

Timecode	What said	Quality
01:00:00 Start		
01:00:01	My name is Catherine Avent, I'm unmarried, I'm 91 years old I was in the Women's Royal Naval Service from July 1942 to April 1947 a year and a half on the lower deck as a rating listening to long distance telecommunication coming across from further points of Russia one end or California, Vancouver actually its British Columbia isn't it, the West Coast of America and then as an officer basically doing what would now be called Human Resources looking after the deployment and retirement of Wren's(WRNS) personnel	
01:00:55	<b><i>Catherine could you begin by telling me why you joined the WREN's (WRNS)?</i></b>	
01:01:00	Well I suppose basically romanticism you know. I had no navel background a great many people were or you may no in fact when I joined July 29 <sup>th</sup> 1942 most people could only be a Wren if they had a qualification in maths which all of us who just left university had because you couldn't go without in those days and equally if you had some navel of merchant navy or fishing fleet relative and the only one I had was my grandfather... whose portrait is in the dining room who sailed around the world as a midshipman in the 1860s he was so seasick, so miserable he decided to go to Cambridge and be a clergyman instead. So I had no navel background but I'd always faced that's what I wanted to do and we were forced as undergraduates... I went up in 1939 we were forced to stay and complete the degree because of course the men left after a year to join up you see a lot of my friends went then did or didn't come back again. So it was romanticism basically and of course the feeling if they would accept me it was a very prestigious thing to be in.	
01:02:15	<b><i>Can you tell me what your family thought of you joining the Wrens?</i></b>	

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01:02:19	They were very supportive my father had been a captain in the army medical core in the first world war and my mother had been a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) you know voluntary nurses they were untrained they mopped the brow of the soldiers and so on but a... well they...they helped you know they could empty bed pans and do certain minor... I mean she could bandage things up and so on but anyway yes she was a volunteer nurse and they met in the base hospital at Boulogne so they were very supportive. I had one sister she didn't actually join the service because she was nursing so she went straight o St Thomas's and became a nurse so that was fine, she married a pilot.	
01:03:04	<b><i>What was it like then from going from being an undergraduate to joining the WRNS?</i></b>	
01:03:09	Well of course ones always... ones always please to have a change and at the beginning when I started of course we had to go to an initial training establishment, which at that stage 1942 was in what is now The National Institute of Medical Research at Mill Hill there was just two floors of it and a... it was amazing there we all were about fifty or so new entrance we didn't no anybody we had of course no uniform or anything then and of course there was an air raid first night and we were taken down and of course no lights you see everything was in darkness and there was a petty officer with a torch just led us hand in hand as we went down from our cabins everything as you know in the navy supposedly still in Nelsons HMS Victory and of we went down to the basement were we sat in our overcoats over our pyjamas on a dust strewn concrete floor until the all clear went when of course we were led back up again and when we just about got ourselves into our cabins and sort of taking of our coats and... what should happen a trolley appeared and young third officer with a rating handing out cups of tea and I thought if that's the navy that's for me because it was a wonderful example of the way the navy actually looks after its people.	
01:04:36	<b><i>Can you tell me about your training and what you were learning to do?</i></b>	
01:04:39	Yes because I wasn't tall enough to go to Bletchley if you've been to the museum there you will no why or to be an MT driver.... Or a photographer I wanted to do you could opt for different categories they were called I was put into signals we wore crossed flags known as bunting tossers and I was sent to Marconi's as what was called a Classifier there were about sixty or seventy of us and what we were doing basically the unit which was attached to Marconi's research labs was looking into long distance communication now I spent a year and a bit working watches in the little hut two fields away from the main lab where we were taking bearings on fast morse coming in from Omsk, Tomsk, Vladivostok, Vancouver and so on	

