



**Copyright - Legasee under licence [2011]. Except as provided by the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted or published in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.**

**For details please contact: [info@legasee.org.uk](mailto:info@legasee.org.uk)**

Thank you for downloading this transcript featuring **Gladys Yates**

Before you read it we'd like to make you aware of our copyright terms and conditions.

#### Copyright license

Legasee grants to you a worldwide non-exclusive royalty-free revocable license to:

- view this document and the material associated with this Veteran on a computer or mobile device;
- copy and store this document and the material associated with this Veteran on your computer and in your web browser cache memory; and
- print pages from this transcript for your own [personal and non-commercial] use.

Legasee does not grant you any other rights in relation to this website or the material on this website. In other words, all other rights are reserved.

For the avoidance of doubt, you must not adapt, edit, change, transform, publish, republish, distribute, redistribute, broadcast, rebroadcast or show or play in public this document or the material associated with this Veteran (in any form or media) without Legasee's prior written permission.

#### Enforcement of our copyright

Legasee takes the protection of its copyright very seriously.

If we discover that you have used our copyright materials in contravention of the Copyright Act 1968, we will bring legal proceedings against you seeking monetary damages and an injunction to stop you using those materials. You could also be ordered to pay legal costs.

If you become aware of any use of Legasee's copyright materials that contravenes or may contravene the Copyright Act 1968, please report this by email to [info@legasee.org.uk](mailto:info@legasee.org.uk) or by post to Legasee Ltd, 27 Government Row, Enfield Lock, Middlesex, EN3 6JN.

For more details visit our Terms & Conditions at: <http://www.legasee.org.uk/terms-and-conditions/>

Name: Gladys Yates  
Regiment: WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service)

Date transcript: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014  
Transcribe by: David Davies

