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Name: Pam Torrens

Regiment: Chief Petty Officer WRNS

Transcribed By:

Interviewed By: Martin Bisiker

Time Code	What is Said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	My name is Pam Torrens. I was four years in the WRNS and I was a chief petty officer after the first six months or so.
01:00:13	<i>Okay, so just, Pam, before we get too much into your service information, just tell me a bit about where you're from. What was life like for you pre-war?</i>
01:00:22	Well, I was born in Southampton, into a family which was very sea-orientated, coming from a long line of sailors and fishermen. My father was a pilot and there wasn't any question as to which service I would go in to. When I reached eighteen and the family let me join up, I joined the WRNS.
01:00:50	<i>What do you remember of the outbreak of the war and what do you remember of the impact of war on your family?</i>
01:00:55	Oh. Well, the greatest impact was a German parachute dropped a mine which landed on the house behind us and killed the family outright. All four of them. Our house, which was a biggish, Victorian, solid-built and there were two other solid-built houses of Victorian style beside us, and round the back there was a small series of modern houses, and it landed on one of the modern houses. The others were very badly damaged, ours was badly damaged and the other two were, but by the end of the month, ours was the only house standing. It had quite an impact on us. We couldn't live there until the end of the war. They repaired our house, but all the others had to be rebuilt.
01:01:50	<i>What year was that then? Was that '39?</i>
01:01:52	1940.
01:01:53	<i>'40. When did you sign up? How old were you?</i>
01:01:56	I was eighteen when I signed up in 1942. I went to the initial training in Mill Hill for Christmas. I was over Christmas there which was odd. It was a bit like a sort of warped boarding school, so it wasn't too strange, but of course I didn't have to scrub floors in boarding school and you do awful jobs when you're in initial training.
01:02:27	<i>Had you been to boarding school or anything? How did you adapt to it?</i>
01:02:31	Yes. Yes, yes.
01:02:32	<i>Oh, so you were able to adapt to that sort of ...</i>
01:02:33	It was easier; I'm sure, for me. Some girls who'd never been away from home were not happy and some of them went home after a fortnight. Not many. Just one or two who were used to being in the family all the time.
00:02:46	<i>When did you sort of have an, at Mill Hill ... Just talk through the procedure for weeding out the ones that might have gone off to do wire service etc. and how did that all come about?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:03:02	Well, I think they start on that beforehand because my mother had to take me out to the admiralty to have a test in my German to see if it was good enough. I was just about good enough. Most people had more qualifications than I did or more knowledge because they'd lived in Switzerland or Germany itself. That was already organized because whereas most girls were issued with a uniform straightaway, we were not issued until we'd been through a, as far as I remember, through a course that the special unit, in Wimbledon at Southfields, which trained us in the use of radios and what codes the Germans we were listening to would be using. At the end of that, we went to get our uniform because we became petty officers straightaway, so it was a different uniform.
01:03:59	<i>Did you go straight from Mill Hill to Southfields or home first?</i>
01:04:02	Yes. No, straight to Southfields, yes.
01:04:05	<i>Okay. Can you just talk a bit about what you remember of Southfields and where you were billeted and ...</i>
01:04:11	Yes. Southfields was a nice house in Wimbledon and there was a lieutenant commander in charge who'd started in the Navy, I suppose about two years before, I don't know when he joined up. He had the idea of having a whole series of stations round the south and east coasts to listen out for German E-boats because they were attacking in little packs like the wolf packs of the U-boats on the North Sea coast area and the channel when our ships went through. They put a whole series of small stations, mind you, some of them were twelve WRNS, one Wren officer, in the middle of nowhere, twenty miles from the nearest naval base and nobody knew we were there or what we were doing. It was a pretty deadlied times as regards your time off, but the job itself was very interesting.
01:05:16	<i>You've explained the purpose of Southfields.</i>
01:05:18	Yes.
