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Name: Colette Cook  
Regiment: WRNS (Womens Royal Naval Service)

Date transcript:

Transcribe by:

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	My name is Colette Claire Cook and I was originally, before I was married my surname was St George York.
01:00:06	<b><i>So Colette, just tell me, where are you from and what was life like pre-war what determined your future?</i></b>
01:00:16	Well, I think the thing was first of all I had good parent. My mother was Irish; my father was very English and in actual fact had fought in the First World War in the Highland Light Infantry and won the Military Cross in the Somme and, um, we had a very happy childhood in Harrogate, we really did and we used to go on holiday every summer to my mother's relatives in Ireland, and we use to, we had a lovely childhood really when I think about it. A very happy childhood with very good parents.
01:00:49	<b><i>And did you have a sense as a young person that things were changing, that there might be a war or was it literally, war was declared?</i></b>
01:00:58	I think we used to hear my parents talking about, I think the first thing I remember, in actual fact, was hearing, because we used to listen to the radio a lot and I think the first thing I remember is coming back from Munich waving a piece of paper. Chamberlain, Neville Chamberlain and in actual fact I've often thought since that man was a bit of a hero 'cause he knew perfectly well. He had to buy us at least a year and he made himself look a fool. That's only my own personal feeling, looking back, you know. And, um, I don't think we knew, I think the first thing was, we used to reach a lady, we used to go out for walks with my mother, um, or maybe when we were going to school, because Shelia and I went to the convent, the Holy Child Convent in Harrogate where we got a very good modern education which was marvelous with modern thinking. We used to talk to a Mrs Menuhin and apparently she was Yehudi Menuhin's aunt and she had come over to this country from Germany in 1936, something like that, and I think she told my mother and I remember her telling me that things were happening like somebody would disappear or be taken away in the night and some weeks after that a little box would be delivered by the postman, whatever it was, with ashes inside. So it was kind of known that things were happening but I don't think it was generally known.
01:02:24	<b><i>Where were you when war did break out?</i></b>
01:02:26	In Harrogate.
01:02:27	<b><i>Do you remember the day?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:02:29	<p>Well when we were living in Harrogate, in actual fact, we were in Ireland on holiday and we always used to go from Liverpool, we used to like the boat journey most of all I think from Liverpool it used to be an eight hour journey. Liverpool to Dublin, and we used to leave the car then get the overhead railway in Liverpool, out of the, I don't know what dock it was Gladstone I think and at this particular time it was the week before war broke out, funnily enough, and there was a mock air raid in Liverpool and then they wouldn't let us board the ship and there were all sorts of things going on ???? we didn't sail until about 6 o'clock in the morning instead of 10 o'clock the night before. And we went, the first people we went to visit was my aunt and uncle up in Caven which is just south of the northern border and my uncle, in actual fact, was a detective and I remember us sitting there listening to Jim and I can remember my father say, "Oh my God, not another bloody war!" listening to the radio. And so to come back it was a bit of a performance really cos we couldn't, we couldn't come back the way we'd gone because they were taking those Liverpool-Dublin ships over for hospital ships so we had to go Holyhead, Dunmurry. And the ships were all blacked out and it was rough and I can remember we got on the train at Holyhead and the lights were all covered with blue paper and I think that was it, you know, but we thought it was a bit exciting, I think. My parents must have been worried silly. And we'd also heard, in actual fact that the Athenia had been sunk. The Athenia was the first ship to be torpedoed up in the Northern Irish Sea, I think, and I think there were a number of Americans on it which caused a bit of a stir for the time being.</p>
	Start of Film 2
01:04:23	<b><i>So how did war change things for you in Harrogate then?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:04:27	Well the first thing that happened, in actual fact, was there was an air raid siren, I can't remember whether it was the end of 1939 or the beginning of 1940 because there was a bomber over Harrogate in fact they had heard an awful lot of the chaps that were later on training to be pilots in America and Canada came back to Harrogate first of all before they were sent to their units and the siren went, so we all got in the cupboard under the stairs and my two brothers and sister rushing out to have a look and I said "It's a Dornier," and I know the other one said "It's not a Dornier, it's a Heinkel," and there was an argument went on and nothing much happened really, but my mother used to say "If a German comes to the door, I'm going keep my garden," the thing that you put anti-pest control things in, "I'm going to keep that and if a German comes to the door I shall pump it full!" and my father used to say, "Yes, I can see him standing there like a lemon while you pump insecticide into his face!" And then of course there was the question of rationing and my mother... my father was in timber and plywood and that was taken over by the government, so he had to find another job and joined the Ministry of Aircraft Production, which meant a reduction in his salary in what he was getting, but nonetheless it was better than nothing and my mother also got a job there as well, although she was a trained nurse, but by that time she was, I suppose, in her forties, I would have thought, in actual fact. And then my father got sent to London.
