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Name: Patricia Parker
Regiment: WRNS Women's Royal Naval Service

Date transcript: 10/12/2013
Transcribe by: David Davies

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	<p>Well I'm Patricia Parker I was Patricia Flemming my maiden name and I was born and brought up in Dale Street Chatham near Chatham Station. I was the youngest of three and we lived at 125 Dale Street and me and my brother and my sister we were all baptised, christened, married at St Johns church in Railway Street which is empty now you know and my father he was in the Royal Navy, but when I was born in 1922 he had just come out the navy so I didn't know him in the Navy... my brother and sister did but I didn't he come out the Navy and he became a postman at Rochester post office and as I say we all lived at 125 Dale Street until we all got married and settled and my sister my sister she married and lived at Raynham for a time. My brother was in the Royal Marines and then war broke out and course I was born in 1922 and my mother said thank god they won't take Pat, she's too young because she's sixteen when the war broke out and course war went on and course it come to the year when I was eighteen and came out on the wireless that all eighteen year olds would be called up no excuses.</p>
01:02:21	<p>Of course my boss at that time if you had a fairly important job you could get reserved for three months so of course when I went to work my boss said I'm sorry Pat can't get you reserved any longer, I said yes I know that he said what are you going to do because you could leave your boss and go anywhere you know work in any factory I said I'm going to take pot luck I'll stop with you until I'm called up and cause my father was in the Royal Navy and all my uncles on both sides of the family were in the Royal Navy in the first world war and I said well I said I don't mind what I do actually I didn't. of course my dad said what are you going to do Pat I said oh I'm going to take a chance well he said don't blame you... and when it got nearer the time for me to go for my interview cause you are all interviewed personally mostly when you were called up and he said what are you going to do I said well I hadn't thought about it he says well I'll give you some advice, but you haven't got to take it. He said if you go in one of the three forces no matter how broke you are you'll have a clean bed and three meals a day. So I said yeah you're quite right, but he said that's up to you we're on your side you know me and mum and I was eighteen in the November I went for my interview about a fortnight later down at the labour exchange and I had to fill in a form and all sorts and the WRNS officer happened to be recruiting so they sent me to a...</p>

Time code	What is said
01:04:41	She Had a room in the labour exchange at Burtons Buildings and she gave me a form to fill in which I could fill in I could answer all the questions and when I finished she said well take it home and discuss it with your mother I said I haven't got to I can call her I said I've got to do something, I've got to belong to something before I leave here so of course you know I joined the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service) of course I kept saying to my father I don't suppose I should go in the Navy and within a month I was in the WRNS training at Kings School Rochester because that was the training depot for WRNS when the war first started because all the boys were evacuated so the admiralty took over Kings School as a trainee centre for WRNS you know and from there within in a month I was doing my training there.
01:05:56	We had eight weeks training and there were twenty of us and we all passed are exams etc etc and of course I was the only Kentish girl all the others were Newcastle, Scotland you name it they were from every part of England barring Kent I was the only Kentish friend and when we'd all passed out done our exams. Because while we were training we had to be by half past nine, but when we finished our training we were allowed... we were given a day off and allowed to go home until ten o'clock at night and of course I went home to see my parent in Dale Street and I could walk across Jacksons fields to see them you know and I got in quarters about quarter to ten that night and there was a great big black board as you entered this room at Kings School where the masters put messages for the boys you know from their parents a great big blackboard when they were at school and on this blackboard was written will Wren Flemming report to the Wren officer
01:07:34	and I thought oh my god what have I done and so of course I went over to my Petty Officer and I said oh I'm Wren Flemming oh she says we've been waiting for you I said well I've only been home to see my parents that's all right she said have you had a nice day I said yeah... so of course I went in and the Wren officer was waiting for me oh she said Wren Flemming have you had a nice day I said yes I've been to see my parents in my uniform first time we'd worn our uniform you see. I said my father was so pleased so we've got some good news for you she said you're the first one to be given a draft. I thought crumbs she said you're going up to Yorkshire and I was the only Kentish Wren of twenty that was drafted and they sent me to Yorkshire all the other nineteen went to somewhere in Kent... I said Yorkshire I'd never left Kent and that's how I started my life in the Wrens, but it didn't do me any harm in any way what's so ever it was interesting very interesting and I really loved the work that I did when I went in the WRNS sort of thing.
	Start of Film 2
01:09:24	<i>So what were you tasked with doing then in Yorkshire... what was your role of a Wren in Yorkshire?</i>

