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Name: Megan Moir

Regiment: Wren Writer in The Women's Royal Naval Service

Date transcript: 05 July 2014

Transcribe by: David Davies

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
	`well my name is Megan Moir and I've lived in Cheltenham and I joined the WRNS when I was 18 and I volunteered and I was called up in December 1944 and I went to London to the training barracks and on completion of my training I was made a Wren Writer shorthand and my first posting was to Northern Ireland in Larne.
01:00:35	<i>Megan why did you want to choose the WRNS over any of the other services?</i>
	I think it was because of a friend of mine already joined and I thought I would like to be in the navy.
01:00:53	<i>Not from a naval family or anything?</i>
	No no not at all no
01:00:57	<i>And are you from Cheltenham?</i>
	Yes born and lived all my life in Cheltenham
01:01:04	<i>And what do you remember of Cheltenham during the war what was life like for you?</i>
	Very good really because we had evacuees here and you got to know all your neighbors and it was very friendly and everybody helped everybody else.
01:01:24	<i>How was having sort of a new family stay with you?</i>

Time code	What is said
	I loved it because I was an only child and we had a young girl staying with us and afterwards the army came to Cheltenham and they were billeted and we had one and after the evacuees had gone actually then we had an army chap from America actually but, one night it was the only time Cheltenham was bombed my father had just gone out he was an ARP Warden and he'd just gone out on duty and just below where I lived in Old Bath road there was a bridge called Pilly Bridge and the Germans bombed the bridge and he was just left on the parapet and the bridge went down right in front of him so he was saved but, my mother and I were under the kitchen table and the earth was like an earthquake everything rocked and we didn't know whether he was alive or dead but, he soon came back to reassure us but, rather interestingly two houses were bombed and the people were having supper and they went into their larder under the stairs and when he went there it was dark of course and this women had what he thought was blood running down here cheek but, actually it was pickle they were having pickle for supper and it had all gone over her but, they were all very friendly people and you all helped one another.
01:02:55	<i>Do you remember the changing state of war as a young lady in a town like Cheltenham?</i>
	Not really no just seemed to be going on... we'd hear the bombs going over Cheltenham you could tell the thump of the bombs and of course the air raids went every time they went over which was we had an Anderson shelter in the garden where we went I suppose you don't as children... you don't think about it too much and of course there was no television and of course I didn't read the papers very much I must admit I was always out playing hockey or tennis or something.
01:03:41	<i>And what did you feel about being called up did you want to be?</i>
	I wasn't called up I volunteered yes so I went to secretarial college at Stanway House it was a London secretarial college and the Earl of Weems and it was his country residence at Stanway House and he was in the army so he lent his country house to the secretarial college the Cassandra secretarial college and girls came from all over I was one of two local girls that went there and did my training I was there for a year and then I had my first job then I decided when I was 18 I wanted to join up so I volunteered and that's how I came to get in the WRNS.
	Start of Film 2
01:04:38	<i>So what do you remember of those early days the transition of becoming a Wren? what were you doing? Where were you?</i>
	You mean where did i...
01:04:52	<i>Where did you start your training?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Oh at Mill Hill in London.
01:04:56	<i>Had you ever been out of Cheltenham at this point?</i>
	Yes not very far because in war you couldn't go anywhere the furthest I ever went was to Devon because I had relatives in Devon but, that's about as far as I went because we had holidays at home in those days.
01:05:13	<i>What do you remember of going into London and seeing London in 44 then?</i>
	A bit frightened because of the bombs dropping because when we got our uniform at the finish of our training we all went by train to the centre of London to the Stage Door Canteen which was... the Americans set it up for the members of the forces to go there we had dancing and that sort of thing and I was really quite frightened because I wasn't used to bombs coming from Cheltenham but, then I was sent to Leeds for a week to be tested to see if I was proficient in what I said I was and I passed all the exams quite easily and then the notice went up on the board and you had to sign to say would you like to go to Northern Ireland or to Scotland because I was in the western approaches part of the navy then and I hadn't been to either. The next morning the Wren officer sent for me and said you're going to Northern Ireland and I was a bit surprised. Another Wren and myself off we went that evening by train to Stranraer and we crossed the Irish sea that night and it was very rough because it was January, I think it was January 16 th and we decided to stay on deck because we thought everybody would be sick and there was an old seaman on there with us and he said 'what you want to do is when the ship goes down breath out and when it goes up breath in' and that will stop you being sick but he said 'make sure that you don't...which way the wind is blowing because you don't want to... it will come back in your face' and we were sick eventually and we were glad of his advice.