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01:05:41	It was just brrrrrrrrrr you couldn't translate it so to speak you see but if we got at about 10 O'clock in the evening it was fading and then it would go blank we knew it meant that it would be very difficult for communication to take place between the Central Defense it wasn't then a MOD of course which we now know was at Northwood and the troops in North Africa... so we would send out a warning of interruption if the ionosphere which is the layer up above the clouds that reflected the sort of signal before we had satellites, there were no satellites then.	
01:06:22	<b><i>Wonderful... can you tell me what it was like to be part of this small elite group and what it was like to learn all these new techniques for the first time?</i></b>	
01:06:30	It was lovely actually because I'd never done any physics at school I mean I did English at university and suddenly we were confronted with a whole new area of learning which I mean we were relatively bright and intelligent obviously and just to enter a scientific world even on the periphery of it like that was a marvellous mind opening experience and I loved it the only trouble of course is if you do something which eventually every job becomes routine you know... the nice thing about journalism it isn't because your interviewing different people all the time but the vast majority of work people do becomes fairly routine and of course we did in the end some of us got marginally bored you know and actually I was sent to the officers training unit whilst suffering that common affliction of the lower orders confined to barracks.	
01:07:35	Why was little Cathy confined to barracks for being caught mimicking the officer... so she gave me a total dressing down and a months confined to barracks in the middle of which my posting to the officers training unit came through well of course she couldn't of not let me go because questions would be asked you see leading cadet Avert in hospital or what no CB but I was the only cadet at the time who went there to train to be an officer while being punished for being naughty.	
01:08:05	<b><i>So can you tell me a little bit more about what you were doing in Marconi's labs can you expand on that a bit for me?</i></b>	
01:08:09	Well basically what I personally did as I say was the listening in to these long distance fast Morse signals and sending out warning if we thought it would not be possible to communicate during the dead of night and it varied according to the sunspot cycle its not actually the moon apparently it's the sunspot that effects this sort of thing this ionosphere but of course nowadays because we got satellites which are man made of course they can communicate all the time but at that time 1942 – 43 when I was there you couldn't well then of course when I went...	

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01:08:52	Later on when I went back there as an officer which is never an easy thing to do of course I had friends there still on the lower deck but there most of the girls what they were basically doing was plotting the state of the ionosphere the outfit was called ISIB (Inter Services Ionosphere Bureau) and it was inter service we had people from other navy's and army's as well and so what they were doing they were plotting rather like locator projection maps and so on or the weather maps you see you know they plot things so that they... signals were sent up by RAF I don't know what they were called signallers I suppose anyway RAF Hercs sent up signals and measured the time it took for the signal to come down and that indicated you see where the reflecting power was so what a lot of the girls did was basically sort of draughtsmanship and so on.	
01:09:53	<b><i>How important did you feel the work you were doing was towards helping the war effort... did you feel part of a bigger organisation?</i></b>	
01:10:00	Actually we were of course a unique unit it was the only one of its kind and as such of course we attracted a lot of interest from other services we had Dutch, Poles, Norwegians, all sorts of people as well as some Americans and RAF... WRNS represented the navy occasional I mean we'd be visited by the odd admiral and so on but you know we were just really a unit of Wrens under two officers and well it was the only one of its kind so to that extent it was quite important. I learned a lesson which I hope I've kept... I hope in the back of my mind ever since one of the things we used to have to do was to send some of these figures that the girls were doing and of course I didn't actually do that because I was in my little hut as a rating to the met office which was then at Dunstable and one day the wing commander happened to ring up about something and I said I'm sorry the figures are late this that and the other and her said I don't know why... yes I know you send those things every month it doesn't matter if there late I never use them he said actually I just put them in a draw so I said thank you sir.	