01:06:04	So he was in the Ministry of Aircraft Production on Milbank and then Thames House, or wherever it was, and that's how, I don't know that it, I think, in actual fact we kind of took it as it came, I think when you're kids, you know. I mean I must have been about thirteen when war broke out, I think, fourteen, I can't remember. But it was kind of a bit exciting and my aunt who lived in Liverpool who was a bit of an invalid, she came to live with us for a while and I can see her sitting by the fire in our house while my two brothers had this thing down from the table and they had Dinky toy naval ships on it and there was a row. "I sunk the Ark Royal!" "No you haven't sunk the Ark..." "I sunk the..." and my aunt saying, "Boys, boys. There's enough war going on without you two going to blow through the dining room." So this is how, people think it was all drama all at once, do you know what I mean? But then you gradually began to realise there was Dunkirk and all the rest of it, but I decided I wanted to join up but I couldn't do it till I was seven... well with my father's permission it was seventeen and a half and on my own account it was eighteen and I didn't want to wait until I was eighteen.
<b>01:07:15</b>	<b><i>Why did you want to be a WREN?</i></b>
01:07:19	I've no idea! I just wanted to. Why does anybody want to join a particular thing, you know? I was always mad keen on history. I mean nowadays I am still very keen on history, military history in particular, and, um, that's what I wanted to do.
<b>01:07:38</b>	<b><i>Ok, so when you had the opportunity to join, just talk through the process...</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:07:45	<p>Well, the thing, the thing is, I wanted to join the WRENs and I wanted to join as soon as I could which was seventeen and a half but I had left school when I was sixteen and I wanted to do something so the man that lived next door to us was the works manager of the Yorkshire ????? Chemical Company in Leeds in Hunslet so he said "Well you can have a job in our laboratory where we tested stuff coming up from the factory against standards that we have." And I worked there for a year. My sister used to complain that I smelt when I came home and I used to go back between Harrogate and Leeds everyday on the train and I think I earned 22 and sixpence a week in old time money and I think I used to be able to treat my sister to things and do all sorts of things. I used to walk up into the centre of Leeds at lunchtime and go to Lyons and have my lunch or whatever it was. Anyway, eventually the time came when I could, dad willingly gave me, because he said he'd enjoyed being in the forces and being in the Highland Light Infantry, so I applied and it must have been just at the time when they were wanting to increase more people for what we called P5, and I'll explain that a bit later. So I was summoned for an interview in Leeds, I think, I can't remember much about it and the next thing I knew I'd been accepted and on my way to London.</p>
01:09:11	<p>I'd never been to London in my life, before and it used to take six or seven hours to go by train from Harrogate to London and a friend of my mother's met me and put me on, I knew that I had to go to Mill Hill. Now Mill Hill was a great big building there, it was going to be the, I think the Medical Research Council were going to use but it was taken over by the Navy and that was the WREN training and drafting depot and it was a great big tall building, it had a great big, it would have been a car park nowadays in front of it which they called the quarter deck and we had ????? flying from it and if you went across the quarter deck you had to go at the double and we learnt strait away. And then we were given navy blue overalls and we were set to work. Naval history, PT on the roof and don't forget it was the end of October or something. PT on the roof and it was cold and we thought it was marvellous and we used to be awoken in the morning by a claxon at 5 o'clock and set to work scrubbing. We still thought it was marvellous! I made friends with a girl from Yorkshire as well; Shelia Tong and she said, "This is exciting, isn't it?" and I said "Yes" and she said "We're really in the Navy!" Anyway we then went for interviews as to what we were going to do and they said "There are only three categories left and that is cooks, stewards or P5." And we said "What's P5?" "We can't tell you," she just said. Oh that sounds exciting. Seventeen and a half.</p>
	Start of Film 3

Time code	What is said
01:10:43	<p>So we went for the interview for P5. What is it? Can't tell you. So we said, so then they said to us "Technical or clerical?" and she said, "Well technical sounds more interesting, technical." OK. Well we were left there another two weeks they were probably doing, checking our background and so on and so forth and we weren't even given our uniforms. We were then given our uniforms and piled into a bus with our luggage and sent off and wonder where we're going to. We landed up in Eastcote which is a suburb of London and it was a great big, a part building site, they were all huts they were already working there and it was one of the Bletchley Park outstations and why they had outstations was so the only, in the end I think they only made 210 bombes which I'll explain later the things we were going to operate and they didn't, if they was bombing they didn't want them all destroyed so there was some at Bletchley, some at Stanmore, Eastcote and another one down in the country where we worked in the stables. So that's where we learnt what we were going to do, in fact. And it was very hard work. Apparently I've learnt since they were looking for girls that weren't less, strong girls that weren't less than 5ft 6, 5ft 8 in height and I was 5 8 and a half at that age. And it was hard physical work, it really was, you had to learn, what you would do is you'd, you'd get a menu, what they called a menu in, which used to come over a scrambler phone a green phone and according to that that's how you chose the drums on the front and plugged up the back, it almost impossible to describe, in actual fact, and then you set the thing going.</p>