01:05:19	<i>Just explain the environment of Southfields, and where you were, and how your training was, and how many people were there and ...</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:05:26	<p>We weren't big classes, I should think, there were only about a dozen girls at once if that. We had to learn how to use these radios and we had to use radios that worked on very high frequencies because that was the frequency that the E-boats used. The E-boats were MTBs but bigger than ours, at the beginning of the war anyway. Better armored and faster. Ours were at a disadvantage and because they worked in packs, and they would sort of assemble in a small bay or cove, and it was difficult for radar to pick them up against the background and so on. Therefore it was very vital if we could get a DF fix, that's a bearing from two points to fix the position by radio, it helped our men to know where to take the MTBs.</p> <p>They were sent out if we heard ... We had to search all the time because the Germans knew we were listening by the time I joined. Therefore, they used a band of 20 MHz, but they could come up anywhere in the band so you couldn't rely on the frequency. You had to search the whole time. We were therefore called the twiddlers because of course, you had round knobs then, and you tuned along. Any strange signal you met you tried to identify, and if you couldn't you described it because it might be a new device they were using and our people would be able to work out possibly what it was.</p> <p>You'd get all sorts of strange signals and of course, sometimes you were on duty and you never heard any Germans at all. Of the type that you were looking for anyway, but occasionally you did. Even if it was very faint, you could sometimes get a bearing on a faint signal.</p>
01:07:55	<i>How did you know what the bearing was? You can hear the signal but ...</i>
01:07:59	<p>Ah, ah yes. We had, in addition to the watch room where we did this continuous 24 hour search, we had a DF ... What were they called, a DF tower because it's a bit like a small windmill to look at, except that you don't have wheels you have a dipole area coming out of the middle of it which can be controlled from down below. You twist this big circular control which turns the dipole area and when it's in line with the signal, which you will have been told about by the watch room and you're in the DF tower, then you have to read off the reading on the band on the control. Well, it's a big sort of circular metal bar, I suppose, and let the watch room know. Then they phone it straight through to the naval intelligence center and if it was ... Then presumably they would pass it on to the flotilla that would have to go out and deal with them, or possibly it was already out. I don't know.</p>
	Start of Film 2
01:09:25	<i>When you were in the south though, just to go back to Southfields, where were you billeted?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:09:31	<p>Ah, yes. We were billeted probably a couple of roads away at a place called something like Rose, Rosedean, or Rose something or other. I can't remember. A private house which had been taken over for the Wrens, because mostly we were in good accommodation. We used to walk from there to Southfields proper for our classes, or our instruction, and that went on. Periodically you had to go back for refresher courses from your station. You'd go there for a week or a fortnight for a refresher in new things and all of a sudden, instead of being able to walk in a nice casual, relaxed way, they said you've got to march in a squad.</p> <p>Of course, we weren't very good at that because there was rarely enough people off duty at any one time to form a squad anyway. It's quite difficult to do a squad drill when there's only about five of you in the squad because there's always a gap somewhere. We didn't often have five off anywhere at one time, so we rebelled, and we marched and sang the Horst-Wessel-Lied. Do you know it? It's a marvelous German ... It was the Sturmtruppen song and it had a wonderful beat for marching. Of course, nobody knew, we couldn't make much effect because it was a residential area with not many people around but we enjoyed getting our own back. There was no repercussions because they didn't hear us.</p>
01:11:13	<i>How big is Southfields then? How many rooms is it? What is it?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:11:16	<p>Wouldn't know, I wouldn't know. You only went to your room for your class. Yes, that reminds me. I had my twenty-first birthday there and they had a dance that night, so there was a bit of a party on my birthday. Yeah, that was strange. Southfields itself, you'd have earphones on and you'd take down whatever they said and the Germans used a very simple kind of code because they were so fast. They did about 50 knots or something. I might be wrong but they were faster than ours and because of that they use a kind of code based on the phonetic alphabet. So you'd have Anton, [German 00:12:08], Caesar and so on. They'd put two of the letters together and make something up as a code for it and it was very simple. The only one I can remember is Sophie, Tony for the first letters of stopfen, which meant stop engines or stop. That was for the engine.