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01:11:23	I went bustling into the main unit where these girls were working six or seven at a time and said to the RAF officer in charge I say Tom what do you think I've just been talking to the wing commander etc etc so we can find something else now to put these girls onto and I bustled back full of self importance you know my early twenties with one ring and he came in after ten minutes and he sat down and he said I know your intelligent I know your well educated and I think you'll probably do something interesting with your life but let me tell you in twenty seconds you have totally destroyed the morale of those eight girls because they will tell the other watch because they think there winning the war. I've never forgotten that because it was important that the total unit but individual bits of it you see could at different times of been really of no particular value to the people we were sending it to.	
01:12:20	<b><i>Can you tell me what happened after Marconi's Labs what you did next?</i></b>	
01:12:25	Well yes well I worked when I left the officers training unit I didn't go straight back there I went to HMS Flowerdown which was two miles north of Winchester which was fine now that was a signals station there's also an air station nearby called Worthy Down and to tell you the truth I don't know what the girls were doing there because I was just an admin officer and I worked with a first officer. That was were I was telling your colleague the naughty tale the girl whose pregnant and asked by the officer, I was just sitting alongside learning if she knew how to take out a paternity case and of course said the officer presume you understand who... you know who was responsible for this baby, well yes mam she said I should do I know but you see I don't because he had his hat off so I didn't know if he was a soldier or a sailor. Well you could imagine my innocence.	
01:13:22	But what the girls were actually doing was all part of this signals and much of it was I think related to signals to the ships in the Channel because we was very near... relatively near you see from Winchester and from there I went to take charge of a unit literally ten miles from John O'Groats right in the far north of Caithness because during the middle of the war we had all around the coast of Britain little listening posts some of them were manned by people who understood the German language and they listened to what was know as RT (Radio Telephony) from the E-Boats plugging up and down in the North Sea.	

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01:14:05	My girls were not they were listening in to long distance communications again up there and it was very bleak and I was the only officer so it was very lonely I spent 6 months there but the countryside of course was interesting I used to... I was given an allowance I had never catered for anybody myself or anything because id gone straight from boarding school to college and then into the Wrens and we had of course a petty officer what we call quarters i.e. she had domestic science training you know and she catered she went off on leave and so had... because I had an admiralty driving licence I could go around the crofts you see and buy and they were only to anxious to sell eggs, chickens, occasionally we was offered a goose all sorts of things and vegetables and so on to feed the Wrens I had so much per day per girl you see... cash and my undoing there which I remember with shame going into the fish shop, the leading Wren cook had said you don't forget the fish... I know it'll be done	
01:15:18	When I got there... there were three or four women and I thought how much do I need for thirty girls there was always two or three on leave at a time you see I'll multiply by eight whatever most women are catering for four. Well of course they looked at me wearing an officers hat tied on with a scarf duffle coat size naught tied on with string battledress top and sailors trousers and boots not like Nelson at all anyway they said do you come from the Wrens at Bower? Yes...Are you a cook there? No... are you a driver? No... I have a licence but no do you work in the huts? It was secret you see so no I don't what do you do? Well actually I'm the officer in charge... oh really now they said with unfeigned surprise and pushed me to the front of the queue	
01:16:18	which of course was my undoing so I looked at these slabs of anonymous fish and I said to the girl in the white coat behind may I have five pounds of that please I she said shall I fallet it? I beg your pardon shall I fallet it? I looked utterly blank ok girl she said picking up the tray haven't you heard of falleting fish and she shouted to the husband down below you see Jamie there's a wee girl here from the Wrens at Bower she's never heard of falleting fish and of course I hadn't I'd never bought fish in my life... so that was a learning curve of a particular vicious kind it its way but the Wrens put up with it and we did we ate quite well because as I said we had good fresh food we only had one or two what was known as dry goods i.e. flour, sugar and so on that was delivered. So that was an interesting job and from there I was sent back to Great Baddow as an officer.	
01:17:17	<b><i>Catherine can you paint a picture of your job... what your job was listening to the U-Boats and what you could hear and what you did on a daily bases just to tell us a bit more about that please?</i></b>	



