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Bletchley Park Hut 4, Diplomatic Section in Berkeley Street and Aldford House

Before the War

I hadn't been long out of school and had wanted to be a doctor but my mother wouldn't hear of it. It was getting near the time when the war was going to start anyway, so I joined the Red Cross as a VAD nurse and was working first in the Hospital for Nervous Diseases in Maida Vale, and then after I got married, my husband was in the Army and he was doing officer's training at Tidworth, so then I worked in the hospital there. But then, when my husband was sent to Bletchley, there wasn't a convenient hospital that wanted me and so that is how I ended up working at Bletchley Park.

I had left school at 16 having got only matric but being well qualified to go on and, at that stage, young enough to go to medical school which is what I wanted to do. My mother had a bargain with me and said that there may be a war and they may not be able to afford to keep me in medical school. I could have stayed at school and done the first MB there over two years, followed by one year at medical school but my mother said that I had to do one year at secretarial school first. However, my mother didn't keep her side of the bargain. She really thought my sister and I ought to have gone to finishing schools in Switzerland and spent most of her time on our appearance and looking for eligible husbands. It was not the attitude of many of her friends and certainly not the attitude of mothers in Canada, so my sister had it easier when she and my mother went to Canada. She was able to go to university and she eventually became a professor of psychology. I was frustrated that I wasn't doing things like that. I can remember my mother saying one day that if she had known the two of us were going to turn out the way we had she would never have sent us to the school she had, which was St Paul's Girls School in London. In fact, it was the right school for us.

At the beginning of the war, mothers and children under 16 were being allowed to go abroad and since my sister was not yet 16, she and my mother planned to go to Canada with my father staying in London. I had been shuffled off to the London School of Economics (LSE) because it was as far from medicine as my mother could imagine. Going to the LSE was the last thing in the world that I wanted to do, but I hated being at home and anything that would get me away was better than being there. The LSE was evacuated to Cambridge as was the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), which is where I met my husband, who was Bernard Lewis. As it transpired, I only did one term of the course at the LSE. I was persuaded to get married long before either of us would have thought of it because my mother said she could not leave the country if I was not married. We then

got married with the shortest notice you can, with both of us resenting it, so it wasn't a good start. I was just about 18 and Bernard was a few years older.

Bernard was a lecturer at SOAS and an expert on Arabic and most Middle Eastern languages. He was Dr Lewis then but I am sure he became a Professor. He was called to Bletchley Park because of his languages. He is still alive and must be about 99 years old now. After the War, he went to Princeton University in the USA and there he thrived as an expert and eventually became George Bush's adviser on the Middle East.

Recruitment to Bletchley Park

I can't remember if Bernard suggested it or I suggested it, but we decided I should try for a job at Bletchley Park. I had the most extraordinary interview. Somebody took me to the pub, plied me with quite a lot of drink, and himself with more. The only thing I could make of the interview was that he wanted to find out if I could keep my tongue in control when I had a few drinks in me. The thing is, he couldn't.

To this day, I am convinced that the only reason he took me on was because he needed me to sign the Official Secrets Act and how else was he going to persuade me. There was no sort of background security check and no sort of ability check, although it is possible that they wouldn't have taken Bernard if they had thought that I was a problem. I am not going to name him but he was one of many people who I eventually worked for and it certainly wasn't Commander Denniston.

Work at Bletchley Park

I think I applied for a clerical job at Bletchley Park and that is what I got. I started work there in late 1941 and was working for a man called Walter Ettinghausen, in the German Naval section. My onerous job was to number every message that came in. It was a very simple and boring job. I worked in one of the huts, the hut that is to the left of the Mansion as you look at it, Hut 4 I think. Walter Ettinghausen was an interesting man. He was an Oxford don and after the war, he went to Israel and changed his name from Ettinghausen to Eytan, and became the first foreign minister of Israel. He had a younger brother and they were both at Bletchley. I was at Bletchley Park for only a very short time. It was 1941 when we moved to Bletchley and I worked at the Park from late 1941 until early 1942 when the Diplomatic Section was moved to London. Bernard was transferred with them because of his languages, so I moved as well.