Time code	What is said
01:09:31	I was a shorthand typist so I went in as a clerical as a shorthand typist and I was sent to Wetherby (HMS Ceres a Shore Establishment) and then it was called HMS Cabot because for the first time the Navy had moved completely... I mean I didn't know this until like a few months had moved the whole ship which they did by train from Bristol to Wetherby in Yorkshire because they'd been bombed out at Bristol cause HMS Cabot was like HMS Pembroke you know here in Chatham they were bombed completely out. I mean I think quite a few got killed and they'd got to find a new place for them to start again and evidently they'd built this camp or they had been building this camp and it was very modern, but it was going to be the first open prison camp and it was... it hadn't been used yet so they decided the admiralty said well we'll send them to this camp because its new, its modern and they'd transferred them by train from Bristol to Yorkshire I didn't know this when I joined them.
01:11:18	I was the first Kentish Wren to join them because they were all Bristonian's they called me the Cockney so i didn't argue about it because I wanted to say well I'm Kentish, but they said aye you're a Cockney alright you know so I left it at that I didn't argue about it I thought well they were always known to talk with a... you know and cause the first day I went to the office where I was to work they showed me you know the camp I think it must of covered over twenty miles or more and all I wanted to do was send a postcard to my parents to let them know where I was and so of course when I was shown to my office I said to the staff that were in the office I am the new Wren, but can you tell me where I can get a postcard to let my parents know where I am and they were very helpful and one of the staff got me a postcard I wrote it and they posted it in the village and when my mum picked up the postcard at Dale Street Chatham and she said to my father we don't know anyone in Yorkshire do we dad he said no... and when she turned the back good lord it's Pat she's up in Yorkshire and that was the start, but I loved it.
	Start of Film 3
01:13:13	<i>What made it so much fun?</i>
01:13:16	The comradeship same as what are in here sharing and also learning whatever you were set to do. My father said to me when I was coming in the Wrens he said I'll give you a word of advice Pat he said as you're going in the Wrens he said if you end up in the Navy he said never volunteer for anything and never admit you can't do anything he said if you're told to do something and you've never done it before he said say you can do it because he said you can watch the person who does the job and you can learn from them which was the best advice he could of given me, because I never admitted if I was told to do something I never admitted I'd never done it before I used to think I'd find out somehow which I did do and it was good advice yes.