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01:17:27	Well I was never actually you see working directly with any form of shipping because of course this long distance communication took place from wherever it was suitable to put transmitters for example one of the interesting things I did as a rating two of us was sent to Scarborough where there was one of these listening posts with the people who knew German and they were getting interruptions from what was then called the BBC Light Programmer i.e. radio two you know music while you work nice, loud, cheerful stuff really ad background for people in the factories and they were finding ever so often that they couldn't hear the E-Boats which they were listening too because of this interruption this very loud happy music.	
01:18:23	So we were sent up from Great Baddow to see if we could find were this was coming from and what we had to do we had of course to get an officer to authorise it we couldn't get individual transmitting stations of the BBC turned off for up to thirty seconds that was the maximum aloud because otherwise the public all kept telephoning saying I can't get my radio on you see so bit by bit we were told of coarse where the stations were we had them cut off at a set time absolutely exact set time and of course if it was still audible to the girls sitting in... supposedly listening into the Nazi's out on the sea we had to try again and it took us 6 weeks and eventually what we found was that a transmitter somewhere in Lancashire	
01:19:23	I don't even remember where, if I ever knew which of course was going across the Pennines it was being reflected off the ionosphere and was interrupting this long distance communication and so of course once that one was turned off and immediately the girls listening you see said its stopped we knew we'd got the right one and so of course what happened was the BBC which used to transmit the home service on lots of little relay stations all around the countryside of course it was important that people should be able to listen to warnings of bombings and so on but the light program which wasn't of that importance you see was transmitted by a few powerful transmitters and that's hence this trouble and they simple turned its direction up towards Scotland or whatever and it stopped.	
01:20:19	That was the most interesting thing of that sort which I did otherwise of course as an officer your admin work is to do with peoples leave you know there compassionate leave they need at different times just the ordinary admin of any organisation recruiting people for your unit you know seeing them when they arrive and all this sort of thing not really very interesting really in terms of it wasn't technical what we done as ratings was technical.	
01:20:49	<b><i>And being up in this position near John O'Groats how lonely was that... what was it like being away from home?</i></b>	

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01:20:56	I didn't really mind being away from home because I'd been of course away in college and so on but it was very lonely I used to bicycle all over the place because of course there was no fuel just to joy riding around I used to take my little van as I say and go around the crofts and get haggis something I actually love and try to buy it when I get the chance it's a very good meal that of course how the Scots preserve the mutton for the winter and so I did I used to bicycle there was not far of there was a little beach which was open because nobody could possibly imagine that anybody would invade it because it was such a long way off from anywhere called Castletown and I used to walk along the beach there and pick up cowry shells I don't know if you've ever had them in Cornwall funny little shells that there just peculiar to certain beaches around our coast up there they were known as Groatie Buckies the Scots would not believe that I had picked them up in Cornwall which you used to do going there on holiday as a child but yes I biked around I read a lot of course we could use the public libraries they were very good to service folk and it was lonely but of course I was quite busy in a funny sort of way you know as I said it wasn't of any importance except what the girls were doing was important but you do have to have somebody in charge.	
01:22:30	<b><i>Were the girls ever alarmed by anything they could hear what could they actually hear that you could remember?</i></b>	
01:22:35	Well of course they were listening those who knew German which my lot up in Scotland didn't but on some places the Scarborough did of course they could hear the crews talking from one to another like in a little flotilla you see now my girls were actually listening in to the morse you see which is what we'd been doing at Marconi's so it was not in a sense it was not meaningful but what they had to do was to find where it was coming from and you can only do that you see by direction finding I think called a goniometer where we had huge radios with very very high capacity to catch transmissions that weren't intended for Britain at all and that in itself of course was interesting when you first learn something like that which is new but in time it gets basically rather boring	



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01:23:38	I think and I think a lot of my girls were bored because I did arrange best things I could to entertain them there was no real... I mean there was a cinema in Wick and another in Thurso we were half way between the two so off duty Wrens could go there but of course I went once a week across to Orkney I had to report to a chief officer there a very nice women she was and I loved that because I went across in the ferry you see and of course I enjoyed that the girls cause they had leave from time to time and they didn't spend all that long well I only spent 6 months myself up there and another officer went to take my place because I was wanted to go back down to Great Baddow because the two Marconi's one of them was being sent to Colombo at the time of course we were working up this was 44 towards the Japanese war.	
01:24:32	Anyway we were sending units to places like Malta and so on and equally to North Africa and to Colombo so there was so few people who knew what was going on see I was sent back but I mean admin work in any whatever it doesn't matter whether you were in uniform or otherwise it is basically personnel	
01:24:55	<b><i>How did you find the male officers or male members of the navy treated you and other women?</i></b>	
01:25:02	That's a good point I maintain we were extremely well treated we... there were crusty old retired navel officer well ill tell you in Thurso RNO (Resident Navel Officer) he was a funny old thing retired captain you know they weren't fit to go to sea or anything but they put them in charge of these units and of course there were masses of people coming to and fro from The Orkney there was one train a day took 24hrs to come from Thurso or Wick it joined up in the middle and went down through Inverness and right down to Preston took 24hrs of cause there was no dinning cars on it you stopped at intervals and there were WVS (Women's Voluntary Service) people who handed out cups of tea and sandwiches and so on so he...	

