

1 0 0 T H B I R T H D A Y

sometimes the air wasn't clear and it would be hard to hear the signal. You would be scared of making a mistake."

Pat spent a year training at Tinakori before being posted to Hihitahi Camp at the Naval Wireless Transmitter Station, Waiouru. Both the Navy W/T and Air Force W/T stations had been conceived in the 1930s, with both the Navy and Air Force looking for a lost-cost site to establish a high-frequency transmission and receiving service. Waiouru, flat, isolated and clear of built-up areas, was considered optimal. It quickly became operational in 1942, and Wrens were hand-picked for the duty. It is likely strength of character and resilience were factors, considering the remote conditions.

*Morse Code and Snowflakes*, a book by Lieutenant Commander David Davies (2007), describes the Navy camp as 58 buildings and five miles of road. Pat travelled to Waiouru by train in May 1943. "You never got a seat, it was too crowded. You sat on your suitcase." She joined about 150 officers and ratings, 80 of them being women. Her service record for this time shows her serving at 'HMNZS COOK'. Waiouru was operating as a tender for COOK, which was based in Shelly Bay, Wellington.

"The Wrens slept in one building – the 'wrennery' – and the men's quarters were on the other side of the road," she says. "Each of our cabins had four bunks. We were issued six blankets each and we really needed them. There was a laundry room, and a communal shower." By 1944 Pat was a Petty Officer and got a bathroom to herself and another Petty Officer. In fact, a number of Wrens who served there became Leading Telegraphists and Petty Officer Telegraphists in a short space of time. "I'm going to skite here," says Pat, reaching for her Certificate of Service and pointing to a handwritten note at the bottom. It says, "Passed professionally for Petty Officer Wren Telegraphist – 92.5%".

The Wrens worked at the Naval receiver site, which was near the Hihitahi accommodation but seven kilometres from the Naval transmitter. All message handling took place there, with the transmitters keyed remotely from the receiver site. Her job was to handle messages as they came in on the teleprinter, and where they were to go, and what priority they were. "They never stopped, they just kept coming."



With the Japanese advancing through the Pacific, the station provided valuable support to ships at sea. The station's major achievement during the war was in broadcasting for the British Pacific Fleet off Japan, by acting as the link between Admiralty and the fleet when it was found that the American circuits were too heavily loaded to handle the British traffic. In addition, a large proportion of the messages of a similar nature between Admiral Earl Mountbatten, Supreme Commander, South East Asia, and the British Government passed through Waiouru.

As well as their telegraphist duties, sailors and wrens had cooking and cleaning tasks, including preparing the vegetables in the morning. Captain's rounds were on 1100 on Wednesdays, with Telegraphist Lieutenant H Phillpott, Officer in Charge, and Third Officer Mary Chesney. It meant a scrub-down and clean of the Wrennery the morning before.



*Clockwise from top: PO Telegraphist Pat Clothier (right) and a friend in Taihape during World War II.*

*Cleaning duties at the 'Wrennery'.*

*Preparing vegetables duty.*