I knew what the work I was doing at Bletchley Park was all about; by working in Hut 4 you just picked up what was going on. I knew very well that what they had to do each day was identify the messages from the Channel

shipping which included the weather reports. This wasn't very difficult because the messages all had the same call sign on them and also because these were the same as the weather reports we were getting. If the code-breakers could identify the call sign they could use it as a crib and then read the rest of the traffic for that day. Not all of the messages were weather reports but some were. I don't think I was working with Enigma codes because I think it was too early in the war for those. Mind you, I don't know because they were spotting the key of the day.

On one occasion while I was at Bletchley, messages were intercepted coming, probably, from the Eastern Mediterranean, but the direction finding people could not pinpoint where they were coming from. The messages went to one of the military sections, I think, who worked hard on them and reached a point where they felt they were one stage from converting them into a plain language. They tried French, German and Italian and various languages they all knew, but they could not read the messages. So they took them to Colonel Tiltman who wondered if the language might be Hebrew transliterated, because the letters "im" kept coming up together, as in cherubim and seraphim. These messages were in letters, not figures. He first asked a Captain in the ATS to translate it and she confirmed that the language was Hebrew, but said she wouldn't translate it, obviously a Zionist. So then a man, also a Captain, was asked and he did translate the messages. However, when asked if he would be prepared to head the Palestine section, he said no, because he thought he might have divided loyalties. So then Bernard was asked. He jumped at it, and headed up the Palestine section as part of the Diplomatic Section for the rest of the War dealing with all the stuff between Palestine and the Jewish Agency in London. The only person who was working with him was a professor of theology from Durham, who was not Jewish but he knew Hebrew. His section was in Berkeley Street as well.

When I was at Bletchley, I knew about Colonel Tiltman and Dilly Knox, and of course, Alan Turing. I knew what Alan Turing was doing because people admired him and talked about him but, at the time, I don't think I knew about the Bombe created by him and Gordon Welchman. I am not sure how I know the names Hugh Alexander and Gordon Welchman; it may be because I have read about them in books, but the names do seem to ring a bell.

I think I only worked in the daytime at Bletchley, that is I didn't work shifts and I don't think my husband did shifts either. He was obviously translating, probably from Arabic, although he did speak Turkish as well. I have no idea which part of the Park my husband was working in.

Accommodation at Bletchley

We lived somewhere near Bletchley in a boarding house. The wife was very, very house proud and got very upset that I didn't polish the furniture every day in my room. She wanted her husband to look good at work, so she was always ironing his shirts, but only the collar and cuffs; I had never seen anyone do that before.

I think we walked to the Park every day. I can't remember if we ever ate at Bletchley Park, although we must have had lunch there because I can't believe we went back to the boarding house for lunch. Other meals would have been at the boarding house.

Work in the Diplomatic Section in London

By early 1942, Bernard and I were working in London. The Diplomatic Section was located in Berkeley Street, but we outgrew Berkeley Street. The Section also had a flat in a block called Aldford House in Park Lane with balconies overlooking the park, which was very nice.

I started off with a slightly better clerical job working on Italian codes. The Italian section in Berkeley Street was quite big. There were two intercommunicating rooms and I was in the smaller room. The codes the Italians were using were transmitted in five-figure groups and I had to keep a record of the first five groups and the last five groups; very tidily done and set down in rows.

There were a lot of linguists and quite a few mathematicians in the section, all university dons. I did get to know what was going on and some of the things that happened were very funny. There was something rather exciting early on and I think this happened in 1942, or possibly early 1943, when I was probably still doing clerical work although I didn't stay in that department for long. The Italian consul, in Lourenço Marques which was in East Africa, sent a message to Rome simply asking where a particular ship was. The navy and the air force were looking all over the place for it, but couldn't find it. I can remember the translators holding up the message and saying that Rome would never answer, but the next day they did and told the Italian Consul that it was in the North Atlantic. Now I don't know if this contributed to finding the ship within days or coincidence, but I like to think that it did.

