

Pat Davies, née Owtram

WRNS in RN Y service 1942 - 1944, including Withernsea, Lyme Regis, Abbot's Cliff. Intercept operator against German voice and Morse communications. Admiralty and SHAEF, 1944 - 1945. Interviewed April 2012.

I was 16 when the war started and living with my father in the country, in Lancashire. In the late 1930s he had a problem getting a cook or housekeeper and he discovered an agency in London which could find Austrian or German Jewish refugee women escaping from Hitler's Europe. He engaged a series of cooks and housemaids through this agency.

I remember before the first one came he said "These Austrians are not going to know which are the drinking water taps; we had two sources of water coming into the house – the mains water and the water we preferred to drink from a spring. So he produced a German dictionary and some manila labels and I wrote "Wasser für trinken" on the labels and tied them on the taps, not very grammatical German.

When the Austrians arrived, as I was the one who knew at least three words of German it was my job to liaise with them, particularly with the third one, Lily Getsel. Lily was a very intelligent woman from Vienna; she had books, letters and articles, and I used to spend my evenings on holiday from boarding school talking and reading with her. I suppose she was learning English from me and I learnt quite fluent German, probably with an Austrian accent, from Lily.

I always wanted to go into the Wrens as there was a bit of naval tradition on my mother's side of the family. Her mother was a Channel Islander and all that family seemed to go into the Navy. Her brother, Uncle Charles, said "Girls ought to go into the Wrens". As I had to wait until I was 18, I filled in the time with a secretarial course in London.

My mother had a cousin whose husband was a diplomat in the Foreign Office, and he wrote to my mother saying that it would be so nice if Pat went to a place called Bletchley Park, because a lot of the Foreign Office girls were going there to do some interesting work. It would be nice for her to be with a crowd of jolly girls. My mother told me and it was the last thing I wanted to do, to be with a crowd of jolly civilian girls someplace in the Home Counties, when what I wanted was to be a Wren and in ports around the coast. I remember sending her a telegram which you could do quite cheaply saying "Hate crowds jolly girls", and no more was heard of this suggestion.

I managed to pass my Wren medical after a bit of delay. On the application form they asked if you had any qualifications so I put German. I was then asked

to go to Liverpool which was our nearest Naval base and do a fairly easy German test, supervised by a young Naval officer. We discussed what this might lead to and decided obviously I was going to be a spy which was rather alarming but interesting.

I went home and waited and then got my railway warrant to go to Mill Hill where we did basic training; marching and saluting and a bit of King's Regulations, Admiralty Instructions and all that. It was in a heatwave, we were sent off to Hampstead to be kitted out and issued with serge coats and skirts, black tie, stiff collars, greatcoats, caps, and black lisle stockings and of course it was so hot, none of us had thought of bringing a suspender belt or any way of holding up stockings. Luckily, one of the girls knew that you could twist pennies in the tops of stockings, and they might with luck stay up and that was how we all got back eventually from Hampstead to Mill Hill.

At the end of my training, a few of us were collected and told we would be going on to a very secret Naval training establishment in Wimbledon called Southmead, where we would be instructed in how to listen to German Naval radio signals. This was an extremely secret affair which we must not tell anybody about including our families.

So our little group arrived at Southmead in Wimbledon where the training courses were run by Lieutenant Commander Freddie Marshall. Freddie had started this branch of the Wrens, with stations all the way around the coast, intercepting and writing down all the signals from German naval ships and bases. It started with one near Dover and by the time I joined there were stations all down the east coast and along the Channel as far round as South Wales. He instructed us by sitting in one room and speaking into a microphone, we sat in another room with headphones, writing down the messages, and he simulated the sort of messages as we would hear them from German ships or bases, with fading and interruptions, and gradually as we improved in speed he went faster and faster. I learnt later he was assessing whether we had the right sort of temperaments for the job, which would mean long periods of boredom and then some periods of intense activity. Provided we passed all this we were then promoted to petty officer Wrens so I never got the little round hat, but we did get the brass buttons and tricorne hats. Nice uniform.