Time code	What is said
01:14:39	<p>So of cause I was I worked in the offices you know in an office mostly at Wetherby we trained the wrights and the store houseman that when onboard the ships you know and who were called up and we had to draft them into the different ships I feel ashamed now really because just think we used to have about five hundred men and these were eighteen year olds and we trained them and we sent out five hundred men to different ships every I don't know whether it would be eight weeks or so trained sufficient to serve or start to serve onboard any ship they were sent to just imagine that now you can't. I often think about it you know and I think gosh we thought nothing of it with me I worked with the training that was my first job... I worked for the training commander and had to sort of mark and go through the marks of all the Ratings for the various exams you know when they passed out at the end of eight weeks I had to check all the exams that they'd taken and how many marks they'd got and things like that yeah it was very interesting.</p>
01:16:40	<p>Cause we did because they were all on convoys the ships I mean we relied on the Navy to stop us from starving and we were at starvation point through the war definitely we were very much at the mercy and we needed our Navy to fetch what food they could from our commonwealth countries like Canada, Australia. Australia sent as much tinned fruit and butter as they could, but it was all rationed everybody got their proper ration in Britain nobody went... had gone without and we had personal friends German after the war and John the husband of this family told us that England had the most fair rationing both in the first world war and in the second world war John said you all got your proper ration nobody was left out in Germany it was sink or swim. He said we didn't have proper rationing and he in question they had a baby when the war broke out he'd got daughters and two sons and they lost the baby because they couldn't buy mile, couldn't by baby food in Germany... he said we lost our baby, it starved he said you could only buy things on the black market cause it went in Germany you often well you were there too late to get anything and they used to send their daughter out and she said yes she said he died he starved because we couldn't get the right food for him, baby food yes... I suppose she'd be about twelve thirteen she said and John said you had the fairest rationing system I would say in the world because everybody got their ration he said both my father could remember in the first world war because he had to fight and he said and I can remember that people, prisoners and that told us what rationing they got in their own country and it was very fair yeah... so we you know and I mean I know it sounded small a little bit or meat or butter but that was there every week for you to draw for the family and put it all together yes we were very fairly treated by well I suppose our governments really yes.</p>
	Start of Film 4

Time code	What is said
01:20:13	<i>What was your social life like... what did you do for fun?</i>
01:20:16	Well really same as what's in here even now the Navy always made sure that we had some sort of social life within the camp and also with the other camps you know the RAF, the Hats, The Army we invited when we had a dance we invited the airforce and the army so many of them to our dance that was our captain that made sure of that and vice versa the chiefs of the RAF and the Army when they had a dance or anything they invited so many Navy. We all shared so we had a good... really quite a good social life because all the people were very... I mean it was up to you who you chose I know that and course when I when in the WRNS I said to my dad you don't need to worry about me I shall never get married while the war is on and my father said why not because I said you don't know who you're marrying I said everybody's different when there is a war on, it's not like meeting a young man today and taking a young man home I said so I said I told my father I would not marry while the war was on and I didn't I said I kept that promise...
01:22:11	I had a some very nice young men I must admit at the dances and the different places we went to, but we were always treated very well you know very nicely yes had a few heartbreaks, but of course some of the boyfriends that we had went off and never come back because we didn't know where they were going some went to Burma, some went to Egypt you know and when they didn't come back well you didn't ask any questions you guessed you know that they were either on the convoys or in the Middle East or out on Burma so you guessed you know what was happening yes...
	Start of Film 5
01:23:00	<i>Did you feel like you were contributing to the war effort... did you feel proud?</i>
01:23:04	Yes... oh yes yes because we were taking the men's places on land the jobs they did on land we were doing their jobs and they could go to sea oh yes, but it wasn't only the WRNS it was the Hats I mean the friend of mine whose here now she was on an AK AK Unit it the Hats and when she was on leave and I was on leave we used to meet and go out to London because we'd been friends in our civvie life and we lived in the same street and she is in here now and we've known each other since we were ten years old and May yes she went on an AK AK Unit in Kent and I went away and served up in Yorkshire and all sorts you know yeah. Oh yeah you felt if you were really helping oh yes everybody was out to help and defend this country absolutely.
	Start of Film 6

