

Hello, I'm Lucy Mary West-Oram, known to all as Molly. I was born just outside Preston in Lancashire on 10th December, 1914. The third child and first daughter of Charles and Kathleen Dobbin. Another daughter Nancy came four years after me, with another brother in between.

My childhood was happy with much outdoor play and fun. After full-time education, I went to train as a nurse at Saint Thomas' Hospital in London. (My daughter Elisabeth also trained there and my grandson Ben, who of course I never knew, trained to be a nurse in London as well, but at King's College; he is now a mental health nurse in Sweden.)

I loved being a nurse and enjoyed the training and London life very much. Things became extremely exciting in 1939 when war broke out. I had become good friends with another nurse, Kathleen Ford, to whom I remained close for the rest of my life. Kathleen and I went out one night in the winter of 1940/41, apparently, so we were told later, putting ourselves at considerable risk; we were doing some hazardous sightseeing during the winter blitz of London.

Later in 1941 Kathleen and I, not put off by our experiences of the blitz, signed up for the war effort. We were both sent to India as Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military nurses. We joined 14th General Hospital Royal Army Medical Corps. This was an extraordinary set-up. It was in fact a self-contained mobile hospital which moved around the world with all its staff, medical equipment, tents and all the added paraphernalia you can think of! You will all have heard of the Burma Campaign. Well, we were part of that. Our nursing duties consisted of looking after wounded and ill soldiers. There were many horrific injuries, as you can imagine, and various very unpleasant tropical diseases. In fact, many of the staff, including me, caught dysentery, not a lot of fun.

One of the things that horrified our children was that by the early morning the inside of the tents/wards were covered with flying insects, some of them huge, which all disappeared as the sun grew stronger. We were allowed to wear long trousers on the wards as, someone realised, skirts were not suitable as the patients, all men, were on rather low camp beds!

There's so much I could tell you about the actual military campaign; that will have to wait till another time.

It's noted in George's [my later husband's] diaries that, on 9th March 1942, 14 BGH (British General Hospital) disembarked at Bombay; I was on that ship. On 16th March he notes: 'met 4 sisters of the QAs'; 22nd April, 'Lucknow, had quite an amusing time with Dobbin'; 26th April, 'saw Molly off at station'; 8th May, 'Lucknow, lunch and tea with LMD, then to pictures'; 11th October, 'at Naini Tal, chit from Molly to say she was arriving the next day for a short stay'; 12th and 13th October, 'rode with Molly in morning and again (plus Yates unfortunately) in the afternoon'; 9th December 1944, 'flew to Comilla'; 10th December, 'my 30th birthday(!). Saw Molly and stayed till late'; 11th December, 'Out to see Molly again - very pleasant day.'

George and I became engaged on 19th December and were married in Comilla on 24th March, 1945.

[Presenter's note: It's notable that Mum and Dad only met physically six times before they became engaged, including a two-year gap, during which they didn't meet at all.

Our Mum, who became Molly West-Oram, was awarded the War Medal, the Burma Star Defence Medal and the Star Medal for services during the war. We are all enormously proud of her. Tragically, Mum died in 1965 so didn't see us grow into adulthood or meet any of her seven grandchildren; but Dad did!]

Molly Dobbin

Charlotte West-Oram