

## **Mrs Jean Evans, née Birtles**

*Bletchley Park 1942 - 1945. Block D(3), WAAF Modified Typex operator.  
Interviewed November 2015*

We were living in Norfolk when the war broke out. My father was a cricket coach at a public school and just after the war started the whole school was evacuated to Newquay in Cornwall.

I had been to business college and trained as a shorthand typist and when we arrived in Newquay, I worked in Barclays Bank for a few months. I then decided to join the WAAFs. I volunteered for the WAAFs because my brother had been in the RAF since he was a boy.

I joined the WAAFs from Newquay in 1941 and I did my training in various places. I went to Gloucester, Morecambe and ended up posted eventually to Bath in Somerset - it was a group headquarters - for about 18 months, and then they posted me to Bletchley. During this time I worked as a shorthand typist.

Apart from my training when I went to various places, I had only been to Bath - a big manor house - Claverton, now an American museum. Out of the blue I was told I was going to Bletchley. When I got there, by train, I had not got a clue what it was. I had to find the place, it's not far so I walked there. I went straight to the Admin Office and they took my details and took me straight to Hut 125, on the RAF camp specially built there, and told me to report to the guardroom.

From the guardroom, I was taken into Bletchley Park where I was to work in Hut 3, and just trained from there. This was the wooden Hut 3 and I have some pictures taken on my first visit, it was a bit dilapidated, a sorry looking red, it had an eight-foot wall around it, so when we looked out all we could see was bricks. I was in Hut 3 all the time I was there, until the war ended and they moved us to typing Japanese. I couldn't cope with the words, a lot of them were still in Japanese and asked to be transferred, I was transferred to admin.

In Hut 3 we used to get the decoded signals from Hut 6 and type them all out, I don't think then we realised how important the work was. We used to type them out and they would go through a hatch, which I could not find on my visit to BP, then they were checked two or three times I think. Where they went after that I don't know. We used normal typewriters; there were six of us on each eight-hour shift, I think the shifts were 6 am to 2 pm, 2 pm to 10 pm and 10 pm to 6 am. The night shift wasn't very good. It was busy all the time whatever shift we were on. The signals came to us decoded and translated but there were certain words in German, it was mostly RAF stuff.

We didn't know a lot, apart from what we typed. We were all very young and I don't think we realised it was so important - it was just a job. Some of the signals were really long. The signals were numbered from 1X to 5X - if a 5X came through you dropped everything and typed it out because it was top secret and urgent. A 1X was shorter and not so urgent. I think what we got was the output from the Typex machines. Next to us in the same hut there was the teleprinter section, I don't know whether our stuff went through to them after it was checked. We didn't know where these messages were going to.

We were allowed to go into the teleprinter section, operated by WAAFs, but we certainly weren't allowed to go into any of the other huts at all. Winston Churchill came down once and had some tennis courts built and I did not even know they were there until it all came out, because we were either working or sleeping, so we didn't go about the camp very much. If we went out we went to Leighton Buzzard or Bletchley.

I can always remember the day before D-day - there were two sergeants with us, we were corporals. This girl started to cry, I said to her 'What's the matter?', and she said 'There's a big day coming up tomorrow'. I think she had a boyfriend or someone over there, so we knew about D-day before it happened.

Our camp was small and the huts were a bit miserable, they were cold and all we had for heating was a big iron stove in the middle and we had to go and fetch the coal ourselves. I think there were about 20 of us in each hut. They were a bit bleak but we enjoyed ourselves. I think you don't feel the cold when you're young. We did not have any parades and there was no discipline on the camp. The people in the hut worked in different sections, but all were on the same shift. We had to go to other huts outside to the toilet and take a shower, which was a bit cold, because there was no heating there.

We had a good canteen and good food, which was a blessing, and we had to walk to there as it was in the centre of the camp. I didn't like the night shift as you were having your main meal at about 3 o'clock in the morning, which upset your system. We had all our meals in the camp as it was only a short walk from Bletchley Park. We had to go out of the gates which were always guarded, by RAF guards.

There were so many civilians at Bletchley Park, in fact one or two of us had some civilian clothes there, so when we used to go into Bletchley, we used to go out in civilian clothes, just for a night out. With there being so many civilians there you mingled among them and they didn't know whether you were one or not. In Bletchley, there was a cinema and a church hall where we used to go for dances. We used to walk there and back.

I met my future husband, Bill, at one of the dances - we used to go into Leighton Buzzard in the evening. He flew in Lancasters, and was at RAF Wing. We used to go to Bedford and London, by train, on days off and I enjoyed that, because most of the bombing had finished by then, so we never saw any of that. We just used to walk around and look at various things, there was not a lot to see, a lot of it had been bombed out.

When I met Bill on 48-hour passes, we used to go visit relations sometimes. He came from Liverpool and I came from Newquay, so it wasn't a matter of nipping down home for the day. I used to go home on our long leaves of 14 days. We got two 14 days through the year, a day off a week, 48-hours about once a month. I used to go home to Newquay on leave and then towards the end of 1944, the school went back again to Norfolk, so from then on, I used to go to Norfolk.

My parents never asked what I did - with my brother being in the RAF, I don't think it occurred to them, and I had taken the Official Secrets Act, so you didn't talk about it. When it came out in the 70s, I was quite shocked, having not said anything about it. In fact, even now, I find it a bit difficult to talk about and I'm the only one in this village who was there. About five or six years ago one of the villagers got up a trip to go to Bletchley Park, I said I would like to go on the trip because I was stationed there. It soon spread round the village and he announced it on the bus!

I made a friend in Bletchley - a couple, and got quite friendly with them, so when Bill came down he used to stay with them, but I stayed on camp of course. It was nice to be able to go and not be on camp and be able to go out. I actually met this lady on the station - I was meeting Bill, when he was coming for the first time down to Bletchley, he had been posted away by this time because he'd done his training on the Lancs and was posted to Lincolnshire. I was meeting him on the station at Bletchley and this lady was there and I got talking to her and I said I was meeting my boyfriend and said we were going to have to find somewhere for him to stay. We were going to try the Eight Bells pub around the corner. When we were walking off the station, she ran after us and said would he like to come and stay with us, while he was here. Her husband was a lieutenant colonel and he worked in London, so every time Bill came down to see me he used to stay with them, and I used to visit them during the week.

I kept in touch with two of the girls - there were three of us used to go out together and on VE-day, we weren't on duty, so we went down to London and met two Canadian chaps. Irene, this girl who was with me, she continued seeing him, married him and went to live in Canada. The other girl married the air gunner of my husband's plane and I kept in touch with her as she lived in Liverpool, until she died about three years ago.

I got married in August 1945, I applied for my discharge, and came out and went to live at Binbrook, where my husband got us a little house just outside the RAF camp, and we lived there until he got demobbed the following April. He was an art teacher at the grammar school in Nottingham, and he died when he was 59. We came here the end of 1946, we moved in the day after Boxing Day, and these houses were newly built and it was all farmland round here, so I've lived here for 67 years. We have a cricket field and a lovely bowling green here and I used to play until I got arthritis in my shoulder. We have a lovely village hall and every night there is something going on - scouts, guides, brownies and so on, so there was no reason to move. A lot of things revolve around the church here and I belong to one or two of the church things.

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