The Palestine section was also in Berkeley Street, so after I left Bernard, I thought I would have to resign because I didn't think we could work in the same building. Commander Denniston asked me why and I said because Bernard and I might pass each other on the stairs and it would be so embarrassing. He just told me that it wouldn't embarrass him.

Although we weren't at Bletchley Park any more, we still heard about various things. An event I recall being told about was when the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau got out from Brest and sailed through the Channel in 1942. We should have been able to stop that and I was told that Walter Ettinghausen had said they must have missed the weather report for that day and feeling that he was partly responsible.

Code-breaking in the Diplomatic Section

I got into code-breaking because of the following incident. The Italian codes were being read, and had been for some time, but then suddenly, they couldn't be read any more. Everyone was very alarmed and thought the Italians had completely new codes and that they (the code breakers) would have to start from scratch. I couldn't understand this and thought that the Italians didn't have the ability to supply new codes to every outpost they had in the world and that there must be some other explanation, that is, that these were the same codes but being used differently.

One night I was lying in bed awake, I have the feeling that there were distant guns going off, and suddenly I could see this whole column of figures that I had written and it struck me that these were not repeating, which would be something that people looked for, but that there were differences between the numbers in adjoining columns. The differences would be constant for a day or two and then they would change. I wondered if these numbers could be representing dates. I went over it in my head and rushed in next morning, checked it and yes, the numbers were representing the date and month. I suspected that the next two pairs of numbers were showing the page and line of the random number book where they started because the person decoding it would have to know that. And I was right!

After that, I moved onto code breaking in the Italian section. I was part of a three person team that went from section to section where they were having difficulties and we were supposed to help sort these out. Some of the time we worked in Berkeley Street and sometimes in Park Lane depending basically on what we were doing and where the section that had the problem was. We became trouble shooters. I thought of us as the "flying squad".

I didn't speak Italian, but by the time I left that section I could, with difficulty, read an Italian newspaper. The other two in the team were a male lecturer in mathematics from University College, London and another young man. I have no idea what he did before. He was clever but we didn't find him particularly friendly, or rather we didn't find him the sort of person we particularly wanted to be friends with, although we got on working together. I have been trying but I can't remember their names. I can visualise them and if I saw them again, at the ages they were then, I would know them.

The Foreign Office set up language courses, not specifically for us, in the building just opposite the Berkeley Street offices. There was a choice of which language you could learn and the three of us thought it would be quite useful to learn Russian. We didn't learn much, only a few words and became familiar with the alphabet, but this was easier for us than for people who had come from completely other departments in the Foreign Office. In fact, some of them freaked out and left as soon as they saw the alphabet.

In fact, we were had no use for the Russian until very near the end of the War when traffic was intercepted that was going between Yugoslavia and Russia, so presumably between Tito and Stalin, and we were set to work on that. We had just about got to the point where we thought this is going to be readable when the Army heard about it and said that belongs to us, and so it was taken away from us. I think they were probably right about that.

I did this sort of work right through the War. On one occasion, after the Americans had landed in North Africa, a message came in and Commander Denniston was worried because he thought we ought to know what it was. He called me in and asked me to work on the message. I looked at it, and said, what can I do with only one message. He said, try, and, in fact, it was very easy and very harmless. That is the sort of relationship I had with him. He was always very encouraging.

Commander Denniston was already in London, as Deputy Director of the Diplomatic Section, when Bernard and I moved there. I didn't know him at all before then and never even saw him when I was at Bletchley. I am not sure how I first came to his notice, but can only imagine it was after I spotted what had happened to that Italian code. After that, he always took an interest in me. I think he was encouraging to everybody. He was a very nice person.