About the first thing we ever did at Southmead of course was to sign the Official Secrets Act and promise not to tell our parents or fiancés or anybody ever what we were doing and we all kept this most sedulously until the 1970s when we were quite astonished and appalled as books started coming out about Bletchley Park and decoding.

From Southmead I was sent to Withernsea, which apart from one station in Scotland, was the most northerly of our coastal stations. It was in a requisitioned hotel called St Leonard's right on the sea front. Withernsea was a rather dreary little seaside town and we made our own entertainments to some extent. We got hold of some tap-dancing shoes and had a tap-dancing troupe and there were one or two pretty dismal cafes in the town, and, I think, the first automat in England. Everything shut on Sundays except this one restaurant where you could put some money through the slot with your order for whatever you wanted, and after a pause the slot opened again and a rather grimy hand came out holding a white china plate with whatever the meal was on it. I don't think we used it very often.

For entertainment you really had to go into Hull on the little local train. We could bicycle along to Spurn Point where Commander Casson would take us to the top of the lighthouse, which, as I have no great head for heights, I found quite alarming. We seemed to have bicycles from somewhere because we certainly used to go out to the farms and help them get in the hay but of course the main point of our being there was the interception of German radio. Our watch room looked out over the North Sea and further down the coast they had a more exciting time because they used to get the German E-boats coming over to attack convoys going down the coast. They were getting plain language German because they had no time to code.

At Withernsea we were using high frequency as well as VHF so we were picking up more long-distance traffic from the Baltic, because the radio waves go up and hit the ionosphere and come down again. I remember one of our very regular clients was Elbe-Weser Radio which was a control on the North Sea somewhere. They had a very loud signal and there was no problem picking them up. We also used to occasionally get some rather odd messages in plain language which didn't fit in with the German naval codes which the signalmen used pretty carefully. These were different and we found eventually we were listening to German tanks on the eastern front.

So it wasn't a tremendously active operational station like some of the ones further south. It was a very good first station to work in and many of my friends for life were people I worked with there. We came from all sorts of different backgrounds because there were various ways you could learn German. Nobody had learnt it like I had. One of the people I worked with, Valerie Forsythe, her family had a nice clothes shop in Edinburgh and Valerie always had beautiful handbags, stockings and shoes. Other people had degrees in German and we had two officers during my time there – the first one was called Pen Sparrow and when she went we had Judy Fidian – both of whom I

liked very much. It was quite informal and on our time off we wore civilian clothes so as not to be conspicuous.

There was very little in the way of military in Withernsea so we and the Scouts and Guides and Home Guard and a few firemen and people used to do the parades in the town. While I was there I had another of the tubercular glands which had cropped up throughout my childhood, due to my grandfather's prize pedigree shorthorn herd having milk which wasn't TB tested and I was sent off to hospital at Beverley. And I remember there was a young trainee fighter pilot there who had been sent there because when he dived his plane a vein in his leg tended to burst so we used to explore Beverley together. I don't think I was there very long. He went back to his base first and he said that he was still thinking of me and would fly over Beverley, and sure enough his plane appeared over Beverley. He did a dive and the same afternoon he was back in hospital because the vein had burst in his leg so I doubt if he had a very successful career in the RAF.

On each of our stations there were about 10 or 12 linguists like me, petty officers. We had cooks and stewards, who looked after us very well, and there was always one man, a charge hand, keeping our radios, aerials, receivers running satisfactorily. He came from Naval Signals. Mr Mason was our Withernsea one and of course, he also knew Morse, so he instructed us in it. Mr Mason lived in an attic in a hotel and he had nailed up the windows so that the sea air couldn't get in. He smoked an appalling pipe and used to sit there in this cloud of tobacco smoke while he tapped away on his key and we practiced writing down the Morse code. When we were considered good enough we were sent off back to Southmead to do a Morse course and provided you passed that you were a chief petty officer, which meant a bit more pay and some extra badges on your uniform.

We worked round the 24 hours in four-hour watches. If you were on from say, 8 in the morning till 12, lunchtime, you would go off and then back on at midnight, till 8 the next morning, so you worked kind of backwards round the clock to complete one round of watches. Then you got a day or two off and occasionally we got what we called a Friday while which meant I could go back by a series of little trains across the Pennines to Lancashire for maybe a weekend or a couple of days off.