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	Gladys Yates and I was an officer steward during the war.
01:00:09	<b><i>Gladys where are you from just tell me how you found yourself... you know what was it like leading up to the war for you?</i></b>
01:00:15	Well I was only 14 when the war broke out and then of course when time went on my friends were joining up and things like this and I was waiting until I was seventeen and a half and then I decided I'd go in the WRNS.
01:00:37	<b><i>Why did you want to be a Wren rather than any other services?</i></b>
01:00:39	Because all my family are Navy and Royal Marines so I was following... I had two brothers in the marines and my father was and my grandfather and I decided the Navy was for me and I could stay here I didn't go elsewhere. Not that I didn't want to leave home or anything like that it to me was like another job I wanted to and to be honest with you I was fed up and wanted to get it over and done with and get back to normality because it wasn't normal during those days it was most unusual. Teenage years were gone.
01:28:24	<b><i>Up close and personnel you know up to the point of becoming a Wren as a young girl I'm thinking pacifically here about that bombing that you mentioned when you were in your bedroom on one of your birthdays?</i></b>
01:01:40	Yeah well it can't be normal for a... you're going off to work and suddenly a siren goes and work is forgotten you've got to get a shelter or home whichever. Everything stops gases were turned off. You could be in the middle of a meal and everything turned off you've got to get into shelter so that is not normal and of a night you couldn't go anywhere for a lot of entertainment because it was all finished everything stopped for a while and you know. Where I should have been getting ready going out with my friends you couldn't London was bombed for 54 days and nights on the trot we had the same because they came this direction. We didn't have the Blitz but, we had the bombs the odd... you know.
01:02:51	<b><i>And where are you from and what was your experience of that bombing?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:54:14	I'm from Gillingham here and we had the bombs dropped in our street we also had a landmine dropped in our street and luck was with it that the bomb killed quite a few people at the bottom of the road and in the next street but, the landmine didn't go off and funnily enough it was defused by a naval commander West his name and I didn't know that until I met him later on. In the next road... was bombed out and that was on one of my birthdays and even while the ambulances were there picking up these people that were hurt and things like this injured that bomber was still above. You could tell the difference between a German airplane and ours that... you knew that German plane was up there you know it was lovely when it was cloudy nights we thought we were in for a peaceful night but, when it was moonlight we knew we were for it and they would just go around and around and around you know everybody's life was shattered people were tired but, no nothing was normal, not a normal life of getting yourself ready going to work and all this no you just had to wait for it.
	<b>Start of Film 2</b>
<b>01:04:52</b>	<b><i>So becoming a Wren was a big plan for you then to just do your bit?</i></b>
01:04:59	I wanted to join up with the rest of them and all the rest and that was it so when I was seventeen and a half I put my name down and all they could offer me was an Officer Steward. You couldn't go in and say I wanted to be this that or the other you were pushed into it and that was it but, they did promise me that they would let me know if any vacancy appeared. I wanted to go in the stores and they did they kept to their promise but, I was enjoying myself so much with the girls that I was with I wouldn't leave them.
<b>01:05:42</b>	<b><i>And what do you remember of that early you know that transition from being a girl who was trying to do a normal day but, finding that disrupted to becoming... the training, the early days of becoming a Wren what was it like, where did you go?</i></b>
01:05:57	Well we went as I say I was at Chatham all the time because I was an immobile Wren I wasn't sent away anywhere else and the Navy paid my mother to keep me here, the Navy didn't have enough accommodation to put everybody in so they had immobile WRNS and no I enjoyed it because of so many people I met. There was about twelve to fourteen on each watch and it was good. I think I gained a lot of knowledge by... I was just in a small shop in Gillingham when I left school no life... well war had started and everything... no cinemas no nothing, no entertainment but, then you got in with all these girls that came from different parts of the country and it was wonderful and I met some very good friends.
<b>01:07:12</b>	<b><i>And what did you do in those first few weeks can you remember where was it? Sorry at Chatham whereabouts?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:07:17	I worked in the warrant officers mess first of all in the naval barracks and then after about eighteen months then I moved up to the ward room you know with all the captains, commanders you name it but, it was wonderful in the warrant officers place it was great.
01:07:40	<b><i>Tell me a bit about your job then what you were doing as a steward, how you trained to become one what did you actually have to do in order to become one?</i></b>
01:07:48	Well I had to chain at the King's School at Rochester wait on table and that you know with officers and you were given marks and things. I had to wait on all tables breakfast, lunch and tea and dinner and then when they sent me to naval barracks here at warrant officers then different WRNS were... some were sent to look after the library, some were sent to the dining hall and some of us were given cabins to look after and the majority of you had to have six... and it was our duty when we were on duty early we had to wake those officers and make sure they were up with a cup of tea. Make sure they were up and down to breakfast by eight o'clock and so we had that to do and they used to drum 'make sure your officers are up' and I did it for about a fortnight and then they told me that they reckon I woke the whole of the naval barracks because I was so frightened that I would leave somebody and how you would know they had to... after they had drunk their tea they had to put their cup and saucer outside their room and you'd know that officer was up. You just had to knock on the door open the door, put the tea on the small chest inside the door and that was it. Just say good morning or sometimes you'd get a grunt, sometimes you didn't get anything and that's it and then as soon as we'd done that we used to go down have our breakfast and then we'd have to be ready to be served them their breakfast at eight o'clock. What did they have...
01:09:53	<b><i>What was served up at Chatham because I heard the food was dreadful?</i></b>
