

Joan Sandford, née Ahrens

Bletchley Park Spring 1943 - April 1946. Hut 14 and Block E, WAAF Wireless operator/Morse Slip Reader, Communications Centre. Interviewed May 2014.

I had just left school and was employed at the Hammersmith Public Library. I was called up in the spring of 1941 and was given the choice of the Women's Land Army or the Women Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). I chose the WAAF.

After being kitted out and undergoing basic training in Morecambe, I moved to RAF Compton Bassett, near Calne in Wiltshire, to be trained as a Wireless Operator. I was there for six months, enough time to join the Station Band as a piccolo player. I had learned to play the flute at school and while at the library I had played in the West London Symphony Orchestra, which was based in Hammersmith.

At Compton Bassett, I was taught how to read and transmit Morse code along with some typing.

When I first arrived at Bletchley Park, I was not aware of any codebreaking. My task was to sit at tables and listen on headphones and take down the Morse. We sat at desks rather than long tables, sitting opposite a colleague.

We were not using radios so the Morse must have been received via a land line. The Morse was in coded five letter groups which made no sense to us, so we didn't know what it was about. We then sent it on to someone else. I worked in a hut and there were about 20 of us in the room; all the others were WAAFs, although the manager was a man.

Later on, we moved into a block, and occasionally I had to go to the mansion and into a room on the left of the ground floor. I think some of the signals we received had been intercepted somewhere on the south coast and forwarded to us.

My accommodation was at RAF Church Green which was adjacent to Bletchley Park. I kept up my music by joining the RAF Church Green band which occasionally played for parades.

We worked a shift pattern that was typically from 8 am until 4 pm; 4 pm until midnight and then midnight to 8 am. Occasionally the shift pattern allowed for an extra few days off

I do remember a few people from Bletchley Park. Flt Lt [Pirie](#), who I think was my Officer Commanding, and [Muriel Watts](#), a Welsh girl in the WAAF who was on the same shift as myself and came from Pontywaun in South Wales. She is my son's God Mother. I also remember [Peter Twinn](#), a civilian, who was quite important at Bletchley Park.

When the war ended, I was not demobilised, so I was posted to several other locations, including Blickling Hall¹. I met Trevor Sandford, my husband, at a concert during my time at Bletchley where he was an RAF Pay Account Manager. He was due to be demobbed in May 1946, while my demob was due to be after this. By marrying him we could be demobbed together. We married in May 1946 at St Andrews Church in Hammersmith where my father led the choir.

After demobilisation, my husband joined the Civil Service. I went back to library work for a while, until we had children. When my children grew up I became a peripatetic flute teacher. I was surprised in the early 1970's when what happened in World War Two at Bletchley Park became known, as I had been told, along with others working at Bletchley Park, not to speak about my work during the War.

¹ Norfolk, Accommodated aircrew from nearby RAF Oulton.