We listened, spending our four hours on watch, twiddling the knobs on our receiver up and down the frequencies that the German ships and bases used, and apart from any plain language we might pick up, what we were mostly listening to was coded messages. The Germans used three, four or five-letter

codes, and we had message pads which were blocked out in squares in which we would write down the letters as we heard them.

There were various different ways in which we heard the traffic from the German ships. If these were Schnellboots, which we called E boats, coming over to attack the convoys, they were talking in plain language and they might say things to each other like "Achtung, englische Schiff links", they would talk to each other in plain language. Sometimes we picked up a bit of chat between bases and ships. For instance, I remember one of the German Schnellboot captains was called Bobby Fillen. I remember we picked up a signal which said "Did you know Bobby Fillen's crew are all going on leave?" and the signalman replied "Oh, they're all going to make children". This kind of information was quite useful. But most of what they said was operational. What we mostly listened to was code.

Very often the signals were interrupted, fading or distorted, so you really had to listen very very closely. When a German ship came up on one of the frequencies, usually a carrier wave came up first. You would latch on to this and see if it turned into speech and the speech would normally start with the call signs of the sender and the one or two other ships or places he was sending to, and the German signalman would then start reading out these letters. They had names for all the letters of the alphabet like Anton, Berta, Cäsar, Dora, Emil, Fritz, Gustav, Hans, and so on. They would start off with their call signs, from somebody to somebody, and then go into groups. As we heard this we would be writing down, A, D, C, E or whatever the code was so we would end up with a complete message. The moment we got a ship up we would usually telephone the nearest intelligence centre and while one girl was writing down the codes, another girl was standing by as we completed messages or sheets of code, taking it off to the teleprinter and we would then teleprint it to what we knew as Station X, which was Bletchley Park.

We only knew that Station X was an operator on the other end of a teleprinter system and there was quite a lot of chat over the teleprinters between the Wrens at our end and the Wrens at Bletchley Park. We got to know them a bit but of course we never asked what they did and they never asked about our work – we just sent these signals over to them. One of my friends kept a lot of copies of these and I wish I had collected them. She died some time ago and it would have been rather interesting to see what we were saying to each other. Stations nearer Bletchley Park would send messages by despatch rider but we were several hundred miles away so we used teleprinters as they needed them immediately for decoding.

We got absolutely no feedback on what we were doing and sending. We never knew if it really helped to sink ships - we hoped it did but there was a complete blackout of information on what happened once it left us.

When you got a ship up, the officer was called if she wasn't already in the watch room and it was really quite tense while you got the message down. You had no idea of how important, how urgent, or what the message was about and you never did hear any of that.

There was one time when two of us were sent up to Scarborough to try out some different frequencies and that was quite an extraordinary experience because we were based there for a few days in the town. We went out in buses with a lot of other naval men and Wrens to a listening station which was in a hangar underneath, I think, Scarborough Racecourse, certainly underneath a hill outside Scarborough.

All the others were on U-boat watch and this must have been late 1942, early 1943, when we were losing a lot of ships in the Atlantic. All the others were listening out on the U-boat frequencies - U-boats very rarely came up - if one did, immediately the person receiving it would shout out the frequency. Everyone had to practically not breathe while they listened to it. There was a man in the centre of the room who had a desk connected to all the direction finding - or it may have been radar, I am not sure if radar existed then - stations to try and get a fix on where this U-boat was and it was a very tense atmosphere in that station. My colleague Joan Vinycomb and I were rather glad to get back to Withernsea again to our own familiar watch room and routines

The hotel there was really quite comfortable. We had rooms with double bunks and everything was kept spotlessly clean as various inspectors came from naval bases and inspected us. I was once sent off on some administrative job to Immingham which was our nearest naval base after Hull and was installed in the petty officer Wrens' mess. These very butch type petty officers couldn't think how somebody as unsuitable as me could be a petty officer and I couldn't tell them why I was, that I didn't enjoy. We never really enjoyed the naval bases as they didn't really know what we were or what we did and we were considered a bit sort of uppity, and of course we had learnt German and all sorts of different ways, and various people's fathers had been in the Diplomatic Service or in business abroad, or they had been to university so we were a rather different lot from probably the rest of the Wrens we met at the bases.