01:12:33	<p>And the plugging up of the back was the most difficult thing of the lot really. You set it going and at the side if that's, if that was say a machine, at the side there used to be a place where you could, if it stopped you could read off some numbers or letters from there and you would pass that through the hatch to girls who were operating machines that were a bit like the German Enigma machine which checked and it would, either they said job up stroke or they'd say it was a fault and then you'd have to find the, there must have been a short somewhere so you'd have to go through all the little, the drums had little brass brushes behind them and you had to go through those to find the short, you had to take all the plugs out to find the short then start it up again. But if, in actual fact, they call out if it was right they'd say job up stroke and you'd take the thing down and wait for the next job. And we used to work 8 hours and we'd do a week, a week of days 8 to 4, whatever it was and then a day off and then a week of evenings 4 to midnight and a day off and a week of midnight to 8 in the morning and then we'd get 4 days standoff.</p>



Time code	What is said
01:13:48	<p>It was such a hard job we used to get 4 days after each cycle like that. So I was there for a while, but while I was there there was the mini blitz, the fire blitz in London and this particular night we were all, we had huts that were joined together, they were open but they were joined together down the middle, each one had these bunks, you see, down the middle were all the pipes the water pipes and all the rest of it and right at the end was the ablutions for that particular hut and this particular night we were all in bed, Shelia was on the top bunk and I was on the bottom bunk and the siren had gone, I never went in an air raid shelter in my life, in fact, and the siren had gone and then we peeped out through the blackout curtain and a house at the end of the road was on fire, had been hit by, it was empty so it had been hit by incendiary bombs and the next thing we heard was this German aircraft and they did sound different, absolutely different. And it got lower and lower. The next thing we knew "Bang! Crash! Wallop!" and all the rest of it and what they had dropped in the hut, they managed to drop it in between the two blocks, was a Molotov, what we called a Molotov bread basket which was a container full of 800 incendiary bombs and it would open at a certain altitude, but because it was so low it hadn't opened properly but some of them had burnt their way out of it and down it went and brought the ceiling down. Only, I think in actual fact, it was as close to me as it was to the hedge outside. Our bunk. But before that happened when we heard the thing coming low, Shelia had leant over to me and said "Let's get under the bedclothes!" Fine protection, the silly things you say! Anyway, there was silence and then there was the sound of water pouring in and all of the sudden the voice of the other WRENS near us shouting "Abandon ship!" Sounded like one of those war time films! So Shelia clambered out over this thing and all this rubbish and the roof and all the rest of it.</p>
01:15:55	<p>Mad, absolutely mad. Well, I laugh when I think, in actual... We had, it was very naval and the chief petty officer, the regulating petty officer, the master of arms was Golda Bernstein and I remember that I was fire watching, when I was in Eastcote which meant you had to be there to put out incendiary bombs and all the rest of it and I can remember I used to have to put my hair in curlers because it was long it was sort of page boy, you know, so I had to keep it off my collar and two nights running the siren went and I couldn't put my curlers in and we had to go and be ready to go and do the thing with the stirrup pump and the third night I thought, I can't go because it's going to be on my collar in the morning and division and I would be in trouble. So I went again and I had to rush up and I put it into curlers and I rushed up to the regulating office and I went to put the tin hat on and it wouldn't fit over the curlers so I had to take it off and Golda Bernstein said "I hope the Luftwaffe will wait whilst St George York takes her curlers out!" Embarrassment, you know, sort of thing.</p>
	Start of Film 4

Time code	What is said
01:17:11	Anyway, the next thing that happened was, I was posted to, um, Bletchley if you like because they had one hut at Bletchley which was operating bombes. Now the bombes, I ought to add at this point spelt with an e s on the end of it came from what the Poles who first found an Enigma machine and managed to smuggle it out, it was destined for the German Embassy in Warsaw, they called it a bomber, whatever it was, they managed to get it out and get it to Paris and the head of the France ???? or whatever it was they got it to the UK, but that's another story. Anyway, off we went and we were billeted in the most gorgeous Elizabethan house it belonged to Cardinal Wolsey, I've checked since and it really did! And Crawley Grange, and we used to go to, doing the same shifts we used to taken by bus into Bletchley Park, never went anywhere near the, I saw the house in the distance the only other thing I can remember is a tennis court with a funny, an American chap who was playing tennis and he had one brown tennis shoe on and one white and he had a sort of bandanna round his head, I've never seen a man wearing that before, in my life. And we'd do our shift in the huts and we'd be back to Crawley Grange doing the same shifts.