01:09:57	Officers in the navy were well fed definitely and they had a choice, yes they did and when you went to the... up to the ward room every officer had their own rack, small rack where they had their own newspapers where they read it at breakfast. Oh yes definitely they lived... mind you I always think they deserved it. They brought the food in you know things like that... no they were well looked after and I... you'd get the odd note when you'd go into their cabin to clean would you please so this button on, they hadn't got a clue how to sew. So I did just a little bit of sewing a button on their uniform and you always got a little gift, there was always something that they found yeah they were very very good.
	<b>Start of Film 3</b>
01:11:06	<b><i>Are there any that stand out that you can still recall to this day that was a lovely captain, or a lovely admiral or a lovely you know anybody you cared for?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:11:17	<p>Oh I loved them all. No it... I always liked Gunners, I could tell a Gunner as soon as he entered it was something about his attitude little did I realise I was going to marry one but, he was a Marine Gunner not a Naval Gunner but, no there was some that irritated me and I remember once this particular one used to come in late every time for his lunch and we'd have to wait and he enjoyed it. We were on the parade ground and that was another thing we were doing the marching up and down and this petty officer said ' we'll do saluting on the march' and he said 'there is an officer on the stairs and we'll salute him' and when I looked it was the officer that we didn't like and my mate said 'oh lets pull a face when we go passed' you know and we did and when we got passed he stopped the parade and I nearly died and he called this petty officer over and said something to him and back come this petty officer he said 'there is two of you' and I honestly thought that was it but, they've got curls below the HMS you know take their hats off push them back and of course that was that.</p>
01:13:02	<p>And when he came in for tea he said to me when we were serving up teas and that he said 'you two nearly didn't you this afternoon' he knew and I thought trust him you know he was that kind... but, he used to strut in there you know but, no on the whole... we had one officer there that used to play the piano on an evening and when we were serving dinner on a night he'd say quietly because we weren't allowed to speak to them really. He say ' what do you want me to play tonight?' you know and there was a lot of wonderful... and a lot of them when you used to go at night to their rooms and you know turn the covers back, you used to have to do that. You'd go in and see their photographs of their wives, their girls and you'd get in conversation you got to know a lot of them. They were just as unhappy as a lot more people you know.</p>
01:14:08	<p><b><i>Did you ever... obviously this is a time of war and these are Chatham naval officers that are coming and going. Were there ever occasions when some of them went and didn't come back that you knew of and how did you cope with that?</i></b></p>
01:14:20	<p>No no. there was probably lots but, no never went with anything like that and you know no and I always remember one particular lunch when one of our WRNS upset baked apples all over the first... Jimmy the one they called the first lieutenant and he was he was a man that I didn't like... actually he frightened the life out of me he did. To look at him... and she did it and she started wiping all this juice, this syrup all down his gold braid and I thought 'oh my god' well up come this Leading Wren... Chief Wren and she was only stood about that high and she waddled down and she said 'whatever you two do don't laugh otherwise' she said 'he'll have you shot at dawn!' well that made me laugh didn't so my friend and I well she laughed as well. We were in trouble again everything was like that you know.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:15:32	<b>What other little duties did you have that were probably inconsequential but, are really quiet interesting... just imagine a normal day you mentioned sort of the cup of tea in the morning waking them up. What would happen next?</b>
01:15:45	Well then after we did that we'd go down to our room, we had our own mess. Have our own breakfast and that was between seven o'clock and eight o'clock we had to call them and get them up wash up the cups and saucers quickly in the stewards room and then get down and have your breakfast and get up again ready to serve them at eight. And then that was from eight o'clock until nine and then after that we'd come down quarter past nine all officer had to be out of their rooms and then we would go up and start cleaning you know get them done just make their bed sweep dust and whatever and then clean everywhere that's got to be. Then we had to be back down for eleven for lunch and then we'd have to be back up again by twelve ready to serve their dinner or their lunch as they called it but, they had like two main meals a day as well.
01:17:00	<b><i>Did you get to have their food?</i></b>
01:17:02	No... no it was a thing... they called it rissoles day after day after day and if they had a piece of fish well it was amazing but, no never did. In the afternoon we'd have to go back and do odd clearing, cleaning whatever could be done in that particular time and get ready for their tea. That was at four because we'd have ours before. They used to say feed us first and we wouldn't be tempted to steal their food and then of course we left at let's see six o'clock we'd have our main meal ready for seven o'clock ready to serve theirs and then you'd get the off duty but, I tell you one night we're up there and the officers... this was in the ward room they had fresh fruit and it was apples all served and the petty officer said to me 'go down to the storeroom and get two more dishes of fruit' and I went down there and he had these two bowls of fruit and I got to the bottom of the stairs and he'd sent half the off duty watch just as I was ready to go up the stairs by the time I got to the top of the stairs they'd passed me by I'd got two empty bowls of fruit. Well he came out this petty officer and he looked and he said 'where's the fruit' and I thought I'm going to get everybody into trouble and I stood there and I thought what am I going to say and he said to me 'go down to that storeroom and ask for two more' and he said 'whatever you do don't cry' I was really worried I remember that as easy as winking and of course when I told my father my father roared he said 'that's what they'll all do' but, I was so frightened I was going to get them all in trouble you see so I got the fruit and went back and that was it but, different things like that wouldn't be funny to anybody else but, it was to other people at the time you know.
	<b>Start of Film 4</b>