	And we arrived in County Antrim and we were met by a Wren, the other girl went somewhere else and I went to an ordinary house in the centre of Larne very cosy had an open fire and there was only a few of us but, we were in bunk beds and then I met a Wren called Lynn Mitchell and she had been working on the Philante now the Philante had been loaned to the Navy from Sir Tommy Sopwith a millionaire and he lent his luxury yacht to the navy and after the war it was given back to him of course and when King Haakon came back to Norway the people subscribed to buy him a royal yacht and they bought the Philante from Sir Tommy and it became the Norge the Norwegian Royal yacht so that was quite a history for the Philante.
	Start of Film 3

Time code	What is said
	<p>Now at Larne I met Lynn Mitchell as I say had been working on the Philante and there was a petty officer that had been working in the office with her now she was sent elsewhere and I came to take over from her well because the Philante had been to sea a lot it was in to be serviced and most of the crew had gone on leave so Lynn and I just worked in the dockyard office. Well soon after Lynn went on holiday to well on leave so I was the only one going there well soon after I went down as usual it was a ten minute walk from the Wrenery and the officer there said 'the Philante is moving and we've sent a signal to the WRNS headquarters asking permission to take you aboard' because in those days there was a rule that no single Wren could go aboard a ship on her own they had to be accompanied by another Wren but, as Lynn was on leave they thought they wouldn't get permission. So he said 'we're going to whisk you away in an MT boat before we can get you know to say you can't come' and he said 'you've got twenty minutes to go back to the Wrenery just get your personnel night clothes and the rest of your equipment will be sent on later' so I ran most of the way back grabbed my pyjamas and my hair curlers sponge bag and got back and there was a surgeon a doctor there and he'd also been told the same thing, he'd been given minutes' notice and he'd just got engaged to a nurse at the base and he was so upset because he couldn't say goodbye to her.</p>
	<p>Anyway we got on this little motorboat there was two naval officers aboard and we set off and by then we didn't know where I was going so I said 'well where are we going' and he said 'oh we're going to Kyle so I thought where is Kyle' oh he said 'you'll be the only white women there' and of course they were pulling my leg and soon after he said 'well we're going to Kyle of Lochalsh in Ross-shire because the Philante is getting too dangerous to exercise in the Irish sea because the U-boats are coming in and so we're moving the base up to Kyle. Now the Kyle of Lochalsh was opposite the Isle of Skye lovely place and there was a big naval base there so it was beautiful. It had been snowing the day before and he said 'would you like to come up to the wheel with me and I'll point out all the islands' and it was wonderful seeing the snow... we were near to the mainland and all the different islands and we arrived in the dark in the Kyle of Lochalsh and a Wren met me and took me up to the wrenery it was HMS Trelawney was the name of the naval base and joy of joy I was in a lovely room and at last I had a single bed to myself and not a bunk bed and there was six other girls with me.</p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Now next morning the Philante had arrived in Kyle and so I had to go aboard for the first time and of course I didn't know anyone it was my first posting. I went up the gangplank and I was shown the office where I had to work there was a lieutenant Roberts there who was the captains secretary he was RNVR and he showed me around the office and gave me a pile of letters to type. Now the porthole was a lovely view opposite... you could see the Isle of Skye in the distance and I was so immersed in typing and finding where the paper and envelopes and everything was that I never noticed that we were at sea so I looked... he said 'why are you looking so puzzled we've been at sea for half an hour and now we're the other side of the Isle of Skye. Well I realised then that we were on an exercise at sea and we were away all day.</p>