Having passed the Morse course, I was sent to Lyme Regis which was a really rather nice station because it was on the golf course, the Lyme Regis Golf Club House, on top of the hill between Lyme and Charmouth. The early mornings there were really lovely with fog lifting and a view right over the Channel from Torbay. There wasn't an awful lot of traffic because the German E boats which infested the east coast obviously didn't operate down there but we picked up more high frequency traffic from the French lighthouse keepers for instance across the Channel. They would say quite useful things like what time to put on the lights which might mean a convoy was coming up the French coast.

There was one incident down there I heard about when one of our Wrens in Coverack in Cornwall was on watch and picked up a signal from one lighthouse keeper to another which said: "If you look out in an hour you will see something interesting" This was when everyone was looking for the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau which had been in the South Atlantic and were known to be coming up north and nobody knew if they had come up the Channel or round the north coast of Scotland to get back to the Baltic.

This message, the girl and her officer realized, was significant, and they sent it off to the Admiralty and apparently it went into the in tray of somebody who had gone on leave for the weekend and the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau crept up the French coast and got up the channel before anybody realized that they were there. I don't think we really knew the outcome of that at the time but she, when she did know, was disappointed.

Those lighthouses used the call signs of plants and trees like Edelweiss and Tannenbaum so we always knew if it was a lighthouse talking.

From that station we were invited by the hospitable local people quite often to go out to tea, and unfortunately we had a Wren officer, Miss Chamberlain, who was very thrifty, and used to save on our catering allowance, much to the annoyance of some of us. She even told us on our days off she would like us to go and collect blackberries to make jam and if we were going out to tea with someone, she would say "Do try and make sure you bring back some fruit and vegetables". We were much too embarrassed to do anything of the sort.

We used to get cider from a nice little farmer who used to drive over in a horse and cart from somewhere nearby with little barrels of cider so we always had those.

One of our number, Gwen Saltzer, was a really rather glamorous Austrian, I think a Jewess, married to an RAF officer, but this didn't prevent Gwen having romantic affairs with people. The current young man was a test pilot and when

Gwen had long telephone conversations with him, the telephone was on the stairs and we couldn't help overhearing. When she came off watch, she would hear this pilot flying over and rush out with a tablecloth or something and wave it at him to let him know she was still fond of him. Two or three of us were under instructions that if Gwen had come off watch and was asleep, we should seize a tablecloth or towel and go and wave at Gwen's test pilot. We rather resented keeping this romance going because we liked her husband who was a nice man and I never heard what happened to Gwen. I don't know what she did after the war. I have a list of all of us who were still in the service in 1944 and Gwen's name is not on it and she is the one person who when we meet each other we often say, "I wonder what did happen to Gwen Saltzer?"

From Lyme I was sent to the most operational of our stations which was Abbot's Cliff. This was a house on the top of the cliffs midway between Dover and Folkestone and it's still there, a very isolated building, and we had a view straight across the Channel to the French coast. We could see the clock tower in Calais and we used to see the sun glinting on the windscreens of the presumably German cars going up the roads over the other side. We had very good access to German traffic there because if they had, say, a destroyer warming up its transmitter in Boulogne Harbour, the signal would be so loud you could even hear it outside our watch room which had windows looking right over the Channel to the other side. Of course there was a lot of activity with them sending their Schnellboots out and our MTBs going and attacking them.

We were picking up a lot of traffic; it was a very busy station, and relaying it to the intelligence centre in Dover or to Bletchley Park.

There was also a certain amount of shelling because they had these guns which could shell Dover and we used to go into Dover on our time off, and if you were having dinner out with your boyfriend in the Crypt which had an underground restaurant, you were allowed to stay during a shelling warning. Otherwise when the sirens went you had to get whatever transport you could and get back to the station at Abbot's Cliff. I suppose there was always some risk of a German raid on land or something because it was the only station where we were guarded by military police. One or two of them were very nice and friendly and some of us thought we would like to learn how to use a Sten gun which was what they had and they very kindly taught us exactly how to shoot on automatic or single shot and how to take apart a Sten gun and put it together again and I should think I'm the only old lady in Chiswick who knows how to do that!