</p> <p>That was the basis of the code and it was very simple to take down because you just wrote down the initial letters of the word or the letters they ... We knew a lot of them. We didn't know all of them but we knew a great deal of them or what they meant. This we copied down on a message pad which had a carbon copy below it which was kept in the station. The other one was sent to, I think was sent to Bletchley. Only we didn't know it at Bletchley, it was Station X, which to an eighteen year old was a very glamorous place to be involved with. There was always somebody else on duty besides you, especially during the daytime, who would take the top sheet of your message pad, immediately push the other pad over so you could carry on without pause and they would phone that through to the local naval intelligence center. Which for example, in Portsmouth area, was under Fort Suffolk. In the Dover area was under Dover Castle.</p> <p>I don't know if you've ever been there, but it's fascinating because it's a series of ... It's like a rabbit warren of tunnels that were built originally, some of them, by French prisoners of war back in some other war. It's been expanded since then and I was lent from Abbot's Cliff near Dover to them for either a week or a fortnight because they were short of people in the intelligence center. I saw the other Wren a bit because the messages would come through to us on the phone from the station, the operating station receiving the messages, then we would teleprint it to Station X. We didn't know where Station X was. We had no knowledge and you never knew anything more than you needed to know for your job. We never knew whether the information we gave to the Navy by this course was ever useful or not, which was sad really, but we hoped it was useful because they certainly needed the help at the beginning of the war.</p>
01:15:14	<i>After Southfields, how do you know you've passed? What do they do? Do you have to sign the Official Secrets Act?</i>
01:15:18	<p>Oh, you certainly have to sign the Official Secrets Act, yes. We were not released from it for at least thirty years. I was abroad then, and I didn't even know I could tell my family, and both parents died before I could ever really tell them what I had been doing. I was speaking to a lady yesterday at the VJ Memorial Service in Bournemouth, and she said the same. Her parents both died and she'd never been able to tell them, and what horrifies me nowadays is that people don't seem to care whether they've signed it or not. If they can get money for their story, they will tell it, and yet there must have been tens of thousands of people who were involved in secret work and we fooled the Germans time and time again. It was wonderful, the integrity that people had then.</p>
01:16:18	<i>You passed out at Southfields, I assume. Yeah, because you got your uniform.</i>
01:16:23	Yes.
01:16:24	<i>Where did you go? You went to?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:16:26	Abbot's Cliff.
01:16:26	<i>Abbot's Cliff. What do you remember of Abbot's Cliff?</i>
01:16:28	Well, you're four hundred feet up on a very windy cliff, I remember that. All the windows were covered with camouflage netting obviously, because we were right on the edge of the cliff and a prime target in a way. If you tried to go sleep after night watch, there'd be this beastly thing waving to and fro in the wind and flapping against ... So it was very difficult to sleep sometimes, or get to sleep. Once you'd got to sleep it wasn't too bad.
01:17:04	<i>How many Wrens there?</i>
01:17:07	<p>There were more there because that was one of the bigger ... There were two bigger stations and that was one of them. They were bigger because they listened to other things as well as to the E-boats. In the watch room there, there were two sets. One very high frequency which the E-boats used and a high frequency which was used by more normal traffic. It was more routine German exchanges of messages between the, for example ... I remember it better when I was at Ventnor, which was the other big station. We listened to the headquarters, the Headquarters of the Germans set up there. They would call every so many hours, just about two or three hours, they would keep checking all the harbor defense vessels to see that they were in order, and where they should be, and reception was good and so on. Then they'd pass other minor messages. Nothing very exciting.</p> <p>It was amusing at Christmas because they'd exchange Christmas greetings and things in plain language, but mostly it was the Q Code there. It was routine, but why we listened to it was because if there was any changes in the routine or different messages being sent then Station X was interested because it meant something was happening. Like the Bismarck going through or so on, which I think it was the Bismarck was one of the ones ... Two of the big battleships managed to get down the channel without our knowing. How they did it I don't quite know, but they did, but usually it indicated enough for the Navy to sort of have a look out and see what was happening. Otherwise that was routine. That was all in WT and the other was in RT. WT being Morse, of course.</p>
	Start of Film 3
01:19:22	<i>What was it like living there?</i>
01:19:24	It was all right. We were only three miles really, from Dover and about three miles from Folkestone. You could, in time off, go to the pictures in either town or you could go and ... We didn't do much shopping those days. We didn't have much money. I think as a petty officer, I got thirty shillings a fortnight. Which is one-fifty I think now, but you didn't need much because you had your accommodation. Your clothing was very, very cheap which you bought from the purser's store, which we called the parser's store. Things like a shirt would be one and nine pence which is about sort of twenty-five p or something. It's amazing the difference in prices.
