

BARRY GI BRIDES MAGAZINE

Number Two

December 2009



Part of G 40 the US Army supply depot on the outskirts of Barry, south Wales

Welcome to Issue Number Two!

My aim in this magazine is to share some of the stories of the Barry women who married American service personnel during and after World War Two.

My thanks to folks for your very kind comments regarding the first magazine!



– Glenn Booker

This month:

1. More on GI Bride **Thelma Copeland**, and her husband Homer.
2. Miss **Betty Farmer** becomes Mrs **Betty Nelson**.
3. Thoughts on the Good Life in America from **Mrs Joan Young**.

Thelma Copeland's Long Journey to Junction City

How did my aunt end up living right in the middle of the United States of America, so very far from the town of Barry on the Bristol Channel?

In 1942 the US Army began to take over a British Army facility known as **Supply Reserve Depot No. 2** and so General Supply Depot "**G-40**" began its not inconsiderable growth right next to Barry Docks. (See cover photograph)

Many of the GI's who worked in Barry from 1942-45 would members of the Transportation Corps. Eventually men from 11th, 12th and 17th Ports of Embarkation married local women.

Thelma in her own words written in 1996:

"I met Homer in 1945. He was with 12th Port, receiving and shipping supplies to the front line in France. Uncle Sam used Barry Docks to ship supplies to France. There was a Scuttle run to Le Havres (France).

When I dated Homer I had to be home at 10 o'clock and we didn't go out to the pubs and clubs. Mostly we went to the movies. I can remember the kids standing on the corner of Broad Street, Barry, and as the GI's walked by they would say, "You got any gum, chum?" I used to tell Brian, my younger brother, I'd better not catch him doing that and I don't think he did.

BARRY HERALD

Friday January 4th, 1946

COPELAND – TOOMEY

The engagement is announced between Staff Sergeant **Homer Copeland**, US Army, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Copeland, Denton, Texas, and **Thelma**, second daughter of Mr and Mrs Toomey, High Street, Barry

When my mother was sick Homer was a Mess Sergeant and he would take butter and canned fruit to her at the hospital. During the war food and clothes were rationed and we didn't have too much to eat. Homer ate beet (root) sandwiches just like us when he was visiting us. Fish and chips were really a treat. On the whole the Americans did nice things for the people in Barry and surrounding areas. They were good to the kids."

Homer and Thelma were married in St Paul's Church, Barry, on June 22nd 1946. Thelma's mother had died in April 7th 1946 and her father worked on the railways in West Africa so she stayed in Barry for some time to look after her brother, Brian, and her two sisters, Pat and Cynthia (my mother.)

On the move after the war

Homer stayed on in the United States Army after the end of the war so it was to be almost twenty years before they settled down. From Barry Homer and Thelma moved to Bremerhaven in Germany where their daughter **Cynthia** was born March 25th 1947. Next year April 2nd they were visiting in Texas when **Thomas Dewey** arrived in the world. Their next destination was Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where **Dana** was born on June 14th 1949. From there they went to Fort Chaffey, Arkansas, and then for the first time to Fort Riley, Kansas. Next it was off to Stuttgart, Germany, before heading for Camp Gilroy in California for two years. (Phew!)

Yet again it was back to Germany before returning (finally!) to Fort Riley, Kansas in 1962, living up on Custer Hill for two years then settling once and for all in Grandview Plaza, Junction City.

Crossing the Pond



Homer and Thelma Sometime in 60's

Homer never returned to Barry after 1946. Apparently, he was involved in an air crash in the service so he was wary of flying again. Ironically, I never got to meet the man who, with his wife, sparked off a major interest in my life: GI's in south Wales and GI Brides.

As for Thelma: she came home to Barry in **1960** around the time her father passed away. But there were NO visits for the next twenty years! It was too expensive, I guess.

In **1980** and **1981** my parents and Brian and my brother Mark went to Kansas. Sadly, I did not go with them, long story. Thelma did return to Wales in **1986**. 26 years away!