	<p>Now when lunch time came I wasn't allowed to eat with the ratings although I was one but, they said 'you must eat in the ward room' so I went in there was this long polished table and I was surrounded by gold braid and I was absolutely terrified and the lieutenant commander he was the chief engineer he was sitting next to me and he sort of did some small talk to kind of help me I think but, it was all very formal we had stewards, we had soup to start with by then we were at sea and it was quite rough and what with being very nervous and the ship moving about a bit I don't know how I got the spoon up to my mouth but, I did the stewards were lovely they just gave me a nudge and I smiled and they knew how I was feeling. Well soon after Lynn came back off leave and she'd been in Northern Ireland and she'd been at sea a lot so she showed me the ropes and we soon got... I felt a real nautical type by then learning all the slang words that you ditched things in the sea, you felt choka and that sort of thing and that sort of thing and when you were off duty you could go in the ward room and the officers that weren't on duty would buy us a drink sometimes because there was a bar there and a gin and tonic only cost 4 pence because it was duty free.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 4</p>
<p>01:15:12</p>	<p><i>So what are you doing onboard what is your job at this stage?</i></p>
	<p>All clerical work but, before the... we used to have about three or four either frigates or corvettes learning to be escorts and the submarines we always had two submarines with us and before we went to sea they came onboard to get their instructions which we had typed out all the call signs and what they had to do and they duplicated them and they were given to all the captains of all the ships and then of course after we had been to sea then they wrote the results and we typed those and then we did all the letters general whatever needed to be done in an office really is what we did.</p>
<p>01:16:08</p>	<p><i>What was the exercise the Philantes doing there?</i></p>

Time code	What is said
	Well the Philante is teaching... we used to have different ones some we had French and American and Canadian ships and they would come for about three days and we went to sea with them yes well the Philante had these specialist officers and we were to be the merchant ship for the purpose of the exercise the submarines acted as U-boats and they were going to try and sink us and the escort groups had to try and protect us because before the merchant ships could go across the Atlantic they were protected by these escort groups but, before they could do this they had to learn all the ins and outs of what to do and we would go to sea and often you'd hear an ping and one of the officers would say that's the second time we've been torpedoed today.
01:17:23	<i>Was it exciting being sort of doing this was there evasive action and stuff or was it you were just in the room, in the office?</i>
	We were just in the office sometimes we had to go up to the bridge to tale messages or something and you'd hear all this chatter you know all these call signs coming in and it was exciting and you'd see star shells at night and you'd hear bangs and that kind of thing and yes we were so busy really that you didn't really have time to think what was happening.
01:17:57	<i>You talk about the codes and stuff, did you have to sign an official secrets act?</i>
	Yes that's right they were things like gorgonzola, little red riding hood these were some of these I suppose call signs or what but, to identify the ships to say what they were ????? I can remember this because I wrote it all down to my parents... not that because it was after the war now I don't know how I know... because we couldn't all our letters were censored we weren't allowed to say any of this but, I must od just remembered it.
01:18:50	<i>And what was... how long were you at sea on the Philante in these exercises?</i>
	Well we went out for the day we went out in the morning and we come back perhaps ten o'clock at night that was the usual sort of thing.
01:19:09	<i>So you never... you weren't overnighing on the Philante you would always come back to the wrenery?</i>
	Yes accept at the end of the war when we had to go down to Glasgow, Greenock rather and we had to stay overnight then and they didn't know where to put us so they put us in the sick bay. There were two beds in the sick bay and we were told to lock the doors we had a few taps on the door with the night watch keepers going by but, that's the only night yes because we always went back to the wrenery because there was room. I mean Wrens didn't really stay overnight really in the war.