01:20:18	<i>Do you remember a lot of people around Dover and Folkestone, or was it basically military?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:20:22	<p>Oh, all of normal people were there. I had an aunt and a cousin who lived in Dover. All the normal people were there and they just endured the constant, you know, they had a lot of shelling there. There were Wrens also stationed in Dover itself because that's where I had to stay when I was temporarily transferred to the intelligence center there under Dover Castle. A funny thing happened during my stay there. You were permitted, if nothing was happening in the night, there was no traffic as we used to call it, in other words the Germans were not on operations that night; one of you could sleep while the other stayed awake then you changed halfway through the night. You slept on the floor in a duffle coat; there was nothing else to do.</p> <p>It was my turn to be on the floor. I was fast asleep when I suddenly realised somebody was near me. I opened my eyes and there was a naval officer standing beside me, with gold braid all around here and gold braid up to his elbow. I thought oh my goodness, it's the admiral, what do I lie at attention or do I hop up? While I was looking, I should think, horrified he just quietly went away and left us. I don't know which admiral it was, but a very nice admiral it was obviously.</p>
01:22:04	<i>Did you meet any of the senior admirals? Do you remember any ... Did you see Churchill when you were in Dover?</i>
01:22:08	<p>Nope, no. He wasn't there at that time. I was only there a week or a fortnight, you see. No, nobody of interest came to see us at all and we had very little to do with the Navy. It was one of the things we regretted, obviously. We used to spend our spare time going for walks. If you walked over the dams far enough you could get cream tea even in the war, because they were so isolated that, you know, they were happy to sell you a cream tea. You could do that also from Ventnor. You had to walk again, over the sort of dam land; inland to a little village that's still ... I can't think of the name of it. It's very well known for tourists now, and you could get a cream tea there and that was very nice. Then we'd get the bus back, but our entertainment was very limited.</p> <p>I can only remember going to one party from Abbot's Cliff, and it was an RAF mess in somewhere near Highs in Kent. They'd taken over Siegfried Sassoon's house, and the thing I most remember of it was a couple who mistook a slightly green slime there was on the little pond there, and walked straight into the pond. Possibly encouraged by a certain amount of alcohol. That was the highlight of that do. I can't remember much about it apart from just working, and walking, and doing things like that. It was never a socially good job because we were in such remote positions usually.</p> <p>After Abbot's Cliff, I was transferred to Hemsby on the east coast. It was twelve Wrens, one Wren officer, a lot of sand dunes, a very cold sea and I liked swimming but I only went in once, a very cold North Sea wind, and no village. Nothing except sand dunes. If you had any time off you tried to hitch a lift somewhere, to Norwich. I remember us going for entertainment. It must have been we had a Saturday off, and you could either try and get to Norwich because there was an American PX there and you could actually have a dance or another night we cycled on awful station bicycles, belonging to the wireless station, but crotchety old things.</p>
01:25:06	<i>Were they provided by Nuffield?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:25:08	Quite possibly because he did provide things for the Wrens, yes. We cycled nine miles into Great Yarmouth, which isn't very great even when you get there. We went to this hop, which they don't call it hop now, but it just means a very ordinary dance with a lot of rude soldiery there, so to speak. We cycled back and halfway back, the chain fell off my bicycle and this is about 10:00 at night along a country road. Luckily two very gallant sailors caught up with us and put my chain back on and said, now don't stop pedaling until you get back, and we managed to get back. We weren't late but I suppose we would've had a good excuse.