I had never had the opportunity to fly, and one couldn't in the war except for people who were operationally flying, but the Fleet Air Arm used to do patrols up and down the Channel in a rather lumbering aircraft called a Walrus and very kindly they would sometimes offer to take us up, and we had to sign a thing called a blood chit saying that the Fleet Air Arm took no responsibility for anything that happened and I do remember the tremendous thrill of flying in the Walrus along the Channel and actually looking down and seeing little ships. They were patrolling looking for any German activity and that I must say was exciting.

In our time off, one of the nicest things was that there was a riding stable in Hythe and they needed their horses exercised. They contacted us and some of us would come off watch about breakfast time and go to Hythe and ride the horses up on the downs. There was somewhere in Hythe you could get rolls and honey for breakfast and it was absolute joy after sitting in a stuffy watch room for four hours to go out on the downs.

We also went to very good parties at the RAF fighter stations all around there – Manston and other places – and they used to fly over to Dublin, load up with all the things we couldn't get in England including silk or nylon stockings and then give parties. They would invite us and the other women's services around. I had learnt to drive at this point, by coming off watch, going up to London and having some lessons with BSM, so I was able to drive our transports and one of my worries was always having to get everyone together and leave these very good parties in time to get back by whatever hour we were obliged to be in our station by.

One of the things I enjoyed particularly while at Abbot's Cliff was the French Centre in Folkestone; some of the Free French had set up this very civilised little centre where they had French gramophone records with people like Charles Trenet and Jean Sablon. I remember Ma Normandie being very popular. They had magazines and books, and we could practice our French conversation with them. We used to enjoy that on our free afternoons. But one way of getting into Folkestone was less enjoyable because the road that ran past Abbot's Cliff was quite busy and quite often a despatch rider would come along and if we were waiting for a bus would very kindly offer us a lift. Well, if you're wearing a very tight Wren skirt, it was all you could do to get onto the pillion of a motorcycle and we were usually carrying a bag of library books; you had to carry your gas mask and probably a shoulder bag and were clutching onto a despatch rider's waist for dear life. You would go whirling down the hill into Folkestone and were very very lucky I felt to arrive alive at the bottom. It was always worth it for the French Centre.

Abbot's Cliff was quite a noisy place because facing the French coast, we had a lot of aircraft activity. I remember when the first doodlebugs came over, we had no idea what these lit up things were; whether it was some sort of invasion or preliminary to invasion or what it was, but the RAF of course were brilliant, the fighters going up and tipping these things with the end of a wing which drove them down to crash into a field. I think one or two crashed into a field across the road from our house but we saw all kinds of aircraft going over because sometimes our own fighters were going over to take on German bombers or there were these reconnaissance planes in one of which I was lucky enough to have my first flight.

The most alarming bit really was when they put an American anti-aircraft unit all around our station who seemed to have an enormous amount of ammunition and loosed off at anything that was a German target, but we were never quite sure where the spent ammunition was going to come down and you had to be pretty careful when you were going in or out of the station and sometimes there were very noisy nights which was not welcome if you had been on night duty.

One of the worst shifts was one that started at 4 am when you would be peacefully asleep in your bunk and someone would come down from the ops room and wake you up and you would have to crawl out of bed and go on watch, but the people going off watch would always make a mug of cocoa for you which made it a bit more endurable, but it's not the best of times to be at your brightest in the early hours of the morning and that I think was the least popular watch. It was very nice to get off at 8 o'clock.

We were sometimes lent to the WAAF at Capel nearby. If they were very hard-pressed listening to the Luftwaffe, we would go over and help them out but of course the Luftwaffe didn't use codes, they were too busy with our fighter planes and would give sort of instructions to each other like "Achtung Indiane links!", Indiane being an English fighter, and that sort of thing. That I don't think was Bletchley Park traffic.

I was there for D Day – we had a 20-mile restriction area before D Day which meant we got to know all the area up to about Canterbury fairly well on our days off.