01:19:48	<i>Just describe the wrenery and what the atmosphere was like there it sounds like quite an exciting place?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Oh it was yes well once a week we had a common room and we were allowed to bring a friend in and because it was a big naval base the Wrens that were working there and we used to have them at home and we had tea and biscuits and they used to come and play the piano. There was always a piano there and funny enough when the Americans came one or two of them were invited because you could only come... we didn't have masses of them just only a few and we had a darts board and I remember these Americans had never played darts, they'd never seen a dart board and they were really intrigued about this yes we had a very good social life. We used to go to the local church what do you call it... hall we were always welcome there but, they used to do the dancing the Scottish dancing the locals to the bagpipes and that was quite interesting and I met a girl there and she was an ATS girl which was very odd as they were all naval bods and I said 'well what are you doing here?' and she said 'I'm on leave' and as you do I said 'where are you stationed?' 'oh' she said 'its miles and miles from here you'll never ever of heard of it it's a place called Cheltenham'</p>
	<p>well of course I came from Cheltenham so I was amazed and I gave her my parents phone number and she visited them and then she took me to her house and I met her mother but, her mother only spoke Gaelic because all the villagers spoke Gaelic and her sisters could speak English but, very religious but, before they even had a cup of tea they would say in Gaelic and they were very welcoming and I used to visit them when I was off duty. We didn't have much time off we sometimes... we always had Sunday off but, sometimes we had to work on Saturdays not the girls at the base but, some of them may of done and when we were off duty it was wonderful country we used to go over to the Isle of Skye and take a bike and cycle over there and of course there was no vegetation there because it was rather rough ground and all the milk had to come by train from Inverness and the vegetables there was no things like lettuce or anything like that there but, we had wonderful cooks and the girls were lovely just like sisters to me I just wished I kept up with them all... there is only one that I'm in communication with now.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 5</p>
<p>01:23:06</p>	<p><i>I was going to ask you fraternization I mean you're up in Scotland you're mixing with Americans I mean what was the fraternization like for a young Wren?</i></p>
	<p>Well we didn't mix with the escort groups they were there for such a short time we very rarely, accept the captains came aboard but, we didn't see them they were with the officers we were just in the office we didn't you know we didn't have any communication they was there for such a short while.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:23:40	<i>Was there any when these guys went off you know what they were heading out into the risk of U-boat did you ever feel anything about that... you know that they might not come home, did you ever hear about any of them?</i>
	No I didn't no it was all so secret you didn't hear what they were doing or know what they were doing and we just did our job and you didn't enquire really.
01:24:11	<i>Were you ever out in big seas?</i>
	Yes we wear life jackets sometimes when we were far out I don't know how far out in the Atlantic we went because we weren't told I mean we just did out job and that was it I mean you couldn't see land where we were. It got very rough sometimes and things would juggle about and fall off shelves and that sort of thing.
01:24:40	<i>Did you like being at sea?</i>
	Oh I loved it yes because I was invited to have tea on one of the submarines and one of the officers because we weren't at sea every day because they had to be onboard to give instructions and that sort of thing and he said would Lynn and I like to have tea and he showed us all around very narrow between the bunks I don't know how they managed a tiny little space and they were given special rations because they were at sea for a very long time and we had lovely cake I remember and tinned peaches and tinned cream which was a luxury in the war and I loved it looking through the periscope and we went all over not to the where the torpedoes and where all the machinery were but, just really in the mess part.
01:25:37	<i>When did you go to Trelawney and when did you finish at Trelawney?</i>
	Well I went in the beginning of January around January the 3 rd and I was there until June 1945 that is I was really only in the war for 5 months because I joined in the December 1944 and because that's another thing... we had been out on exercise and we were coming in and it was May the 7 th 1945 and we had finished our work Lynn and I and we were sitting in the ward room in the evening it was about 9 o'clock and we suddenly heard hooray hooray and all men were shouting and we thought god what's that and somebody dashed in and put on the radio and we heard the end of Churchill saying that the war in Europe was over and that the next day May the 8 th would be VE-Day and of course everyone went mad with excitement and we were with an American escort group on that particular night and they let off rockets star shells and as we came into Kyle of Lochalsh and everyone was standing on the quay they was playing the bagpipes the locals the people from the Kyle were hanging out of their windows waving white cloths of some sort or another.

Time code	What is said
	All the Wrens were down on the rocks there and it was so exciting I shall never never forget it and then later on in the evening we were all down on the quay and the submarines came in one by one with all their lights on and the escort groups that's right they were letting off rockets and there was a little MT boat circling around with a radio on very loud... not a radio well it was a radio with music anyway the flash lights were on and they were doing the noise from the ships you know dot dot dot dash and it was amazing and because it was dark the shining on the water.