Time code	What is said
01:19:33	<b><i>Obviously Chatham was an extremely busy harbour during the second world war and you touched on it in terms of well the naval officers deserved it because the convoys were bringing in the food and stuff, but you know do you ever remember incidents where you know the Chatham was a sad place because of the losses that were being endured, does anything stand out to you?</i></b>
01:19:55	Well no I think it was everywhere had their sad places I mean when a boat went down here and it was a Chatham based it more or less touched every street in the towns because so many sailors onboard they'd be one from every other street if you can understand. And it did upset the people you can tell that everybody was very glum especially with the newspaper placards... ship gone down Chatham based yeah there was all that. I can't particularly say anything.
01:20:50	<b><i>And what do you remember I mean you went in... in 43 and how did you see the war progress up to the point of the end of the war and what do you remember of the end of the war... how did things change for you?</i></b>
01:21:04	Well to be honest with you things weren't getting any better in the shops we were still on rationing and all that business but, there was a different feeling as we were getting towards the light you know that was it because you know everybody wanted to get it over and done with so that they could please themselves what they were going to do. Not have that feeling that we would be here, what's going to happen you know and it was great people were looking where are we going to work, what about our houses you know. And plans and different little things I always felt that my teenage years went just like that... my teenage years and I won a scholarship at school for the arts when war was declared it was finished... they said they would notify me after but, never did I never even thought about it but, I often wondered if I had carried on with it you know. So a lot of people's lives were disrupted not mine particularly but, a lot of people were and it was good to see things were developing you know. That was the main thing. And that night when it all finished you know the war was over and we could have lights on.
01:22:54	And from our road in Britain street the only lights that came on first of all was the army barracks just along here and I remember nearly the whole of the street walked all the way along this Brompton road just to see those lights. Now you tell that to the youngsters today they'd think you're mad but, it was so lovely to come along and see somewhere all lit up because the lamp posts and that didn't come on straight away it was all time you know... yes it was just a sense of relief I think they all had.
01:23:36	<b><i>And how do you feel about being a Wren all these years later?</i></b>

Time code	What is said
01:23:40	<p>Oh I love it... oh yeah I did I had so many laughs, I did all kinds of things, I got told off, I'd forgot to carry my gas mask once because they stopped it and then they brought in this thing about carrying it for about twenty four hours... I forgot mine. So immediately I was sent to the Commander G they called him and when I went in front of him he was one of my commander that I looked after and he said to me 'what are you doing here?' and I said 'I forgot my gas mask' and he said 'right go down there and get one' he said 'make sure you bring yours in tomorrow' that was it when I got back to my Wren officer they said 'what punishment have you got?' I said 'well none' and they said 'right you carry it for a week' but, little did they know that everywhere I went with the WRNS my friends and that there they all took it I never did carry that mask for a week they all did you know it was that kind of feeling and it was lovely you know the actual friendship and the feeling and they helped one another and no it was great I wouldn't off missed it for anything I know I'm a different navy to my other friends here but, it was good.</p>
01:25:13	End of Films