I didn't have an immediate superior when I was in London, just occasionally. There was a time when two of us became very uncomfortable that everyone was walking around in uniform apart from us and that was when we decided we wanted to leave and join the Wrens. Well, of course, Denniston was a Naval Commander and when we told him, he just looked at us and said he had never heard anything so ridiculous in his life, and that the moment we did join the Wrens, he could arrange for us to be transferred back to Berkeley Street. So we didn't join.

I was moved to the Hungarian section to help break the diplomatic code because the section was headed by a woman, whose name I have forgotten, who had had distinguished service in the Middle East, she had an OBE or some decoration as a result of it. I don't know what she had been doing there but it certainly wasn't code-breaking, it may have been translating, or something. She landed up with the Hungarian section but was unable to read the Hungarian diplomatic code, so I ended up there temporarily.

When I was in the Hungarian section there was an amusing incident. We had close relations with the Americans and an American officer who had done a tour of everything at Bletchley arrived to tour the Diplomatic section. The Americans had something which must have been an early form of mainframe computer, but we just called them the machines. I never saw these machines so I have no idea what they looked like. We knew that they handled the material faster than we could by hand; I mean they sped up the code-breaking. As far as my head of department was concerned, and she was quite right from our point of view, the most important thing in the world was the Hungarian codes. The moment the American had left the room, and remember, I was about 22 years old at the time; she looked at me (this wizened old spinster) and said, you know, if you offered to sleep with him I am sure he would let us use their machines! I just told her that we didn't need them because the work was almost done, and it was. I don't know if any of the Diplomatic section had access to the machines. As far as I know, all of my colleagues just used pencil and paper.

Although the records show I worked in "Research", this is word is misused. We didn't do research into the principles of codes or anything like that. We were more trouble shooters.

By then I had been doing all sorts of things, Greek codes stand out. I remember also Icelandic codes or something like that; certainly a code in a language from somewhere in the far north with a small population. I remember there being a lot of people in the room, and being told that a particular man was the only one who spoke that language, him and several thousand others who live there, is what was said, but I didn't have anything to do with that code.

One stupid thing also stands out, to do with French codes. It was quite alarming. Two of us went to the French section because they had something they couldn't read. I can remember us looking over someone's shoulder at this code and neither of us needing a pencil or paper, we simply read it; our school French was good enough. It was a message from the French Resistance and it was in the type of code you might find in the newspaper where every letter has been moved along by three or more letters, so for example, A becomes D and B becomes E and so on. The point was that if we could read it so could anyone else, specifically the Germans, who were occupying Paris at the time. The message said that there was a British agent in one of the government offices there. We were horrified and thought perhaps the Germans hadn't seen the message yet. I can remember running from Aldford House to Berkeley Street with the transcript because something had to be done about it. It was appalling. I never found out any more and I hope the agent was alright.

Our work arrived in our section in paper form but I don't know where it came from or how it got to us. When I got a code to work on, it could take days or sometimes weeks to solve it. Sometimes we were working alone, sometimes two or all three of us on the same code.

A lot of the codes were created by starting with a code book that was like a dictionary containing words and phrases put into five-figure groups. Then a book of random numbers would be used and the five-figure groups put underneath. The five-figure groups and the random numbers were added together and that is what would be transmitted. This meant, for example, that if A became B once, it wouldn't continue being B; not at all like the French code I have mentioned.

Most of the messages we decoded were no more difficult than that. If we converted the code to something that looked like a language then we would hand it over for translating. We didn't need a great knowledge of different languages to do this. I found the code-breaking mentally satisfying and we felt a little bit triumphant when anything worked. You felt you were doing something useful. Also you had to remember that it was highly secret so you had to make sure you didn't say anything stupid to anybody around you. I remember once going to the dentist where they had some kind of local anaesthetic that made you a bit sleepy. I was terrified that I would say things I shouldn't if I was sleepy, particularly as the dentist was a refugee from Germany.