01:28:14	<i>I suppose because you hadn't really seen a lot of light you weren't used to lights were you?</i>
	Well we got back to bed about one o'clock I think and the next day we had it off but, then of course a signal came through to the Philante to say that the commander of the western approaches that the Philante was to go to Loch ???? Which is in Scapa Flow and a group of U-boats had surrendered there and the Philante had to go there and bring them back to Kyle of Lochalsh. Well we weren't allowed to go Lynn and I as they thought it be too dangerous. The Kyle of Lochalsh was taken over the top part and the signals section was there for the navy and we worked as night watch people typing out the signals that came in and that was interesting we often got messages directly from the ships you know on the telephone.
01:29:26	<i>Any that stand out?</i>
	No I can't remember now I did speak to the Philante one night and that was quite exciting and then when the Philante came back with the U-boats they were tied up in Kyle of Lochalsh and during that time Lynn and I had to type a whole lot of documents in German and we had to be locked away in one of the cabins to type it because it was all top secret. Now I had done German at school but, I didn't it was all technical I didn't understand it but, I don't know what it was but, pages and pages of this German thing we had to do and then one day they said would we like to go on one of the U-boats well I was a bit scared really because the Germans was still on it but, we did go and we were shown part of it and the Germans were there and very nice looking boys they were but, it did smell terrible as they'd been at sea for about six weeks and they looked a bit grim, dirty looking uniform they had on but, two of our boys was on there with rifles so we felt a bit safe that if anything happened we'd be protected.
01:31:04	<i>What happened to them do you know?</i>
	Yes they were put on eventually put on a train and sent to some camp but, I don't know we weren't told where they went.
	Start of Film 6
01:31:13	<i>Has the work load the work intensity changed in some way or is it still very busy for you?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Yes well it was quite busy yes there was a lot of paperwork to do although we weren't going to sea then but, soon after that because there was no need to have the exercises we left Kyle of Lochalsh and we said goodbye to everybody and we went down to Greenock and because we had to be on their overnight they thought where can they sleep us because we hadn't been onboard and they hit on the idea of going into the sickbay and we had to lock the door and told to lock the door which we did... had a few tapping's on there by the night watch people but, before we left the ship the captain sent for us to thank us for the work that we had done and we felt very honored because we hadn't seen the captain. I once took letters in shorthand when the captains secretary was on leave but, apart from that he had his own quarters and we didn't really see the captain and he offered us a glass of sherry and then said good bye then Lynn went off somewhere else and I went to the admirals office in Greenock to work.</p>
	<p>Well the first job I had to do I was in a typing pool with other Wrens but, the first job I had to do in the morning is go into the Wren officers room and she locked the door and then I had to type out the weather forecast for the fleet and then duplicate it and that went out to the fleet and then I just did general office work I wasn't there too long but, whilst I was there we'd gone to sleep we were in Nissan huts and we'd gone to sleep... well we were in bed anyway and the watch keepers came and they said 'get up girls... wake up the war is over!' because that was August 1945 so the battle... VJ Day that was so we all got up and some of us was still in dressing gowns others put their coats on and off we went down to the sea front all in a line and the next day in the local paper in the paper it said '<i>Wrens parade in hair curlers and dressing gowns</i>' but oh all the ships that were in the docks they were all honking their horns and flash lights were coming with the v sign and everybody was oh rockets going off everywhere it was absolutely wonderful and we got back quite late and we raided the galley we weren't supposed to be in there but, we went into the galley and found some eggs and started frying these eggs and then the Wren officer came in and we thought oh dear now we're for it and she said 'now come on girls got any eggs to spare' and she joined in with us which was very nice.</p>
