

NANCY MOORE



Top left: Camaraderie among the men and women was high at Waiouru.

Above: Pat (centre) with the oft-necessary gumboots.

“It was so cold, but we were all there together, and everyone was happy. It really didn’t matter. We all were far from home, and we had a job to do.”

People dated while they were there, she says. “There was a YMCA facility, a civilian-run thing. It had magazines to read, tables to play cards.” Some of the Wrens had fiancé or boyfriends who lost their lives overseas. Pat’s Air Force fiancé was lost after the fall of Singapore, and in reading *Morse Code and Snowflakes* years later, Pat recognises herself as the Wren who was “scanning through lists of missing servicemen, looking for the name of her fiancé”.

The Wrens weren’t allowed alcohol, unlike the sailors. “Imagine that today,” she says. “We used to sneak our own drink in, hiding a bottle or two in our gumboots. When the captain did his rounds, he’d always look, but he would never find it.”

Pat spent three winters at Waiouru. According to *Morse Code and Snowflakes* the leave allowance on paper was liberal, but it was rarely able to be used. Male telegraphists tended to be in between sea-going posts, so they came and went. “Once the European war was over, they loosened up a bit, and would give us a truck to go up to Lake Taupo. We used to have picnics on the foreshore.”

Life wasn’t easy, but you made wonderful friends, she says. It was reasonably egalitarian between men and women – apart from the alcohol rule – because the isolated environment threw everyone together for long hours.

Pat served in the Navy up to 1946. She met John Moore, a Fleet Air Arm pilot, while he was on furlough in 1944, and they later married. John became a stock agent in Wairarapa and the couple brought up a family on a farmlet in Upper Plains, Masterton, living there for forty years. Pat has four children, nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

After the war the RNZAF personnel in Waiouru posted to Ohakea and the station later became known as HMNZS IRIRANGI, being formally commissioned as a Royal New Zealand Navy establishment on 30 October 1951. It was decommissioned in 1993 and today is called the Irirangi (Waiouru) Naval Communications Facility.

“The ship in the desert, that’s what they called us. All we were hoping was that we would be able to go overseas. We kept saying, when are we going to go? Oh, I would have loved a chance to go.”