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01:25:56	I was told the first thing you have to do every Friday at 10:30 you have to report to the captain in Thurso so I duly drove over in my little van and presented myself and there was a elderly retired petty officer who worked with him and so he knocked on his door come third officer Avent sir... good morning third officer any pregnancy's? no sir...silence...thank you sir I turned and left. The next Friday exactly the same thing took place so when I came out I said to the petty officer I say PO what do you think the captain ask me oh you don't want to take no notice of him you see trouble is he never has nothing to do with Wrens you know and we didn't have them you see when he was a young officer he's frightened of you and your girls I thought I can't believe that so the third Friday I marched straight up to his desk sure enough the same question and I said loudly assuming that he was deaf which he probably wasn't I understand sir it takes two sir and I have thirty girls and only two much married chief petty officer machinations he was so astonished at this outburst of course he melted straight away you know and said ah come and sit here and we became great pals	
01:27:28	and he was constantly bringing officers up from admiralty who would go up on the night train on the Thursday visit my little unit the little unit that was further along the coast and then they done fishing for salmon over the weekend and go back again on Saturday night I was so innocent I didn't realise why we had all these visits but anyway it didn't matter.	
01:27:54	<b><i>What difference did you find between being a Rating and being an officer was it a hard transition for you and how was it a change?</i></b>	
01:28:01	Well of course it was interesting of learning something new and of course one had responsibility you had to make up your mind about things such as for example I remember one girl up there in Caithness she had got a lift from one of the airmen from the... there was a RAF station not far off from us and I don't know what happened but anyway they had an accident and she was badly hurt and was carted off by the ambulance to the RAF station where they had a little small it wasn't a hospital but a sickbay and eventually she was discharged unfit now the question I had to decide was whether to send for her mother whom I knew to be a widow running a sweet shop in the Midlands Nottingham or somewhere or not	

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01:38:37	now it would of meant nearly a days journey for her to get there... there was no machinery to pay her fare or anything cause I telephoned the chief officer and she very sensibly said I don't know we must read the AFO's and find out if there's anything but you do what you think right Avent and I'll back you now that actually was perfectly sensible she didn't know anymore than me what sort of arrangement one should make in the case of a girl whose been badly injured long way from home whether her only relative next of kin was her mother you see to be sent for we decided that she was probably going to be fit to transfer to a hospital so before very long we got her transferred and eventually down to a hospital in Nottingham so she was finally discharged unfit but that's the sort of thing officers have to do that the other ranks wouldn't	
01:29:53	<b><i>Can you tell me did you find it frustrating being a women kept in the UK would you of liked to do more of the sort of active roll in the second world war or was that just...?</i></b>	
01:30:03	Good point of course we all volunteered you know to go somewhere more interesting as I say I can remember people going to Malta and other overseas stations when people say oh right I had a dinner party here last Saturday you know and we were talking about this sort of thing because I had a friend from the American army that was here so... but didn't you... you never got anywhere overseas? I said no I didn't I volunteered persistently because I had no children to support or anything but relatively few actually of the Wrens went, of course there were a few who were very specialised I mean one or two secretarial officers went with Churchill to meet Roosevelt and so on the ships because of cause they were known to be totally trustworthy anything they heard that was secret they would never of divulged of course.	
01:30:56	And there were these small units moved two and fro but no basically the only people who went to sea apart from a few like that were the boats crew now little ports like well Devonport and big ports little boats crew were great fun it was the most glamorous form of Wren partly they wore trousers all the time you know which we didn't... I was aloud to in Scotland because it was so rugged the atmosphere up there but the boats crew they went tooing and froing between the ships that were anchored you see in the port that was a very nice and glamorous job but very few Wrens actually went to sea now there were people who were for example fleet mail officers they took the mail that came in for the ships when the ship came back from let us say Murmansk or somewhere or from across the Atlantic of cause mail would of accumulated for the crew and so fleet mail officers they were known as they would go and have to clamber up a rope ladder you see to get into the warship and deliver mail	