01:26:05	<i>What sort of operational were you running from Hemsby?</i>
01:26:09	Well, it was the single operation there. Just the radio telephony, looking out for E-boats. It was just that. You didn't have the other thing which I wasn't qualified to do at that time. I hadn't been on the Morse course, but I disliked Hemsby so much because the flat countryside I didn't like. I was used to Hampshire which is rolling, and wooded, and beautiful. I was a long way from home too, so was Dover, but I didn't miss it so much. I had got relatives quite near and there was more going on. I realized that if I learnt Morse they couldn't keep me at Hemsby, because they didn't do it. I would either be at Abbot's Cliff, and I didn't know about Ventnor there, but I knew there were other stations, so I think the radio mechanic there would teach you up to a certain level. I'd done it in Girl Guide, you know, zero speed, and he'd get you up to sort of ten words a minute or something. Then you went back to, I think it was Southfields, to have your speeds brought up to twenty-five words a minute and you were taught the German procedural methods which were marginally different from the English. Then you could be sent to either Abbot's Cliff or Ventnor and I think I was sent to Ventnor.
01:27:45	<i>Did you find that studying it at Southfields in Morse very hard?</i>
01:27:49	No. No, it was ever so easy.
	Start of Film 4
01:27:53	<i>What was Ventnor like?</i>
01:27:54	Oh, lovely. Lovely place. I loved it at Ventnor.
01:27:58	<i>When did you go there? Was it pre D-Day?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:28:00	<p>I was there twice and I was twice at Abbot's Cliff. It was over D-Day, during D-Day, but I went there about in '43. I think it was something like September '43. I had just passed as a WT operator and that made me into a chief petty officer or chief Wren as they called it. Which I think is a bit misleading, it sounds as if you were leading the whole of the Wrens, if you have a title like chief Wren, and because I think she was referred ... I've forgotten her name now. I think she was called the chief Wren.</p> <p>Anyway, I went there and I loved it because it's beautiful. It's very pretty around Ventnor. Also, I could get home for forty-eight hours easily, or even thirty-six. Across the island, and that was Solent, and the family then were living in Totton because we couldn't live in our own house in South Hampton. I just felt more at ease there and I think I went back to Abbot's Cliff at some stage, but later on. I'm trying to remember when it was. I was certainly, at D-Day, I was certainly at Ventnor and it was a wonderful place to be because Ventnor's nearly at the southern point of the Isle of Wight.</p> <p>It was glorious morning and somebody came and shook me up and said it's today, it's today. They're going. When you went and looked, because we were four hundred feet up there, very, very high; you could see a stream of ... They were landing crafts in rows, going out each side, and because it was a glorious day with blue skies, blue sea, bright sunlight, they all looked white. I remember them as white, but they must have been gray. I think they were pale gray or something, landing craft, and it was a magnificent sight. It also gave you a rather creepy feeling. I had danced with a sergeant the Saturday before and you couldn't help wondering how long he survived. Of course, I didn't know, we'd hadn't met before, we just danced, but it did make you think, you know?</p>
01:30:31	<i>How long were you there afterwards? Did you see the hospital ships coming back?</i>