01:18:36	<b><i>In the scale of the bombe, I mean how big are these individual cylinders and how big is the...</i></b>
01:18:42	Oh, well the machine was over 6 foot, it was over 6 foot. I should have looked at some of my things and seen if I'd got a picture of it. I should think, in actual, it was over 6 foot and it was enormous. I mean if you, it probably was as long as this table and very deep and you pulled out the back and all these great big plugs at the back and there were rows upon rows of these drums, different colours. I can't remember, in actual fact, how we knew which colour to use but anyway it used to come out, the most difficult thing of the lot was the menu. First time I'd ever heard that used. The menu was how you plugged up the back, and if you looked at the diagram of a menu it looked like a sort of computerised thing, it was extraordinary. Poor old Alan Turing, baby, the bombs, you know.
01:19:38	<b><i>And how did you, how did you learn it, I mean what was the sort of...</i></b>
01:19:42	Well I had to learn, learn on the job, because it was already operating, you see, at Eastcote so we would, we would just double up and learn how to do it.
01:19:52	<b><i>And the sort of messages and stuff that you're receiving or sending, is it a sender or receiver? Apologies.</i></b>
01:20:00	Is what a sender?
01:20:02	<b><i>Is the bombe...? What's its actual...?</i></b>



Time code	What is said
01:20:04	What, what it was actually doing was trying to get an “in” into a particular message and if it was, if it was an inside into particular message only the boffins at Bletchley Park would know they were all sorts of people who could do crosswords puzzles or were chess masters and God only knows what and they could work is what we would get or these menus that the bombe had been working on to try and get that the one thing that would... sometimes it would be quite easy in a sense that the German Army, apparently were very careless and some young soldier in the field would quite easily use each time as his particular starter thing the name of his girlfriend. Now that would be an immediate in for somebody sitting, some boffin sitting in Bletchley Park working it out, you know what I mean. But we, this is what we were trying to do. Was an in. And it’s difficult to explain in fact I hardly understand it myself to certainly when I think about it sometimes.
<b>01:21:06</b>	<b><i>Did you have to sign something; I mean what was the process?</i></b>
01:21:09	Oh, the Official Secrets Act I’ve signed that several times, um, no I mean it was secret, I couldn’t tell my, I couldn’t tell my parents what I was doing. They said if people asked you said you were a clerk and then, or a writer as you would be in naval terms but then people would look and say “Well why haven’t you got your secretariat badge on then?” You kind of, pass it over.
<b>01:21:32</b>	<b><i>You mentioned earlier that you, you know, your father would be like “How do we know where the U-boats are” but you do explain that. So you knew but you couldn’t say, just tell me quickly about that, how you managed your secrets.</i></b>
01:21:43	Well, I can, well, it became second nature in a sense, strangely enough and the emergency of it all. I’d go home on leave and I can remember very well going to the cinema and my mother used to particularly like the new Movietone news and they’d talk about, sort of, this was early 1944 I think and they’d talk about U-boats being found, wolf packs and so on and so forth found and all the rest of it and I remember my father saying “I wonder how they knew that “ I couldn’t tell him, I knew but I couldn’t tell him. But it became second nature really.
