

Adelaide Martin (1923-) Women's Auxiliary Air Force Tanygroes

West Wales Veterans' Archive

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Interviewer: Hugh Morgan

Early Years

Adelaide Jarman was born in August 1923 in the small village of Clipston, Northamptonshire. Her father was employed as a groom in the manor house. Adelaide attended the local village primary school before winning a scholarship to nearby Market Harborough Grammar School which was a fee-paying school. Adelaide was still at the school when War was declared on 3rd September 1939. During the War she preferred to be known as Ann rather than as Adelaide, but to her family she was always known as Adelaide.

Women's Auxiliary Air Force

Although her brother was serving in the Royal Navy, Adelaide determined to join the Royal Air Force. She volunteered for the WAAF's and after being accepted was sent to RAF Morecambe Bay for Basic training. She recalls that *'we seemed to do a lot of marching and saluting there but for us there were no seaside pleasures!'* Following completion of her Basic training, Adelaide had hoped to become an Aircraft Plotter, but being a little colour blind she failed her eye test and was asked if she would be prepared to train as a Flight Mechanic to which she readily agreed. She remembers it being made clear to her that a Flight Mechanic needed to work long and exacting hours outside on open and often windswept airfields in freezing cold weather and the task required high levels of attention to detail. She assured them that she was happy to do this and more. Adelaide was then posted to No 6 School of Technical Training at RAF Hednesford in Staffordshire, where Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm mechanics received technical training on a variety of airframes and engines.

Graduating from Hednesford, Adelaide was posted to RAF Little Rissington in the Cotswolds. This was the home of No 6 Service Flying Training School and also No 8 Maintenance Unit. Opened in 1938, the station boasted centrally heated barracks and even a cinema. Today, Adelaide's husband John, himself a former WW2 Lancaster Wireless Operator and PoW, refers to Little Rissington in 1943 as being *'the cushiest posting in the whole of the Royal Air Force!'* It was whilst at home on leave in Clipston from Little Rissington that by chance she and John met at dance, and the rest is history! Adelaide spent three years at Little Rissington and remembers:

"I worked throughout on Airspeed Oxfords. All the girls (Flight Mechanics) worked exceedingly well together— it took 2 people to do a daily inspection on an Oxford. We had to be agile – working at height on the back a propellor, walking along the top of the fuselage, taking a petrol hose off the bowser and crawling, dragging the hose onto the aircraft, and then putting the nozzle into place. The engine mechanic would read the petrol gauge though intuitively she

would know how much was being put in. I was the airframe mechanic and often the crew of the Oxford I was working on would come milling around my a/c when I was checking the ailerons, flaps etc. They'd ask 'So when are you going to sign up (form 700) so we can take the a/c off! These were aircrew keen to get in their flying hours in order to be posted an operational squadron, somewhere.

We were very keen to do everything right because we knew the men who were going to be flying in these a/c. Myself and another girl sat in the cockpit and ran the engines. My friends Freda and Anne became very worried if an engine didn't make the right noise. In fact, Anne would suddenly wake up in the middle of the night and shout out that an engine was going to blow a gasket, and we would shout at her to go back to sleep!

There was a real sense of togetherness and we shared problems and discussed solutions ever before we went into the crew room to sign the aircraft off. We would only then sign-off our work on the form 700 confirming that we were totally satisfied that the aircraft was fit to fly, before the crew were allowed to take the Oxford off the ground (even today in 2021 the RAF use Form 700!).

We worked very hard. We had real bond with these aircraft and occasionally would get to fly with a crew, but you could only fly when the Sergeant Kemahan gave permission – and only then he allowed us to go up with experienced pilots! You then needed to find a crew member willing to let you borrow their parachute.

The girls were highly qualified and efficient at their job and we had such a bond of friendship that we all kept in touch for decades after the war and we were still talking aircrew all those years later!"

Post-War

Adelaide waited for John to be repatriated from Germany where he had been a PoW and on his return, they were both given leave together. They got married on 29th September 1945 with their reception being held in the same village primary school in which Adelaide had been a pupil. They honeymooned in Wales. Adelaide and John brought up their own family and remain very much in love some 78yrs after their first chance meeting at a dance in Northamptonshire in 1943. Today, Adelaide and John live in Tanygroes, Ceredigion.