GCHQ Scarborough veteran revisits her past

A 92-year-old former World War Two wireless operator visits GCHQ Scarborough for the first time in nearly 70 years.

Sister Pamela Hussey MBE was given a tour of the GCHQ Scarborough museum recently, and re-visited the underground bunker where she used to work listening to German communications.

Accompanied by GCHQ Scarborough's Head of Station, Sister Pamela was able to retrace her steps, even though the old site she worked at has undergone a dramatic transformation since the end of the war, and is now the location of a modern intelligence and security agency at the cutting edge of technology.

Sister Pamela, known as Pam, was only 20 when she left her job at the British Embassy in Buenos Aires to join the war effort in Britain.

Crossing the Atlantic in 1942 was a hazardous undertaking, and the vessels immediately ahead of and behind Pam's ship were sunk by U-Boats.

On arrival in Britain Pam enrolled in the Royal Navy and in September 1942 was sent to the Irton Moor listening post, now GCHQ Scarborough, as a WRNS Wireless Telegraphist special operator.

Pam and her colleagues would listen to and transcribe German communications sent in Enigma-encoded Morse code, which was then passed to a mysterious 'Station X', now known as Bletchley Park.

Pam's supervisor, known as Griff, would tell the team, 'If you do nothing else during this war, you've done your bit.' During her visit to GCHQ Scarborough's museum Pam was able to see up close an original German Enigma machine, and view other wartime artefacts that had a particular resonance with her.

Talking about her working conditions at that time, Pam revealed that the the operators worked underground in a bunker guarded by military police with dogs, while shifts were long and arduous, sometimes eight hours at a time without removing their headphones.

Chances for recreation were few, but Pam recalled the occasional trip to nearby Filey or a local country pub. In 1945 Pam was transferred to Flowerdown wireless station in Hampshire before travelling back to Argentina when the war ended.

In 1950 she returned to the UK and joined the Society of the Holy Child of Jesus.

Pam then spent many years teaching modern languages, before taking up a role with the Catholic Institute for International Relations. She worked in several Central American countries, including El Salvador during its civil war. In 2000 she received an MBE from HM The Queen for services to human rights.

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