<b>01:22:23</b>	<b><i>What was your feeling about the work? Were you proud? Was it an interesting job?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:22:30	Well, we felt we were doing a good job and it was monotonous and very very tiring. It was very monotonous. But you knew perfectly, you see, I seem to remember that some of the, that you knew whether it was German army, navy and it would be, it would be sort of "Eagle" or "Porpoise" or "Wolf" or something and I remember, certainly in Stanmore I think, it was like that so we'd know, we'd have an idea of whether, we knew what we were doing but we knew no further than that. And how they managed to keep it secret was everything was in compartments, I mean, we never spoke to anybody in the park. We'd be bust in, done our 8 hour watch and bust out again and we never, we never met anybody there, and the first time I went into the mansion itself was when we went there about 4 years ago with my family.
	Start of Film 5
01:23:33	<b><i>What was it like, I mean if you, it sounds like it was an exhausting job but what was the, sort of Wrenery like that you were in what did you do for socialising? Was there any down time? Did you enjoy yourself?</i></b>
01:23:45	Oh, we did. I mean, when it came to the Bletchley one when we were living in Crawley Grange we only had pass once a week so we'd probably only get out once a week, but we used to do all sorts of things and some people would knit and we'd read a lot and so on and so forth and I remember one night when somebody was having a séance and it was the most, it was very very peculiar in actual fact, I don't know if you want me to tell you but in actual fact I was reading and this was this beautiful ballroom great big, two big bay windows and ???? it was a gorgeous house not very big. And I was reading and I heard a lot of giggling going on and I looked over and they were at this table with a glass, you know. And who was there? And they said "Georges" with an "s" on the end of it like a French George. "What are you? Or who are you?" And they said "Tutor." "Where are you?" "Standing beside you." And the whole thing broke up and hysterics and everything (screaming noise), you know all those. Well one of the girls, in actual fact was engaged to a vicar up in Much Wenlock and she got very friendly with the vicar in the village there and he said "It's funny that," because in actual fact Boswell who was the favourite, the court favourite who was given that after Wolsey fell out of favour and apparently, the story went, came home with a young bride and she had a French tutor and in actual fact, she had a baby but the baby disappeared. Was never seen again. And she was reputed to walk the house looking for the baby and all the rest of it but the interesting sequel to that was there was a small paneled room over the front door, later paneling, I think it was Jacobean and it was a very old Victorian fireplace.

Time code	What is said
01:25:43	<p>A funny fireplace to have and apparently the story was they had dry rot in Victorian times and they had to take some of the panelling out and all the rest, and they found the bones of a baby behind the paneling. I rest my case. I tell you that. I don't know. I don't know the answer but I do think it's just a little... but we used to entertain ourselves. I seem to remember at one point there was, was there an airfield nearby and we had, did we have Americans in, we had a party or something I don't know, we had very good quarters officer who used to make the most of whatever she had in the way of, um, food and I think when we had a party she used to do things like she'd have a saucer with a candle in the middle and flowers all the way round and you could make, you'd make the most out of anything you could think of. I don't remember what we actually did, I think once every 3 weeks or whatever we'd go into Newport Pagnell or Bedford or, I can't remember where it was. Then I was posted to Stanmore, another outstation. And I can remember that most because, in actual fact while I was there we, they had Wings For Victory, or something in Watford and we were invited to march, to join the march and because we were the only representatives of senior service we had to head it much to the annoyance of the RAF and the army. And, I can remember we had a Royal Marines sergeant from Chatham to come and drill us and all the rest of it and I can hear him saying "stone frigate though this may be I'll 'ave you girls marching proper!" And we were very proud to do it, in actual fact, but that, at that, we were there when D-Day occurred and I can remember that as well as anything.</p>
01:27:25	<p>We had been confined to barracks for about two weeks before, we knew something was up but not what or when and I can remember I was fire watching, I can remember it was a sunny morning the 6th of June and we were fire watching and we'd had a bit of a sleep on mattresses on this concrete corridor and I can remember woken up by the noise of aircraft and going outside and I could see the whole sky was full of aircraft, could hardly put a finger between them. Well then the Doodlebugs started, the flying bombs and I can remember there was another, they were very frightening I must admit, very frightening because you knew when the engine stopped; straight down. They had a Ram Jet I think, so much it would and then down they'd go and hit whoever was underneath the explosive. This particular night the only ones left in our watch I think was Shelia and I because we lived in Yorkshire and there wasn't time, I think we had a short break and there wasn't time for us to get up to Yorkshire so she'd gone down to the Ablutions block which was down this concrete corridor to get washed and I was just about to climb into my bunk when I heard this Doodlebug, very low and very loud and then it stopped. And I jumped out of my bunk and I ran down that concrete corridor in my bare feet to join Shelia on the floor like this saying to myself, I don't want to die by myself. And you'd put your hands behind your neck and nothing happened and this is the, one of the only ones it, in actual fact didn't come straight down it managed to drift and landed about two miles away.</p>
01:29:10	<b><i>You thought that was the end there, then?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:29:14	Yeah. I also thought, it was, one night we went to the pictures in Ealing and the siren went, this was when the mini blitz was on and we were walking across Ealing Common so we thought we, it might be a good, there was lots of anti-aircraft fires so we thought it would be a good idea to lie down on the grass for a while and there was a gorse bush and there we lay and when we got up about as far as where I am from you there was a great big piece of shrapnel which I had for a long time, I don't know where it's gone. Yeah.