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01:32:14	but no we didn't have of cause we were not firing guns anyway that was the whole point one of my best friends was a Quaker... Quaker don't fire guns but she said no she wasn't a pacifist she was going to do what she could like the humanitarian fights that are taking place now so there were a few people who were doing something in what you might call in a way more active in nautical but no most of...	
01:32:44	of cause the people working now when I was at Chatham which is a huge base there people were doing all sorts of things now at that stage I was an education officer which meant preparing the service people to come out into civilian life which they had asked in about the spring of 1945 it was obvious that the war was beginning to come... really our way and so they asked for volunteers amongst people who had either done teacher training or had a degree in anything to transfer and be educational resettlement officers and we were two groups side by side one was a very dear friend I mean one of her children is a god daughter of mine, she was a resettlement officer and I was the education officer and that meant running courses for organising course for basic cookery you see the girls had often gone straight into the service they'd got married they were going to come out and set up home with a husband when he was released and many of them hadn't the slightest idea you see of cookery or catering it wasn't done in schools to any real extent I certainly never done any of course but there were jobs of that sort that were interesting and they were of cause related to what service folk were looking forward to and so on but they weren't actually in a sense fighting the enemy if you like	
01:34:20	<b><i>Can I just backtrack a bit could you tell me what you did at Great Baddow?</i></b>	

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01:34:25	<p>When I went back there as an admin officer the basic thing really was as I say I would in civilian life it would be called personnel or human resources because it was dealing with Wrens with problems once sort and another you know they did what you do when a girls brother has been drowned you know she's not due for leave well you can there is a system for compassionate leave and so on but of course it had to be done in such away that it didn't effect the work of any team you know so what I call moving people about like that which is straight forward personnel there was a certain amount of admin keeping statistics as always in any office as you know you've got to account for what's going on and so on otherwise I liked, I enjoyed talking to scientists of course I learnt a bit of physics likes that which I'd never done as I was saying and I really enjoyed it because they were interesting they... some of them were actually quite I mean there was somebody called Tremelon who was very well known in the science world Tremelon Curves some of the things my girls were drawing came from him and there was another Humbee they were eminent scientists who of course remained as civilians nobody put them into uniform because they were more useful in what they were doing there.</p>	
01:35:56	<p>Actually it was at Marconi's that I first saw television which was of course black and white and it was very experimental at that stage it was quite interesting of course every time a car went along the road or anything like that it went all stars you know your to young to remember but even after the war it still happened on ordinary commercial televisions but they were working other scientists were working on all sorts of things most of which I hadn't any idea about none of us did we were in away cocooned in a little unit all of our own together with these RAF there were three I suppose RAF officers who were in charge and these US Army Signal Core officers they were hilarious they had come from all sorts of different backgrounds one I know came from a fairground in Chicago he was extremely funny about it but there they were Americans that were in England at the time</p>	

