones, but that would have been stealing. The entrances to the dump were guarded by armed soldiers, but I used to go in along the stream, where I had been visiting poor old cart horses which were destined for slaughter.

About 18 months ago my late cousin's daughter contacted Ralph Franklin of the 306<sup>th</sup> this end. We met him when Walter was over and he showed us around the base and he sent her Weary Bones mission list for me. I do not have a computer or want one. It doesn't quite agree with the information Walter gave me, but it is more or less the same.

I thought Walter Keilt had died

a long time ago – about 1998 – as I saw his name in the memorial book at Duxford which I assumed contained the names of those who had died.

My mother died in 1997 and I was completely exhausted. I was then ‘responsible’ for my Aunt and Uncle who had no children – my Aunt died 2 years ago, my Uncle in 1998, my brother lives in Sweden.

To return to Weary Bones, I was also in touch with Robert Edwards who was piloting her on the day of the accident, who also gave me much information about it. Sadly I heard from his wife at Christmas 2007 that he had died the previous June. Walter said he might contact him but I don’t think he ever did.

The crash dump is now under the ring road and a housing estate although the spot where Weary Bones rested is still just alongside the road covered in shrubs and bushes.

I am glad you are both well. I am still driving my little Mini-Cooper. When I have to give up, for whatever reason, I shall be virtually housebound as the arthritis makes walking very difficult, and I can do very little now before I need a rest.

If you, or your friend, have any more questions, do not hesitate to ask if you think I can be of help.

With best wishes.

Pamela Austin