01:30:35	<p>No, no, I wasn't there for that. At some stage I was transferred back to Abbot's Cliff and that was when the V-1s were coming over, the flying bombs. At that stage they'd moved the watch room from an upper floor to a ground floor because we had anti-aircraft guns of every description you can think of in all the fields right beside us, and extending in various directions to try and bring the buzzbombs down before they reached London. For that reason we had a blast wall; we were on the ground floor with a blast wall all the way round, and when you heard them sort of cut out, we had earphones on as you have, and we'd just dive under the bench, you know, in the hope that it wasn't going to land on us.</p> <p>Of course, they did bring them down quite near sometimes, and one poor gun crew were completely wiped out because it landed on them. You would hear them cut out, you know? The engine you would hear coming towards you and I can't remember whether it was before then or after then that I was in Ventnor, and I was sleeping after a duty, and I could hear this buzzbomb coming nearer and nearer, and then it lit up my bedroom with its tail, so it was so close. I thought well, this is me. I'm just going to die now, and no it didn't because it went ... It came very close, went into the hillside behind us and because the hill had hummocks the blast was deflected away from us and we had very little damage, but it was enough. Funnily enough, you're just resigned. You think, you know, you're going to go, you're going to go.</p>
01:32:32	<i>They were supposed to go to London, weren't they, but I know the POW's that made them deliberately altered the fuses so they'd overshoot or come down ahead of. An awful lot of them never made London or went past London.</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:32:45	Did they? Yes, and I think they sometimes aimed at different places possibly as well, because ... I don't know how, whether Southampton ... I think we thought it was going for Southampton, you see, because we didn't have many buzzbombs in that area, but your reason is a very good one. Yes.
01:33:05	<i>After D-Day, you went back to Dover?</i>
01:33:07	Yes.
01:33:08	<i>This is when it was you [crosstalk 01:33:10].</i>
01:33:11	That was when we had all the buzzbombs coming over.
01:33:13	<i>Yeah, what about the V-2s? Did you ever see the V-2's come?</i>
01:33:17	<p>Well, we met those in London because when our job ... As the armies moved along the coast towards Germany, there was no point in having Ventnor open, for instance, because we'd taken that part of France. Gradually, we were drawn back to London. To occupy us, they had us helping to translate captured documents using enormous technical dictionaries and doing the preliminary translations. Then it was handed to naval officers, English and Dutch, who had a much better knowledge, and also maybe engineering knowledge, which we didn't have.</p> <p>I was very amused to find out that there was a word called a stuffing box, so I know the German for stuffing box, and injection jets, but stuffing box was very amusing. We did, as I said, the preliminary and while we were there we lived in a block of flats in Chain Walk. Mary and I shared a room right at the top, and every so often you'd hear this enormous crab-bang and it would be a V-1 landing somewhere or other, but, I mean, you had to take it. It was philosophically. It didn't really worry us. You just accepted it.</p>
01:34:45	<i>Where were you working when you came to live there?</i>
01:34:4	I think it was either in admiralty or in some other place which they'd taken over, because we'd translated part of the schnorchel, which is this device the Germans had and we didn't. Our Navy was particularly interested in getting it translated. It was the device by which they could remain slightly underwater and therefore difficult to see from aircraft and so on, and of ships of course, and they could exchange the foul air in the submarine for ... I'm talking about submarines, sorry ... For fresh air, without actually surfacing. They called it the schnorchel because it was like our word snort. The snorter, really.
01:35:41	<i>You can't remember where that you were doing that though?</i>
01:35:43	Well, I can't remember the actual building. No. No. It wouldn't have been far. We would have walked there, I think.