	<b>Start of Film 6</b>
01:29:47	Because we used to do fire watches it was very important because the idea that you had to put out incendiary bombs because they kept, if they got going they'd put high explosives down on top of it and we did a day's course in firefighting at Bletchley Park and the chap that was doing the course was in army uniform but he was, apparently had been "I was a reporter before the war and believe you me I saw some terrible sights after fires." Anyway we were shown how to put out petrol fires and all this sort of thing and how you couldn't spread, how you used foam and all the rest of it but the best of the lot was they had a hut and there was a duckboard and the entrance was there and the exit was there and over in that corner was the, they lit a pile of boiling rags and they had a real blaze going in the corner and then they sent you in there on your stomach with a stirrup pump and all the rest of it and when you got, full of smoke, when you got in there the chap said, "Now stand up." And that was the best lesson I ever had because people think if you look at a film and you see people with the smoke in a fire they start coughing. You don't, what happens in fact is exactly like someone put a vacuum cleaner (gasps) and brings every bit of air in your lungs out of it and your soon down on your, flat on your stomach again. If most, terrible feeling, you see people coughing but that's not true it doesn't happen like that. It sucks all the air out of you. And this chap said to us, "I've see people that have been brought out of fires and believe you me they're not a pretty sight." And we went "Ooohh!" We did a day; it taught me a lot, in actual fact. We did put the fire out incidentally but the standing up was the lesson.
<b>01:31:37</b>	<b><i>Just the heat...</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:31:39	Yeah, it's just as if somebody sucked all the air out of your lungs, instant. Frightening. So then, um, the next thing that happened was we, after D-Day I was posted back, went back to a place called Steeple Claydon in Oxfordshire and Steeple Claydon was the home village, I believe of Florence Nightingale and we lived in a place called "The Camp" it was a Victorian or Edwardian house but apparently it was where Cromwell had camped for the siege of Oxford and it was very nice, it looked out over the valley but we used to go in a lorry to work in a stable block. This house I think belonged to a naval commander who, we worked in the stable block and it was, we had five, I think, bombs there, five or six bombs. In all our places we had RAF technicians because I believe I heard recently originally they thought, they had RAF technicians operating these bombs when it, well "I wonder if women could do it," sort of thing and that's where the WRENS came in. But that was quite, I can remember the technicians room there had guns in it as well because when we were out on our own there we used to, to open, we had an electronic door so if you went across the yard and you were just going to make the tea or the supper or whatever it was, you had to press this thing (knocks) with the V sign and then they'd open the door electronically. So then we were in the stable block.
<b>01:33:18</b>	<b><i>When you say there were five bombs, I mean how many women were on the same shift?</i></b>
01:33:23	Er, you would have double the amount because some would be operating the bombs and some would be operating the checkers.
<b>01:33:33</b>	<b><i>And were they noisy?</i></b>
01:33:35	Very. Very noise (makes clicking noise) yeah, very noisy. 'Cos, the click, click, click, click, they were testing everything and they used to, you know, if you were working you'd go through some of the ones that were on the rack and because, did you ever have Scalextric cars and you know how the brushes always were picking up dust and this sort, well that's exact, this is, what was at the back of the, the drums and you'd always have into the pair of tweezers cleaning them. So then I got...
<b>01:34:11</b>	<b><i>So each click is producing a different letter, is it?</i></b>
01:34:15	Yes, different letter, different letter 'cos they all the alphabet down the edge of the, edge of the, the drums. Amazing, really.
<b>01:34:25</b>	<b><i>And so each of these drums is clicking away.</i></b>
01:34:29	Well there were a whole lot of them, you'd have red ones there and the next row two lots, I can't remember how many rows we had. Good many rows.