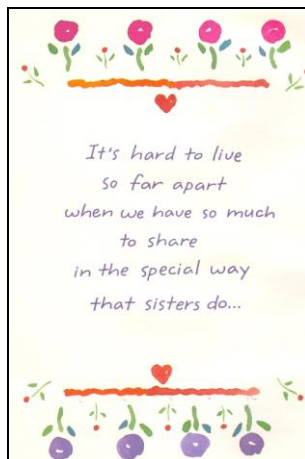


Brian Toomey, Thelma Copeland , Thelma's daughter Cynthia Pearson, and Thelma's sisters, Pat Lowell and Cynthia Booker in 1986

And then Thelma's final visit home was in **1992**. Twice in the 90's my mother crossed the Pond to see her sister; once in **1995** with her sister-in-law, Ena, and then in **1998** with Brian. Of course, in **2002** I was en route to visit her in Kansas when she died suddenly.

Reckoning

So, by my reckoning Thelma was in her hometown only three times from 1947 to 1992, and my mother only saw her sister eight times in 51 years! However, during the 80's and 90's Thelma's brother Brian was able to visit virtually every year staying for at least a month...What a difference marrying an American made – for the family!



Thelma sent this to my mother in 1992. It says it all, really.

BARRY AND DISTRICT NEWS

July 1996

GI Bride Thelma celebrates 50 years

Fifty years after she fell in love with an American soldier while working at Sully Hospital, (a stone's throw from G-40) "GI Bride" Thelma Copeland celebrated her golden wedding anniversary.

Thelma (nee Toomey) met Homer Copeland in 1945 when he was serving as a mess sergeant with a US unit based in Sully.

The couple married at St Paul's Church, Barry on June 22nd, 1946, and Thelma – whose brother Brian and sisters Pat and Cynthia still live in Barry – then spent years at various military bases around the world until Homer retired from the Army in 1965.

They settled in Junction City, Kansas, where they raised a family of two sons and a daughter, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Thelma and Homer, now aged 68 and 78 respectively, enjoy gardening, and also spend much of their time caring for a wide variety of stray dogs.



Now it is time to move on to another Barry GI Bride:

Miss Betty Farmer, Women's Royal Naval Service and her marriage to **Captain Irving Peter Nelson**:



Mr Stuart Farmer, Betty Nelson's brother who now lives in the state of Washington told me the following about his sister. I have "interspersed" some recollections from Joy Nelson, Betty's daughter...

"My sister Betty was a WREN during the war when she met Irving Nelson.

According to "legend," Dad and Mom met when he and his army buddy were standing at a railroad station. They both spotted my mom on the platform and quickly took her arms - one on one side and one on the other. After a few steps, my dad looked at his friend and said something to the effect of "This one's mine." Since he was the higher ranking officer, the "rest is history" - as we say here in the states.

In 1946 she sailed to New York and he was there to meet her. Betty came to the USA on a regular ship which took about 12-14 days to reach New York City. They drove back to the state of Washington...

After he completed his tour of duty, Dad met my mom at the pier in New York. He purchased a used car with a couple of hundred dollars, and, he believed, had enough money left over to drive my mom to his parent's house in Oregon. In those days, roads were not well-marked, maps weren't always helpful, and cash was the only form of payment accepted in most establishments. Unexpected expenses mounted as the car broke down several times. To make matters worse, the young couple spent one entire day driving and, in spite of good intentions, ended up only a few miles from where they had started. Ultimately, they got to Oregon with only a small bag of popcorn to eat and a few gallons of gas to spare.

...where he was employed at the Signal Oil distributorship in Kelso. He eventually bought the business, which eventually became Exxon Oil distributorship. This is where I worked as a mechanic, driver, salesman....etc. for thirty years.

Irving retired in **1984** and finally died of a heart attack (in **1995**). My sister passed away a few months later.

They had a wonderful life together and during the summer months took their two daughters on their 36 foot boat sailing the San Juan Islands. We all had great times fishing for salmon in the Pacific Ocean.

Their oldest daughter, Joy is presently Professor of Music at Oklahoma University and the younger daughter, Patricia is a nurse in Louisiana.”

Back to their wedding in April 1944...



LOCAL WEDDING.

NELSON—FARMER.

Miss Betty Farmer, W.R.N.S., only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Farmer, Port Road, Barry, was married at All Saints' Church, Barry, on Monday, to Capt. Irving P. Nelson, of the U.S. Army, a native of Oregon, U.S.A. The Rector of Barry (Rev. W. N. Peregrine) officiated at a fully choral service.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a gown of white crepe. Her veil was held in place by a coronet of orange blossom and she carried a shower bouquet of red roses. She was attended by three bridesmaids, Miss Audrey Williams (W.R.N.S.), Miss Valerie Hopkins and Miss Debra Morgan, who all wore gowns of stiff pink silk, cut Edwardian style, with head-dresses to match. They carried shower posies of heather and forget-me-nots. The best man was Lieut. Jackson and the groomsmen Capt. MacIntyre and Lieut. Smith of the U.S. Army.