We had a direction-finding tower which was a separate building from the main Wren station. One of us would always be on duty in the tower overnight. If they got a German ship up in the watch room, they would phone you in the Tower, tell you the frequency, and you would then rotate the circular direction finding machine until you reached the point where the signal faded out because it's

easier to find when something fades out than when it's loudest. You'd then give them the direction back in the watch room and they would tell the intelligence centre who would tell all the stations along the coast and they would all try to get a fix on this signal.

When you were on duty in the tower, which was very cold and rather isolated, you were allowed to wear bell bottoms and a jersey, and not uniform as you did in the watch room.

I remember coming out in a duffel coat at eight o'clock one morning and seeing a lot of little heads coming up over the cliff and thinking "That's very odd, it looks like Winston Churchill's hat and that looks very like Monty's black beret". Sure enough, it was them, and a whole lot of staff officers, and they were all coming up over the grassy cliff and I thought "What do I do? I can't salute these senior people because I'm not wearing a hat", and the rule was, you couldn't salute without a hat, so all I could do was sort of wave and say "Hello, Good morning" and they all waved back and said "Hello, good morning" and it was perfectly all right. I think they were going to have a good look at the French coast but afterwards when we found out there had been all this attempt to mislead the Germans into thinking the landings were going to be in the Pas de Calais and that Normandy was just a sort of feint, maybe they wanted to be seen inspecting that bit of the French coast. I've no idea but anyway, that was the only time I saw Churchill during the war but I 'm delighted that actually I did on that morning.

On D Day morning, someone woke me up and said the invasion was on. We'd been seeing bits of the Mulberry harbour, like upside down tables, floating down past our cliff. We wondered very much what these were – we had no idea they were going to make up the Mulberry harbour in Normandy of course. Then after D Day, after we heard they were on their way, then you heard nothing for some time. Of course we were nowhere near all the troops who were all gathered further down the coast. I was at Abbot's Cliff for a bit longer – I remember having a board for a commission sitting in a cellar during a shelling warning with I think, a paraffin lamp. The commission didn't come through; I don't know whether it would have done later but I continued in the Wrens. They had to find jobs for us to do but we were all quite useful because we all knew German and we volunteered as translators or interpreters.

In 1944 I was sent up to Admiralty and had an incredibly boring job translating the manual of the wiring of some type of U-boat which had been captured, and then a more interesting job at SHAEF, whose office in London was on the top floor in Peter Robinson, the shop. We had to go by the back door because

we were supposed to be secret and nobody was supposed to see us. As the Army went further and further across Germany they were sending back enormous amounts of captured documents. We were a mixture of American GIs, British Army and Wrens, who all knew German. I had a particular job going through the official records of Gau Baden which was a district in southwest Germany, looking for war criminals or agents. One of the photographs I discovered was of a large group of chaps sitting in rows and I looked on the back of it and discovered this was the graduating class of a group of low-grade line-crossing agents. They'd all passed their course as agents and sure enough, being German, they all sat in three rows and had a group photograph taken. After that I got an early release from the Wrens to go and help staff the British Embassy in Oslo. That was the end of my Wren career.

I really would have rather liked to go out to Colombo where some of the Wrens in my branch were going to listen to Japanese traffic but because my Father was a POW in the Far East, and he survived and was coming home in 1945, my mother didn't want us all to be abroad. My sister was abroad and so I didn't volunteer for Colombo or the Nuremberg Trials, which was the other thing I could have done, which was to be a translator or interpreter at Nuremberg, which a lot of our branch did.

My sister was two years younger and about the time that I was waiting to get into the Wrens; Jean joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry- the FANY. She was sent to train at Baker Street where they trained the SOE people, which she told me afterwards was all extremely secret and nobody was supposed to know anything about what went on there, except that when she arrived there on a bus, the conductor looked round and said "Any more spies?".