01:35:53	<i>What about VE Day?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:35:56	<p>I can't remember that at all. I think we were sent on leave. Those of us who volunteered to go to Germany after the war for until our time for being discharged came, were sent home on leave prior to the Lords of the Admiralty, who looked after us very well, deciding it was fit for Wrens to go to Germany because, I mean, it was in a pretty awful state immediately after the war. Even when we got there it was in an awful state, so we went out in November '45 and we're put into a naval barracks which had been taken over from the German panzers.</p> <p>Mary and I shared a room which had two huge wardrobes in and a space for our swords, because presumably it was for I suppose their dress uniform of the panzer army. The panzer who were the tank regiment, so to speak, or the tank core. We were only in the barracks for about, magnificent barracks they had, for about a fortnight. Then we were taken by taxi or limousine to our jobs. Then we were housed, as we were all ... We were a group of eight, POs and CPOs, and accommodated in a very nice block of flats in the center of Hamburg. We were allocated to the Army, lent to the Army, because the Navy had plenty of German speakers, more than they needed and the Army needed a lot of German speakers.</p>
01:37:53	<p>I was attached to an Army group who were denazifying the employees of the headquarters and district of the German post office in the Hamburg district. We were supposed to be assistant interpreters, but I really wasn't good enough for that as I discovered the first time they tried to make me interpret. The new head, they were getting rid of all the Nazi's, so the head had already been changed for a non-Nazi. Nice man. We were standing out in the street and I was standing with this captain I worked for, Army captain, and he was explaining to the German how we were going to peel away the layers of Nazi's as one peeled an onion. I thought, my goodness, what on earth is an onion, how am I going to do that? Fortunately, the German knew a lot of English and he stepped into the breach and rescued me, which was very nice.</p> <p>They didn't use me as an interpreter after that. I had jobs like checking inventories when they took over houses. Going through the inventory and translating it into English. Also, going through questionnaires. All the employees of Hamburg district had to fill in a questionnaire giving their status in the Nazi party. If they were scharfuhrer, which was roughly sergeant level, they were out. Although you may think, yes well they're not going to be honest are they, but if somebody who is a scharfuhrer has been booted out, he's going to denounce the ones that stay in. That's how it worked, sort of, if somebody didn't get booted out. The questionnaires worked quite well apparently, and then they were replaced by non-Nazis.</p>
	Start of Film 5
01:40:03	<i>Well, Hamburg was devastated wasn't it?</i>
01:40:06	<p>It was devastated, but there were still buildings. Especially the docks area was really devastated. That was piles of rubble and you would see one room halfway up a block of flats with a bit of smoke coming out of it meaning, somebody was living there, because this was six months after the end of the war. It wasn't damage. They would live in whatever they could live in.</p>
01:40:34	<i>Did you see many dead bodies there?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:40:36	No, but you could smell them sometimes. You know, you would walk past piles of rubble and this sweet-sickly smell would come out. Also, you saw Germans, I could see from the window where we had ... No it wasn't the meal, it can't have been meals, it must have been our flat. We lived in the flat. We had eight of us in one flat, the group that went over, we all lived together. Although we worked in different places. You could see Germans going through our dustbins looking for food. They looked grey. Everything was grey, I remember, because the weather was grey. Hamburg gets some of the damp that comes up from the Atlantic and the North Sea and they also get the cold from Germany, so it's not a very nice climate.
01:41:35	<i>Do you remember how you felt when you went to Hamburg, or what you saw?</i>
01:41:39	Well, I didn't feel terribly sympathetic because they'd bombed us with a very poorly aimed thing. I mean, you can't aim dropping a mine on the end of a parachute in a residential area of the north of South Hampton. We were about three miles from the port. They bombed terribly badly, what's the cathedral town in the middle of England they bombed?
01:42:19	<i>Coventry?</i>
01:42:20	Coventry. That was the first one they did, yes. We hadn't done anything like that, at that time. It was way on in the war that we, you know, we had more power and we could bomb more effectively than they could, but they would've bombed us I'm sure, equally effectively if they had been able to.
01:42:42	<i>By then, you were just resigned to seeing devastation pretty much, you know, wherever you are?</i>
01:42:46	Yes, yes. It was devastating, but in the middle of Hamburg, although it was terribly, badly damaged, there were a number of buildings, for instance the NCOs club was the [German 00:43:07] that's underneath the guild hall so to speak, and it was beautiful. Very nice. We used to go there with some of the other lads that we discovered did our job. We became friendly with them, and we'd go there occasionally, and we'd sing German songs because we all knew lots of beautiful ... I mean, German folk songs are very musical, and pleasant, and we'd sing these. We all knew one which, in my innocence, and the other girl's innocence, we didn't know the full meaning. We knew the meaning of the words but there was a secondary meaning that we didn't get, you see. We innocently sang this song with the lads, you see, and then we saw German faces peering at us sooner the waiters and waitresses; fancy them singing that song. We found out afterwards.