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01:37:03	including for example one Rhode scholar whom I'd actually been at Oxford at the same time and we knew many of the same people which was very nice he used to when I was a rating he used to come down to my hut and chat me up well all this was fine until believe it or not on one occasion and by then I was back there as an officer so it didn't matter because I could talk to them but one of the girls was sent for by the officer in charge because a telegram had come which of course telegrams were not in the yellow envelopes they were telephoned from her mother which simply said don't darling don't well of course the officer sent for her and said to her are you proposing to desert you must understand that a Wren officer couldn't imagine anybody doing anything worse than running away so... no mam well why would your mother of sent a telegram saying don't darling don't I don't know mam well did you write home last weekend yes mam well what did you tell your mother oh I know I told her that I wasn't going home next 72 hour pass I'm going to go to a hotel in London with Lieutenant M???? Don't darling don't. The Regent Palace Hotel at that stage had a rather bad reputation anyway so you could imagine the mother terrified that this American was going to do her down... anyway so of course she never went but I mean that's the sort of silly thing that an officer sometimes had to cope with.	
01:38:48	<b><i>Can you tell me if there was any time during your time as a Wren when you actually felt scared or frightened by what you were hearing or seeing?</i></b>	
01:38:56	We were frightened of the bombing raids there was no question because they came over you see Great Baddow is about twenty-five miles from the East Coast and I mean Essex you know is flat and dull. They would come over hoping to bomb Coventry say or wherever and if for whatever reason they turned back because they had aircraft fires to fierce or whatever they would just drop there bombs anywhere obviously rather than carrying them back to Germany so we did have some quite nasty raids from time to time I can't claim you know that we were like the East End of London you know which was decimated and so on we weren't and in fact the buildings were actually never hit but one was frightened because you know the next morning you could look out and there especially incendiary bombs which just dropped and made a hole in the ground you know.	



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01:40:00	I wasn't frightened otherwise in that sense of you know running with fear of course I was very nervous of something's that you always are when you have to deal with people and your worried about responsibility when your young anyway I was never afraid to take responsibility I wanted to be an officer I got bored in a way on the lower deck because the work became routine you know and I'd just come back from all the stimulus of taking a degree course but apart from that no I can't claim really to of been much frightened	
01:40:35	we obviously there were relationships with people which were good and bad you know sometimes people were very persistent you know well men who were going to be sent back into a little ship with the possibility of never returning many of them well they wanted to get married when they could you know that was one of the things course Wrens were not allowed to leave just on marriage but on pregnancy of course they did cause we didn't keep... nowadays of course the go to sea pregnant I'm sure but it's quite different, but in those days no that was the way you could come out you couldn't otherwise except for misbehaviour of course but that was very rare.	
01:41:21	<b><i>Can you tell me looking back over your time in the Wrens is there a moment your particularly proud of?</i></b>	
01:41:29	I don't think so really except... yes I think the only time I can recall being nearly brought to tears with pride really when I was leaving Great Baddow where these girls several of whom as I say I'd worked with as a rating and when they knew I was being posted they went out and bought book tokens and they were in tears some of them because with all my faults I'd tried to make it easy for them and tried to make it interesting which it wasn't the work was quite interesting while they were doing it but it was a very dull place to spend a lot of time you know a long way from anywhere what do you say to your friends when you get back to Birmingham or wherever you live you know what are you doing in the navy you know I'm just sitting in a little hut somewhere in the north of Scotland so on... so I had tried I was immensely proud really to think that we had survived what could have been a very difficult relationship. Well one of them as I say she's still a friend of mine actually I see her from time to time she's a long way off from here but that...	