<b>01:34:36</b>	<b><i>And where's the signal going into it, I mean, what's the trigger to make them work?</i></b>
01:34:44	Electricity. They were electric.

Time code	What is said
<b>01:34:48</b>	<b><i>Sure but, I mean.</i></b>
01:34:50	Electromechanical, there's nothing esoteric about them, nothing like computers or anything like that. They were electromechanical.
<b>01:34:58</b>	<b><i>So the menu where are you, where are you working the menu? Is that on the front or the back?</i></b>
01:35:03	Well you'd be told, I can't remember how we were told about the drums, the only thing I can remember is that the most difficult part of it was plugging up the back. Where the menu was concerned. 'Cos it was, to be told how many, it would be easy enough say well you put so many red drums or many, but the complicated thing was the back, the plugging up of the back.
<b>01:35:25</b>	<b><i>So they'd say you know, the menu's going to be Wolfpack or something and you've got to wire up the back properly.</i></b>
01:35:33	Well you got these big, these big plugs to stick in. It's very difficult to describe, in fact trying to remember it know sometimes I scramble my mind. I was complicated in some ways and yet not in others. It was, it was very monotonous but you had to be meticulous but if you, I think anybody who'd done it would say the plugging up at the back was the worst bit of the lot.
<b>01:35:56</b>	<b><i>So did you, did you ever get a sense of achievement, of what was coming out of this?</i></b>
01:36:00	Only that the job had come up. From our point of view it then went up to Bletchley Park on a secure scramble phone then they would start to make sense of it.
<b>01:36:10</b>	<b><i>So if you came up with a short it was like, "Oh no, not again!" you've gotta re...</i></b>
01:36:14	Exactly. You'd have to go through and where's the short is it in the drums or in the... so if it wasn't the drums it would be the plugs at the back and aahh, you know.
<b>01:36:23</b>	<b><i>And how long would it take to do from the moment you put a menu in to the outcome?</i></b>
01:36:26	I can't remember, to be perfectly honest. We were at it all the time, all the time, all the time. We'd have a navy cocoa in the middle of the night, I can always remember that, used to send a spoon up with it, it was great, fantastic!
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<b>01:36:43</b>	<b><i>Could you have fun in there? You know, is it...?</i></b>
01:36:46	Oh yes, oh yeah, we used to joke and laugh and all the rest of it certainly we did. Certainly we did.



Time code	What is said
<b>01:36:50</b>	<b><i>And just WRENS or you said you were actually RAF technicians?</i></b>
01:36:55	RAF technicians, yes.
<b>01:36:57</b>	<b><i>OK</i></b>
01:36:58	I can remember one, and he was always, Jack, his name was that was in the, stable block and he always had his tools in a back pocket there, and he always had mug of tea in his hand and he used to say "Jack!" "Yes bud!" uhh, "Yes buddy! Or something. But it, oh we used to have fun, we used to have laughs and all the rest of it and talks. But once the thing was running there wasn't anything else to, you'd go through some of the other drums, but then there would be times when you would sit at the machine at the table and have a mug of cocoa or tea or whatever it was.
<b>01:37:42</b>	<b><i>Did you notice that up to D-Day it was busier?</i></b>
01:37:48	No, it was busy. Well I, I only started doing it in October '43 and I think, in actual fact, it probably that's why they were recruiting for what they call P5, that is HMS Pembroke 5 and that's why they were recruiting, I think for that. And I think that's why, if you were suitable. I'm beginning to think now that when they said there was only a cook, steward or P5 they knew nobody wanted to be a cook or a steward and maybe P5 would attract people, I don't know. If you were, providing you were suitable and you passed the, you know, the security thing and all the rest of it.
<b>01:38:32</b>	<b><i>And how long were you at Steeple Claydon then?</i></b>
01:38:34	Well, I was there, in actual fact, at Steeple Claydon until, I can remember I wasn't working, I was back at the quarters and I can remember, the war was over and I, we heard bells ringing down in the village and I can remember we all stood there and cried. And then the next day we had to pack up and take ourselves off and I can see us at, was it, not Bletchley station, anyway and the train was crowded and we had suitcases and respirator cases and God only knows what and the porter saying "Come on, come on! I don't know why you girls have got to travel on a day like this!" Do you think we'd travel if ?????! Could have hit him! It's a wonder he didn't get lynched, in actual fact, and back to Stanmore and from then onwards we were dismantling the bombs. Taking them apart. Churchill's orders apparently. And there was a quote that at one point Churchill had said about the whole operation "The geese that laid the golden egg and never cackled." And if anybody, if anybody had told it would have been, that would be, you know.
