

4 September 2018

CODEBREAKING VETERANS RETURN TO BLETCHLEY PARK

Former wartime staff reunited at top-secret World War Two base

Sunday 2 September saw a group of 72 Veterans of Bletchley Park and its outstations gather at the former top-secret site. The men and women – all in their 90s or older – came to share stories and spend time with family and friends at the site that played a key role in Allied success in World War Two.

At its height in 1945, over 10,000 people were occupied with work connected with Bletchley Park, around three-quarters of whom were women. Today, surviving Veterans live in the UK and abroad, with many in the US, Canada and Australia. Veterans travelled from as far afield as the Isle of Wight, Lancashire and South Devon to gather at the museum for the annual celebration of their wartime contribution.

"The Annual Veterans' Reunion is a very important day in our calendar", said Iain Standen, CEO of Bletchley Park. "These Veterans made a vital contribution to World War Two, and this event is our opportunity to honour them and their work in person. It was wonderful to welcome so many to the museum, where they could renew old friendships, make new ones, and share stories of their wartime service."

September 2018 marks the eightieth anniversary of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the women's branch of the British army. Several ATS Veterans attended the reunion, including Betty Webb MBE, aged 95, who worked at Bletchley Park during her time working with the Intelligence Corps, and later was part of a team who were sent to the Pentagon, US. "My training at the Royal Welsh Fusiliers depot in Wrexham was jolly hard work, physical work. We had to learn how to march, how to wear our uniforms and how to address our superiors. At the end of our training we had a gas mask drill. We wore obviously military gas masks and in this exercise we were put into this small room and the gas masks would be taken off whilst they sprayed some gas, so it was impressed upon you that you don't disregard a gas warning," said Betty Webb.

Like many Veterans who came to work at Bletchley Park, Betty Webb and ATS Veteran, Mary Watkins, both consider BP to have been their university. "I went into college after I came out of the forces but the army training and being with the others I considered more my university. I didn't really aspire to go onto further education but because of Bletchley Park I got the chance," said Mary Watkins.

The 80th anniversary of the ATS is being marked by a new display in the garages at Bletchley Park running 6 September to 10 March 2019.

Following the reunion, it is likely that more secrets will be revealed as the museum's Oral History Officer, Jonathan Byrne, said that a further 16 Veterans had agreed to be interviewed for Bletchley Park's Oral History project. The stories of many Veterans can be found on the Roll of Honour at www.bletchleypark.org.uk/roll-of-honour

Visitors to Bletchley Park were moved by the Reunion with one visitor commenting: "Visiting Bletchley Park is stirring enough but being here on Veterans' day was extra special."

Image credit: Will Amlot for the Bletchley Park Trust

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About Bletchley Park

Bletchley Park is a place of exceptional historical importance, open to visitors throughout the year. It is the home of British codebreaking and a birthplace of modern information technology. It played a major role in World War Two, producing secret intelligence which had a direct and profound influence on the outcome of the conflict. Over the past twenty-five years Bletchley Park has become an internationally renowned site, visited by people from around the world. It is an accredited museum dedicated to telling the story of BP, its

achievements and the people who worked there during World War Two. By presenting and explaining these achievements in the very place where they occurred, Bletchley Park brings together the dramatic history of the twentieth century with the challenges we face in the twenty first.

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For visitor information, contact 01908 640404, info@bletchleypark.org.uk, or go to www.bletchleypark.org.uk

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