Timecode	What said	Quality
01:42:44	yes I think on the whole I probably did more good than harm you know that's' all but no what we were doing as rating's we weren't... we knew it was part of the war effort and that was all fine but as I explained to you the shame of destroying girls morale you should never do that but on the whole no I hadn't anything really to be particularly proud of I didn't... I was never a... you know I didn't have a Gallantry Medal or anything the first medal given to a Wren rating actually was a girl who I subsequently met at the officers training unit and she was a dispatch rider and she rode through the Blitz day after day after day you know. The first officer to get... officer got a MBE was somebody I knew quite well she'd actually been at my college a little bit ahead of my time now she was given one for something which is often more difficult I.e. moral courage I'm saying nothing against anybody that has the physical courage to drive a motorbike through the bombs but she was insistent...	
01:43:58	she was running one of these listening stations she had a degree in German and she was convinced there were E-Boats in a certain they could take the bearing of it... she got hold of another little unit further up yes they could pinpoint exactly were it was so of course she telephoned this information in to the admiralty duty officer who took no notice she tried again five minutes later still no notice anyway she persisted and in the end the commander said I have to tell you second officer if I send out a destroyer or whatever that can find... to that spot and there's nothing there you will probably be court marshalled and she said I'm sorry sir I must stick to it I cannot not persist give him his due he sent out a corvette or something and sure enough they chased away one of the Nazi E-Boats and he had the grace to nominate her and she was given an MBE she was the first Wren officer to get one.	
01:45:13	We were invited to volunteer for education now I had no job to go to no I don't really know what I was going to do except that because I had... always wanted, vaguely thought I was going to be a doctor because my family had been for several generations and when it was clear my father had no intention of letting me read medicine and in those days unless you were very clever and got a scholarship your parents had to pay for you I thought whatever I do I'm going to do something to help other boys and girls to have whatever sort of career they want so I was in a way looking for something as a careers advisor well doing education and resettlement you see that was very much part of it and I of course learned a lot about people were asking about how they could become this that or the other I really had no idea how you train to be a plumber or anything you see	

Timecode	What said	Quality
01:46:10	so it was arranged we could stay on as long as we were being useful until we had either a place in some form of training or higher education well I had already got a degree so nobody's going to give me anymore I did infact do a year at London school of economics later but immediately the university appointments committee in Oxford sent me a notice of a job which they thought I might enjoy lecturing on careers for girls schools in those days most schools were single sex grammar school, public school, stage so I suppose we had to give a certain amount of notice but I don't think it was very much probably not more than a couple of months so I left in the April 1947 and went straight to work for this body was called The Women's Employment Federation it was a hangover of none militant suffragettes from the first world war and it was really designed it's no longer in existence it was designed to help girls to see the whole range of occupations that were open to them	
01:47:22	and I enjoyed that I went round lecturing in boarding schools and so on and you see what I had learnt in the WRNS amongst other things first was public speaking which I had hardly done as an undergraduate should do don't you.. you know I ran an archaeological society but you know just to stand up in front of ninety girls in a form of a school hall and so on you know you soon learn how to do things like that but the Wrens had taught me how to be reasonably clear and sensible about public speaking so that was one of the good things I learned and of course I did learn a lot about ordinary folk and not the limitations of many peoples ambition and that was one of the sad things I used to think some of these girls were able not necessarily clever in an academic sense but they've got guts, drive, general intelligence and some of course have considerable talents so I had had In a way by having those years in the Wrens a good background to be a careers advisor and so that's what I did for the rest of my life	

Timecode	What said	Quality
01:48:37	from this voluntary body after a year and a half I went to the London school of economics I could still get a grant to take a year there and learn social administration, basic economics I'd never done and didn't know anything about it you know and from there I started at the bottom the careers service then called Youth Employment Service sometimes known as The Juvenile Employment Bureau to are young. We had these employment bureaus all over London... London was just starting it had not done it before the war it was done by The Ministry of Labour and so I got in on the ground floor and after a matter of three months I was promoted to run one of the offices we had twelve offices simply because somebody didn't like the work and left and so there I was in charge of a little office in the borough of Wandsworth finding jobs for boys and girls leaving school at that stage fifteen you see and then it went up to sixteen so at the end of a year there it was decided that they would take over from...	
01:49:48	it was part of the London County Council Education Service you see from the... well the Ministry of Labour staffed a curious thing called the Headmasters Employment Committee and ditto Headmistresses which was run by the heads of the grammar schools and so we were to take it over and the chief... anyway somehow or other he decided I should run it so I was jolly lucky because I'd been able to start something more than once in my life and that's always a nice thing... <b>that's brilliant thank you</b> so I started that you see for sixteen years and then after that I was put into an inspectorate and I was the only inspector of careers guidance anywhere in the country for quite a long time of course I was joined by people eventually obviously and that's what I retired as at the end of 1984	
01:50:35 End		