Jean, to her delight was trained as a cipher officer, sent straight up to Liverpool, off in a convoy to Egypt and she was working in Cairo deciphering the signals between our commandos like Fitzroy Maclean and Randolph Churchill, and people who had been landed with the partisans with Tito in Yugoslavia. She did deciphering, she didn't actually intercept because they had people who were picking up the signals and she deciphered the messages sent to and received from our people in Yugoslavia. Then from Cairo she went to Bari and all the way up Italy with the Army and ended up in Austria – had a really very exciting and interesting war. I was really very jealous of her because my medical had said I could only serve in the UK and I would love to have gone abroad but I was stuck with the English coast and Jean was careering up Europe. Very enviable, I thought.

I went out to Oslo as assistant archivist to the British Embassy. When Norway was invaded, all the Embassy staff had to get out, and the Embassy had been empty all during the war. The cousin I mentioned earlier whose husband was a diplomat, he was the ambassador to Norway and he went back with King Haakon and the others to Oslo and had to reopen the embassy and find staff for it. The archivist who had been there before the war, Miss Bing, had got out through Sweden and she needed an assistant, and so I got this job as a junior civil servant to go and be the assistant archivist in Oslo which I was very pleased about as I had two winters skiing and anyway, Oslo is a very nice place. It was a very interesting time because Norway had the heavy water; everybody wanted it for the atomic bombs, so there was a lot of behind the scenes activity going on.

The Norwegians loved parties and hadn't been able to have any during the German occupation and were delighted to be able to speak English again. So I made friends, particularly with some Red Cross nurses at a clinic near the Embassy, and we did lots of skiing and going out to mountains. Really it was a lovely two years but I thought if I was ever going to go to University I had better get on with it. The son of the consul was at St Andrews University in Scotland where the fees were only £21 per year so even if I didn't get a grant, it seemed possible we could afford for the family to send me there. So I did come back to England and went to St Andrews - got a degree. They gave me a scholarship to go and do a BLitt at Oxford and everyone was getting exchange fellowships to America. So I applied to the English-Speaking Union and got an exchange to Radcliffe College. Because they didn't do post graduate teaching at Radcliffe, which was a women's college, you actually went to Harvard Graduate School, so I thought St Andrews, Oxford and Harvard Graduate School was about as good as you could get. It was all paid for by an ex-service grant for study fellowships.

I had always really intended to be a journalist so I came back and joined the Daily Mail full time in Manchester, but Granada Television was then starting up so I joined them first to write for documentary programmes and then became a television news reporter, and later switched over to programmes. So I was with Granada in Manchester for eight or nine years doing programmes like *Criss Cross Quiz*, *University Challenge* and educational programmes. Then the BBC was looking for people because they were starting BBC2. By then I was hoping to get married to somebody who was in London so I managed to join the BBC from Granada as a television producer and had 19 years with them producing all sorts of things. I partly hoped to get away from quizzes but found I was straight back into quizzes again with my record of producing them. I did big

quizzes with Cliff Michelmore like *So you think you are a good driver?* or *So you think you can survive your holiday*. I did eight years as producer of *The Sky at Night*, the astronomy programme with Patrick Moore who I still go and see at his home in Selsey. I did quite a lot of programmes including some during the Apollo series of moon landings when we interviewed astronauts and cosmonauts. It was an extremely interesting time to be at the BBC. Then I retired and did a bit of free lancing as a producer. Because it was all getting computerized and I had just missed out on all that, I decided I really had to leave it all to young people so that was really the end of my working life. My husband was a BBC radio interviewer and reporter and eventually a news editor with the World Service at Bush House so what he did and what I did never actually overlapped very much and fitted in fairly well.

That is really the end of the story, I was lucky enough to have been in the Wrens at the right time and age, making lots of friends who became friends for life. Two of us ran a series of reunions for our branch which was quite small; there were never more than 400 of us who were German linguists and from 2001 to 2007, we used to have an annual lunch and people came from far and wide. I had one great friend who is still living who was the only Danish rep and she would come from Denmark, one or two came from France, lots came from Scotland to the early reunions but of course as they all got older, travelling got more difficult and after about six or seven reunions we had to give it up so we don't have them anymore. But the few survivors keep in touch with each other.

Bletchley Park Trust Oral History Project. © 2023 Bletchley Park Trust.

Permission must be obtained to reproduce or publish any content from this write-up. Please contact: enquiries@bletchleypark.org.uk