01:44:07	<i>Do you remember the lyrics?</i>
01:44:09	I can tell you the words. [German 00:44:12]. Do you know it?
01:44:31	<i>No, I don't.</i>
01:44:42	It says let me in through your little window, and then it says, you see?
01:44:37	<i>Oh. How do you reflect on your service as a Wren now?</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:44:43	<p>If you meet any Wren almost, nowadays, they all enjoyed it. They all look back to it as a period they wouldn't have wanted to miss. Even though, as I say, we didn't really have a social time and we had very little to do with the Navy because of the circumstances. We did have a good time when we went to Germany. That was terrific because there weren't many English girls over there, so we did have a wonderful time over there. No, we enjoyed it and I always felt, as I think I told one of you on the telephone, that our Lords of the Admiralty were really kind old uncles who looked after the Wrens, because I'll tell you one story that's quite interesting.</p> <p>When we went to Germany, went on our draft, we had to go to Howell and stay in an Army transit camp, which was Nissen Huts in November. The only heating you had in your hut was this iron stove in the middle with a sort of bendy, metal pipe going to the ceiling and my bunk was the far end so I didn't benefit much from that. It was cold and miserable and the ablutions were sort of three or four things, and you went out and washed in concert, so to speak, not a proper bathroom.</p> <p>When they got us up at 4am to go on board and they gave us breakfast of brown stew and plum cake, and when you'd finished what you could eat of the brown stew, you went over to a dustbin already half-full of other people's uneaten brown stews and you wiped it into this horrible mess. We then embarked for a rough North Sea crossing and the only people in for breakfast the next day was me and an Army officer in the far corner of the dining room. My idea of food and accommodation in the WACS endured must have been a bit grim.</p>
01:47:10	<i>You never Mountbatten or anyone like that?</i>
01:47:14	Nobody, no. No, I didn't meet anyone.
01:47:17	<i>Any Wrens that stood out? Any famous Wrens?</i>
01:47:19	No, we had an interesting collection of people. As I said, we had admirals daughters who were not commissioned because an awful lot of the girls in our job were suitable for commissions but there weren't that number of ... You could only have one officer in charge of, you know, so many of us. I met people who had the honorable this, and lady so-and-so, who had been brought up where they learnt German, you see. We also had people who'd worked in travel agencies, and traveled abroad, and teachers who'd volunteered. So we were a very mixed ... Oh, and Jewish girls who'd probably come over from Germany with their parents in the 30's, early 30's. It was a very interesting group.
01:48:31	<i>Very secretive. You didn't talk.</i>
01:48:34	No, we didn't talk. No, we can't have because they didn't know about us. If you read about Enigma, for example, you'll find that we absolutely fooled the Germans. They had no idea that we had broken their codes. Not just ... There were more than one code, there was the Lorenz Code and we used to listen, you could hear the Lorenz machine operating, but of course, you couldn't read it because it was automatic anyway. Very fast and in a different code from Enigma, but they broke that as well, but the Germans didn't realise it.
01:49:18	<i>When you say you could hear it ...</i>

Time Code	What is Said
01:49:20	Well, it was sent by radio, and you could hear it, and it would be a sort of ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding like that, but you couldn't read it. I mean, they could read it, because and I suppose they could hear, they'd worked out ... You had to receive it on a machine. You couldn't receive it; a human being couldn't take it down at that speed, whatever it was. I don't know quite what form it had, but you heard it sometimes. You could also hear what they called hellschreiber, which was a teleprinter. That was very fast too. You couldn't take that either, but it could be taken by a machine and then rehashed so it was readable and you had to investigate straight signals, of course.
01:50:13	End of Films