A reception was held at the Victoria Hotel, Barry Dock, after which the bride and bridegroom left for an unknown destination. The bride wore a brown model suit with matching accessories for travelling.

“Our commanding officer, Captain Irving P. Nelson, took unto himself a wife, Miss Betty Farmer of Barry, South Wales on 24th April 1944, the ceremony being attended by Colonel G.C. Pilkington, the Company Officers, and some British Naval Officers stationed at Barry. “

From the history of **863rd Ordnance Heavy Automotive Maintenance Company @**

["http://www.geocities.com/ccresta/historyof863rd.html"](http://www.geocities.com/ccresta/historyof863rd.html)



STANDING

Lt Johnny Jackson, Val, Debby, Irving (Pete) Nelson, Betty, Audrey, Bill Farmer, Col. Pilkington

best man bridesmaids groom bride bridesmaid bride's father C.O. of G.40

SEATED

Stuart Farmer

head choirboy

bride's brother

Ella Farmer

bride's mother

Picture taken by Mr Charles H Farmer, Holton Road, Barry

More next time on how other members of the Farmer family followed Betty across the ocean next month. But before we go – What did the GI Brides think of the USA when they got there? Mrs Joan Young speaks for herself and for Mrs Gwyneth Hallett from California...

BARRY & DISTRICT NEWS

Friday November 15th, 1946

From California's Sunny Shores to the Green Fields of Wales

From far-off California, across thousands of miles of boundless land and sea, there comes the following very welcome news of two Barry girls who have made their homes at Oakland, U.S.A. But let one of them, **Mrs Joan Young**, to whom we are indebted for the story and photographs, tell it in her own words.

"I am enclosing two snapshots, one of myself and the other of another Barry girl who lives near me in Oakland. I am wondering whether it would be possible for you to re-print these snapshots together with a story of how two Barry girls met in America. Before my departure from Barry, I learned from a friend that **Gwynneth Hallett**, a girl I knew, had sailed for America, and that her final destination was to be Oakland.

THE MEETING

A few days after my marriage in Oakland, my husband and I called at a newspaper office in town to get details of our wedding printed in the paper. It was there that the idea came to me that perhaps Gwynneth would read the paper, and so I mentioned to the Editor that I was looking for a girl from home. This was printed in the paper, and the next day Gwynneth called to see me. Now we are great friends, and we get quite a bit of enjoyment when we see each other and discuss people we knew at home. We get copies of your paper every week, so we are very up-to-date with the things that are happening at home. One thing I would like to mention which Gwynneth and I think a great improvement to your paper, and that is the printing of wedding pictures. Sometimes when we read of Barry girls getting married, one or other of us would know the name and would try to place the person, but now we have the pictures to help.

HOLTON ROAD ON A BANK HOLIDAY

Last week Gwynneth and I went to a Welsh chapel here in Oakland. The service was in English, and the minister, a Mr Thomas of Llanelli, had a very Welsh accent. When I closed my eyes it seemed that I was home again. The congregation consisted of Welsh

people from all different parts of Wales, and although many of them had been resident in America for quite a number of years, the Welsh accent was very profound. Reminded me of Holton Road on a Bank Holiday. After the service Gwynneth and I were pounded with questions, and quite a number of the people we spoke to had visited Barry Island on day trips. We found, too, that when the Romilly Boys' Choir had visited America, they had been to this very chapel. The minister, Mr Thomas, told us at one time, he almost went to Salem Baptist to preach, but decided against it and came to America instead.

HAVING A GOOD TIME



Gwynneth and I are enjoying life in America very much, but there are times when we get a bit homesick for the green fields. California is certainly a beautiful state, and since I have been here (I arrived last April) I think I have only seen rain three times. We have had sunshine day in and day out, but although the sun shines all day, it never really gets too hot here. The reason for this is that we are living right on the coast, and there is always a cool breeze coming in from the sea

I am still very amazed at the amount of good things on display in the shops. Foods of every description are very plentiful, and it's wonderful to be able to walk into a store and buy clothes without having to surrender clothing coupons.

Gwynneth Hallett is the second daughter of Mr and Mrs Williams of 23 Tan-y-Fron, Garden Suburb...

If you know anything about Barry GI Brides or have any questions or comments:

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