There was a point, which may have been just before the Normandy landings when all the foreign missions in London were persuaded to give all their messages to us in Berkeley Street before they were transmitted. They were given to us only in the original language, not in code, but they needed to be translated. This was not a problem because there were so many translators there, except none of them could translate Czech. The translators who worked on Slav languages, the university dons for example, were very careful about what they felt they were able to translate and what they weren't. I ended up being the Czech translator. I didn't know any Czech and had only a few words of Russian but as these are related languages, I felt that Czech couldn't be that different. So I armed myself with a dictionary and a book of grammar and I hope to goodness my translation was correct. It seemed to me that the message was arrangements for a victory parade.

I suppose all the translations were collected and went to Commander Denniston where it was decided what should be done with them.

<u>Working hours</u>

I can't remember what my working hours were although they were very elastic. I can remember one evening near the end of the War, when the university lecturer and I were working late in Aldford House, late enough for it

to be dark. I don't know what we were working on to make us work late because this was very unusual. We did a very unprofessional thing. The building was pretty near Marble Arch and there were anti-aircraft guns at Speakers' Corner. This was long after the Blitz but there was still the occasional raid so it would have been around 1943, I think, before the flying bombs and things like that. The guns opened up and instead of moving into the passageway away from the windows we went out on the balcony and watched. All we could see were the flashes of the guns and I don't think we stayed on the balcony long.

I don't think we worked shifts at Berkeley Street, because nothing we were doing was urgent enough to need shift work. Certainly I didn't, although it is possible that I had to work across a weekend at times. I can't really remember, although I also can't believe that they shut the place up for Sunday and we didn't work then.

Training

I didn't have any training for any of the work I did, I just got on with it. All I used for code-breaking was pencil and paper, no other equipment. I think a lot of my skill at code-breaking was due to my favourite uncle and aunt (not the ones I stayed with at Box Hill) who taught me to do crosswords. I was, and still am, a crossword fiend.

I just told my family I was doing Foreign Office work. They realised that I wouldn't tell them anymore. We had a saying between ourselves at work that three people could keep a secret if two of them were dead! I didn't discuss what I was doing with anybody outside work, although we did discuss it amongst ourselves when we were at work.

Accommodation in London

Bernard and I had a flat in London, so we went back to it when we were moved there. When we split up, I stayed with an uncle and aunt who lived near Box Hill in Surrey and I had to travel into London every day.

Leisure

Before I split up from Bernard, I think we just spent our evenings at home in the flat. I can remember being on the roof fire-watching during air raids. When I was living with my aunt and uncle near Box Hill, I had a new boyfriend and we used to go out walking and cycling in the area.

After the War

I left the Diplomatic Section at the end of the war in Europe. A lot of people who left went back to their old jobs. I think I could have gone to Stanmore,

which is where most people were moved to afterwards, and where, I believe, GCHQ started.

I had an interview at the Foreign Office to see if I could continue there, however, I was no longer in a clerical grade at Berkeley Street, I think I was in an administrative grade but I am not sure about that. Anyway, I couldn't go on doing what I had been doing. I would just have been a clerk if I had stayed with the Foreign Office and I didn't want to go back to that. I was 23 years old and I am surprised that status bothered me so much but it did. I didn't have a degree, I hadn't passed the Civil Service exams, so there was no other way they could take me. If I had stayed I think they would have sent me to an embassy or somewhere like that, but in a clerical grade.

When I left, I have a very clear memory of Commander Denniston standing in the doorway of Berkeley Street, and saying I wish you could stay a bit longer, I have something nice for you and it only needs a smattering of Japanese. I really thought he was teasing me, but anyway I had decided I was going and was rather awestruck at the thought of having to cope with Japanese codes. Since then, I have regretted that decision because I feel I let him down by not trying, but equally, he may have been just pulling my leg.

