

The station band

by [J. Barrie Shepherd](#) in the [August 6, 2014](#) issue

We practiced at “The Decontam”—  
clumsy name for an ugly place—bare concrete rooms  
buried beneath a protective pyramid mound of soil, turf,  
and God knows what, designated sanctuary nonetheless  
for any unlucky enough “in the event of nuclear attack” to survive  
the initial blast and burn to reach this subterranean space of hollow refuge.  
The Station Decontamination Centre—to rhyme the place in full,  
an—as yet—unfrequented location (praises be . . .) where, Tuesday nights,  
an ill-assorted crew of horns and woodwinds—sackbuts, cornets,  
clarinets, even the occasional bassoon—would fumble-stumble  
along through “Colonel Bogey,” “The RAF March Past,”  
old favorites from Gilbert and Sullivan, “Chu Chin Chow,” and Noel Coward,  
rehearsing for the CO’s garden party, full-dress dinner evenings at the Mess.  
They echoed so, those naked rooms and sounding corridors, as if our music  
might drown out—yes, decontaminate—the cold, blind fury  
cradled tight beneath the wings of our sleek avenging bombers;  
full squadrons perched above in laden readiness,  
paying no heed to our hapless melodies and marches.