Time code	What is said
01:24:26	<i>Did you feel the war was coming to an end did you know?</i>
01:24:29	<p>Yes well we were made aware of it we were told not to talk if we heard anything it was most particular and believe you me no one in this country then talked about anything... if you knew something you never talked about it you kept it to yourself. Everybody was very much British all the way along there was no... well from my point of view there was no question of giving up or anything like that no we were out to stand firm if you know what I mean I know it sounds silly now because there is not much national attitude about, but oh no everybody was true to form England England England yes absolutely. We were made aware of the second front we knew it was being formed, we were aware that it was being formed because all the roads up in Yorkshire and I think up in Scotland a whole army camped on the road side by their vehicles ready for the second front... they were trained and the army and whatever you could see them all they were all camped by their own vehicle and you could talk to them they were camped in villages and all sorts. That's how a lot of marriages got made where Yorkshire girls married soldiers from all over the place and took them in doors you know people offered to help with their cooking saying you can come and cook your meals in my kitchen a lot of people did that.</p>
01:27:06	<p>The men they were living side by side which you can't imagine now, but there were like jeeps I can't think.... All the sort of tanks and all that all on the road right up to Scotland, guns and all at the ready and of course when the second front started they went... they went they went to France and a good many didn't come back no, but we were made aware not to talk and we didn't I mean with us we were aware that the second front was ebing forms and when the second front was being formed we were also aware that there would be a bit of time but we would be demobbed back to civvie street. That was all forces you were made aware that you could go back to civvie street perhaps to your old job or like the men they learnt new jobs new work and they went back to better work what they'd learnt in the forces you know what I mean and of course my Wren officer course I was stationed then at the end of the war at Windsor and my Wren officer she interviewed all of us more or less... like she said can you go back to your old job if not I'll give you a letter and you can go into Chatham dock yard and put yourself down for a job and I said no I don't need it... I said I'm going to find my own job I said to her because I said I worked at Featherstone's.</p>
01:29:36	<p>Now Featherstone's was a firm that was very well known in the south I said bit I'm not going back there I said I'm going to find my own job and I did when I come out of the WRNS yeah... my firm offered to take me back you know and I said no I'm going to get a job myself and I ended up at the Co op bank in Chatham and I worked there until I got married.</p>

Time code	What is said
	Start of Film 7
01:30:12	<i>What do you remember of VE Day?</i>
01:30:16	<p>I was in London amongst that crowd you know in the film with a crowd of Canadians and Wrens that I was stationed with at Windsor we all went up... we all got the day off... all the forces in England was given a whole day off to do what they wanted to do and what did they do you saw in the film all went to London all called for the King and Queen and it was marvelous it really was, but six of us had to get back to Windsor by six o'clock that night and we were a bit humped about it because we were in the victory parade at Windsor to march up that hill to castle and we were going to be reviewed now all the forces in Windsor for the people that lived at Windsor and that's what happened to most villages or towns that they immediately had a victory... literally their own victory march until it come to the big one you know when they sorted things out a bit then we had the big victory march up in London all that yes I can remember when we... you know I marched in Windsor and we were on duty until about eight o'clock that night I suppose then we were free to do what we wanted to do, but of cause all of the others had the whole day off but not us that was in the squad that did the marching you know, but you know you'd have a squad of the Navy first of all then the Army then the RAF start of the march you know then there would come all the civilian people that were part of the fire service and all the other different things... I can't remember all... the people that put the bombs out in the streets... ARP they had their group you see yes they all put their group in the victory march indeed everybody was in that day and age very very proud. After all we'd done it on our own.</p>
01:33:20	<p>Well it didn't do me any hard it taught me to mix, taught me to travel on my own because I had to really on my own devices you know I couldn't run home if I was stuck anywhere you know all we had was the military police to go to... to find out where you were going or what you were doing and they always... they were there to help to direct you to wherever you were going yes. Because you all had sort of pass I mean you couldn't just get away with anything in that day and age not at all. We all had an identity card everybody babies and all. They had their own identity card and it didn't hurt anybody at all.</p>
01:34:27	??????

Time code	What is said
01:34:28	I don't know I wouldn't like to say I really wouldn't you know because we had some good people then to lead us and to organise us during those years they were proper people who were already well and truly tried in their special jobs and that, but what would happen now I wouldn't like to say really and truly I mean what would happen if people were put on a ration I don't know I don't think they would like it at all. They wouldn't get on and cope with it I think they'd perhaps wonder at it I don't know, but when the rationing came in we just accepted it you know if we were to survive as an island, but we're not an island now in any way
01:38:51	End of Films