<b>01:39:54</b>	<b><i>You were getting such cryptic messages, and seeing such cryptic... how did you know what you were doing?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:40:00	Well only on occasion in which we'd hear or be told but generally speaking we were just grinding away, you know. But it, it was important, it seemed important, it was important you got the feeling it was important you know what I mean? It, and people wouldn't put up with it nowadays, but what you've got to put you're mind-set back into is what it was like during the war, and it was, and we knew perfectly well when you look at a map you see the last back in was this country and everything else was German was Nazi Germany and all the rest of it, even France had gone and there was this sense of urgency, not panic, urgency that I've never felt since.
<b>01:40:45</b>	<b><i>So even though you didn't really know what you were doing, you were working in a machine that was, you obviously signed the Secrets Act...</i></b>
01:40:50	We knew what it was doing, yeah, that's right, we knew what it was doing, what it was contributing to, that in fact it was breaking German messages.
<b>01:41:00</b>	<b><i>Was it ever explained to you like that?</i></b>
01:41:03	Yeah I think so. Once we, once we got into Eastcote with the door shut behind us, sort of thing, yes I think so, yeah.
<b>01:41:12</b>	<b><i>What was your sort of hierarchy, your commanders, like down there what were they like as people to work under in those individual bases?</i></b>
01:41:20	Oh very good. Petty officers, leading WRENs. Petty officer and we had a quarters WREN officer but we didn't, we never had a, I don't remember a WREN officer being in charge of any one of the watches I think I can remember them being as quarters officers really but we just got on with it, you know, it's a sort of, it's very difficult to describe what it was like because you've got to look at it in the background of the war and the seriousness of it and what was going to happen if we bloody well didn't win, you know, and I think people put up with things that they think they wouldn't put up with nowadays but I think they would if push came to shove. I think it's something in our nature in this country in particular I think we're sort of bloody minded I think. I think that's the only way I can put it. But it was, but it was, it was a great time, in actual fact and it certainly made me grow up. I certainly grew up, very much so, so that when I got demobbed, well I had a period after the Bletchley thing where I was doing aircraft stores on a freight air arms station which I enjoyed and I could see we had one naval officer there he said, "I don't know, we've got these great big stores here and it's all operated by a crowd of bloody women!" laughing to him, because he was joking, you know, but it's true it was interesting and you learnt all sorts of new things there, in actual fact.
<b>01:42:53</b>	<b><i>Were you sad to be demobbed?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:42:55	Yes. I was. I missed it terribly, and that's why when I trained state registered nurse I joined the RAF and I couldn't join the naval nursing because you had to be 25 to join that and I couldn't wait but I was back in the RAF and I can remember being at Halton and course then you're an officer when you're in the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service and you'd have to and we'd do squad drill or something like that and I can see this RAF warrant officer saying to me "When did you learn to march like that?" and I said "In the Navy," and he said "Ugh!"
<b>01:43:32</b>	<b><i>I mean, how do you reflect on being a WREN I mean, how do you, what's you're sort of under... overarching feeling about it now?</i></b>
01:43:44	Well I'm very proud of having served in the WRENs. I'm proud of being a Bletchley. It all seems like a dream now but it's all sort of come out and poor Alan Turing, you know.
<b>01:43:55</b>	<b><i>Have you met any of them since?</i></b>
01:43:58	No.
<b>01:43:59</b>	<b><i>You don't want to or anything?</i></b>
01:44:03	No. I haven't. Well I think the thing is because we left Harrogate, well we, we came from all over the place and I very much regret that Shelia Tong who later married an American war photographer and eventually went to Germany and I used to get letters from her and then they went back to the States and I've never been able to contact her since, which is a pity, because we were great pals.
<b>01:44:28</b>	<b><i>Has your son tried?</i></b>
01:44:31	Oh yes, yes we've tried and my, my brother's worked in America for BUAC and all sorts of things, you know it's just, it just doesn't and he used to work for a magazine called Holiday which doesn't exist now, but, he was a photographer.
<b>01:44:50</b>	<b><i>That's a shame, I mean she was obviously a dear pal.</i></b>
01:44:54	Oh really, yes very much so and I can always remember her saying when that German bomb was overhead "Let's get under the bedclothes!" Which we duly did, you know.
<b>01:45:07</b>	<b>End of Films</b>