

# Memories

The WAAF memories of Mrs Margaret John as told to her niece Kay Pascoe.

This Bônau Cabbage Patch supplement is published as a tribute to Margaret who died on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007.



## MARGARET'S MEMORIES

In the WAAFs  
1941 - 1945

(The WAAF memories of Margaret John as told to her niece Kay Pascoe).

"I was just the same coming back as I was going; I never changed."

We had no deep impression of the war; we learnt a lot from newspapers and the wireless."

"I enjoyed the experience, the change, the discipline ..."

"I felt protected ... it was a little interlude really."

"I liked the uniform; I felt I was doing a useful job."



(Above: Margaret in her uniform.  
Picture taken at Blackpool)

On the eve of her 87<sup>th</sup> birthday, I had the pleasure of 'interviewing' my dear aunt. Margaret Ann John of "Blaengwawr", Pwll Road, about her time in the WAAFS 1941 – 1945. Margaret is the wife of the late Kelvin John who himself served in the RAF, mother of Huw Morgan John, and sister to Mr Edwina Barney formerly of Pwll, now living in Aberaeron and Mrs Meriel Walters, Gwalia, Pwll Road.



Although very young at the time, I have clear memories of Aunty Mag coming home on leave looking very smart in her air force blue uniform always with snippets of songs and verses (some naughty!) and ready to demonstrate the latest dance craze. She was never able to stay very long.

Margaret was called up in 1941 when she was 22 years old. She worked as a tailoress for Willie Williams in West End and lived where Meriel lives now with her mother, father, Meriel, and later, my widowed mother, Edwina and me. Life was simple and happy with social life centred around Libanus Chapel and the 'Institute', now the Community Centre.

"The Institute was the centre of our social lives. There was table tennis, dancing, music (with Meriel at the piano), and snooker for the boys."

When the call came, she travelled to Swansea for her medical ("Meriel came with me") and soon after her 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday in October, she was off to Bridgenorth for briefing, then to Weeton, Lancashire for her first posting. She spent 2½ years in Blackpool and 1½ years in Manchester. I

asked her how she felt about leaving Pwll for the first time:

“I wasn’t frightened. More excited really, but of course, I knew I would miss my family. We had a little “do” before I left and Kelvin turned up. I didn’t know why really because he wasn’t my boyfriend... then Meriel came to the station with me and off I went.”

Margaret has clear memories of life in the camp, which comprised six ‘wings’ and a hospital. It was a training camp so men and women came and went.

“We had no contact with the men except at meal times. Reveille was at 7:00am and there was a parade every day – even in the snow. We marched everywhere and had to salute the officers. Failure to salute would result in us being put on a charge which meant being confined to camp for four or five days. I remember the women Sergeants and Corporals were tough ladies.”



Margaret recalls that the social life was terrific. They could have passes to go outside to the towns, but this was unnecessary as they could see a different film every night in camp; there were dances and amateur entertainment on a regular basis. As this sounded more like a holiday camp I asked Margaret what exactly she did in the way of work. As a tailoress she had to sew the stripes on the uniforms of different ranks and keep their clothes looking smart. A young Richard Attenborough briefly passed through the camp and Margaret remembers cleaning and pressing his uniform.

“He was nowhere near as famous as he is now but we had all heard of him of course. He was just a private.”

Letters arriving from home were especially welcomed with Meriel being a regular correspondent and recipient of cheerful letters.

Meriel said, “The Institute was still open for social life and everyone used to congregate there when home on leave. I worked for a while in the laundry but was needed at home as my mother was unable to do much physical work. I remember the Pwll Home Guard and bombs falling on Pembrey, Penclawdd and, of course, Swansea.”

The sisters were reunited when Meriel spent a week in Manchester staying with a fellow WAAF at her home during Margaret’s leave. Most extended leave meant returning to Pwll to find the Institute denuded of young people who had been called up, or worse, tragically killed in action. There was always a special welcome in Libanus from the Reverend Trevor Jones.

Margaret remembers that she always arrived in Llanelly Station in the pitch dark of late night to face a long walk home to Pwll.

“My father was always there to meet the train and carry my case, saying: ‘Mae tân mawr a sospan o gawl yn aros gyda’ch Mam’ and there was, always, whatever the time.”

I remember being quite excited when she was due home on leave. Vowing to wait up to greet her. I never did and was fast asleep hours before she arrived home. She had the latest pictures of film stars and sometimes used to take or meet me from school. I must have been five or six then.

The end of the war was announced in the middle of the night.



“Some of my mates got up and went outside in pyjamas and dressing gowns to celebrate. I stayed in bed but remember a feeling of great relief. I was 26 years old and must have had mixed feelings because I wanted to turn professional but my mother wouldn’t let me.”

Can you imagine any parent today having that kind of influence over a 26 year old?

They were taken to Birmingham in large lorries to be officially de-mobbed (“all travel was in large lorries”).

I asked her how she adjusted to civilian life.

“Very easy. I went back to work for Willie Williams and that was that.”

I enquired whether she thought her English had improved or whether she had forgotten her Welsh. She retorted quite sharply that her English “was perfectly good” when she went and “certainly not (she) had not forgotten (her) Welsh!”

When asked if she missed anything, she said that she had made some wonderful friends, especially Valmai Davies from Pontardullais who later married an Australian and emigrated. She was no richer financially for she had arranged for most of her meagre pay to be sent home to her parents, keeping some for pocket money for those jaunts to Manchester and Blackpool.

“I think my mother saved some for me but I don’t remember much about that so it couldn’t have been very much!”

The abiding impression I was left with was the old cliché “you can take the girl out of Pwll, but you can’t take Pwll out of the girl”. Margaret’s love of family and her home village stayed with her indelibly and she never moved away again. But is she aware that as she got older, she often used to say – still says – “...in some ways, they were the best years of my life.”

Thanks for your time and your memories, Auntie Mag.

From your loving niece,