I can't remember much about what I did between the war in Europe ending and when I went to America, but I got a job somewhere, a clerical job. At one point my job was with a firm of printers, but just as a secretary.

I went to America in about 1947 because you couldn't actually leave the UK for about two years after the War. Once you could, then I decided I wanted to go and see my sister. It was very difficult getting passage, everything was so booked up. You certainly couldn't get anything on the shipping lines or the regular airlines. So I went to see a travel agent who told me that British Airways were sending a plane with mail to Florida and that a few passengers could travel on the plane. I said I would like to have a place. When I got to the airport with my parents, they were absolutely horrified to find that it was actually a converted bomber; I think it was a Lancaster. There were only about three or four passengers on the flight. We landed first of all somewhere off Spain because the plane couldn't do a trans-Atlantic flight in one go. The seating was benches on either side. The meal was fried eggs in a big tin-thing, side by side as though they had been shoved in an oven all together. We landed in Miami or wherever, I think it was Miami, and from there it was easy to get a flight to New York.

There is another amusing story connected with that. I had a visitor's visa and when I was interviewed by the US Immigration Officer, I said I was a student; remember I was still young and still hoped to get into university. He said that when I left immigration with a visitor's visa I would have to pay airport tax and that I wouldn't be able to afford that. He said he would convert my visitor's visa into a transit visa, then I wouldn't be charged. The only thing is that a

transit visa can't be extended because there was some sort of quota system for the number of immigrants that America would take from each country.

I stayed in America for about two years. However, because I had a transit visa, for several weeks I must have been an illegal immigrant, working without a social security number until I saw a lawyer in Washington about this and was told that the British Consul on the other side of Niagara Falls could put me on his list to come to the USA. I can remember travelling up and going over the Falls, collecting the paperwork and coming back and after that I was in America legally.

I stayed with my sister and her husband, who was a neuro-surgeon. They knew I was interested in medicine and I was also madly keen on photography and quite confident, so they put me in touch with Frank who was a medical photographer and I worked with Frank for quite a long time. I was very impetuous in those days because I came back to London to see my parents thinking it would be for two weeks and then stayed.

It was now around 1948, and I was about 25. I was too old to try for medical school again, so I thought that nursing would be the next best thing. I phoned the Royal College of Nursing for advice and was told that because I was older than the average nurse and had been around in the world, that I wouldn't be able to stand the hierarchy in a general hospital. They suggested a psychiatric hospital and one in particular where there was a very progressive doctor in charge; they thought I would be happy working there. It was a place called Netherne in Surrey, where I worked for a year and loved it. I half-trained as a psychiatric nurse because by then I had met my second husband who was a Russian born Israeli. I met him in London but we intended to go and live in Israel so obviously I had to leave the hospital.

We moved to Israel around 1950 which was only about a year after Israel had become an independent state. It was then quite a primitive country and was a very nice place to live. It was a basically secular society and didn't have a dominant religion. There was also still rationing which was much, much stricter than it ever had been in England during the War. I had an allowance of a quarter of a chicken which was a special ration just for me for a month because I was pregnant. If you wanted to buy sugar or flour or rice, you didn't get it in packets, it was scooped out of a large sack on the floor. You had to spread the rice out on the balcony and leave it in the sun for some time to allow all the little insects to crawl out.

I enjoyed life in Israel then. I liked the atmosphere and also because I had been extremely unhappy living with my mother, but then my husband decided he wanted to live in England so we came back. My son was born in Israel and another daughter before that. My elder daughter was born after we came back to England.

I went back many years later, probably in the 1970s, after my husband's mother had died. His parents had also come to England, but he had to go to Israel to settle some of her affairs. He collapsed while he was there after having a massive haemorrhage and was rushed into hospital. I was telephoned and told that they were afraid to operate because they didn't think he had very long. My elder daughter and I went out there and he did survive, but I found that the country had changed so much.