	<p>Well the next day and off course we had it off. Some of us went to Gurrock and thought we'd walk along there I thought we got a late pass because you couldn't be out after ten you could occasionally have a late pass and so we signed off for this and when we got to Gurrock we saw a lot of Polish officers and they said oh there was a Polish aircraft carrier in the docks and they said 'would you like to come aboard girls' well we weren't supposed to but, they had a little speed boat and they took us onboard and they were all drinking vodka then onboard but, I didn't like it very much I only had a sip. It was wonderful standing on the deck so huge but, then of course it was time to go back and we were late in and we thought oh goodness because the regulating officer always signed us in and if you were late it wasn't good but, she just signed us in and 'goodnight girls' and that was it because it was VJ Day after all.</p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>The next place I went to was Burscough in Lancashire it was a royal naval air station and we had Nissan huts on a field opposite the airfield now I worked with a commanding officer more or less like his shorthand typist but, I worked with a first lieutenant in his office. Well as soon as I arrived the Wren officer sent to me and said 'the girl that was working with the first lieutenant was in floods of tears and we had to take her off the job so I'm warning you the officer is not a pleasant man and please don't take it to heart because I'm warning you he won't be very nice'</p>
	<p>He had a foul temper because I think really he was I don't know if I should say this on camera really but, anyway he was very... we were called the men by their surnames and he called me by my surname because my name was Price and I was sitting in the next desk to him and he would say 'fetch me my pen Price' and I'd get up from my desk walk over to his desk pick up his pen from in front of him and put it in his hand that's the sort of man he was but, he soon left, he wasn't there very long and then another little Welshman came oh he was lovely quite the opposite and he'd often just jump out of the window onto the airfield instead of going to the door and I had great fun with him and then he left and another... oh I must tell you it's the most interesting thing is in the Nissan hut.</p>
	<p>Start of Film 7</p>
	<p>We didn't have any locks on the Nissan hut but, we were all asleep one night and we heard a scream from one of the Wrens near the door and 'what's the matter' and apparently someone had come in and tried to steal her handbag and she had caught hold of this persons hair and because when we all woke up this person tried to... did disappear and she was left with a handful of hair. So the next morning we were all lined up men and women because there was only a wire fence between the men's section and ours the women's the Wrens and we we're all lined up and we had a lock of hair cut off and put in an envelope and sent to the forensic to try and find out who it was but, nobody ever said. There was another Nissan hut and there was a road between where we slept and the ablutions go to the showers and to wash which wasn't so good but, we had a black stove in the middle coke stove and we had to black lead it but, it was very cosy and we had great fun but, after I left the royal naval air station I was sent to Fort Southwick on Portsdown Hill and I worked for the medical officer there and the D-Day landings were planned in the basement they had dug out underneath and you went down lots and lots of stairs. I did go down and see it once where all the operations were planned but, I worked in the offices above.</p>

Time code	What is said
	<p>And well there was one rather funny incident the medical officers room had an enjoining inner door and I was working with a petty officer and one day the petty officer went in and left the door open and I looked up and there was a group of men with their trousers down in a circle and the MO was inspecting their bottoms and I had to look away quickly. I wasn't there very long and then I was sent to HMS Mercury which was the Royal naval signals station in Petersfield and we lived in a place called Soburton Towers a very grand lovely building and each morning a coach would come and take us to Petersfield along country lanes a very grand place a beautiful building a lovely staircase and I worked for a commander there I did all his clerical work and very occasionally he would have committee meetings as well and I had to take it all down in shorthand. Now they would always sit at a big polished table and I would sit in the corner of the room on a tiny little table taking down the minutes which was a bit terrifying because I hoped to get it all down correctly.</p>
	<p>Oh and there was another thing I forgot to say was when I was at the royal naval air and they had what they call detentions and the commanding officer... we had in the corridor and if anybody had misbehaved, come in late or done anything else they were sent before the commander and we had to put a hat on and I had to go and sit at a chair by the commanding officer and take down everything that was said sometimes I can remember one Glaswegian chap and he was very very difficult to understand and what was saying but I did manage to get it down right but, I didn't enjoy that very much... felt sorry for the people brought in front of the commander</p>
01:43:37	<i>What was the demob like did you want to be demobbed?</i>
	<p>Yes I did because by then I'd fallen in love with my husband to be and he was because he'd been in since 1940, he was two years older than me and so he had been demobbed and I wanted to go home and carry on with my life... two years I was in, just over two years and that was the end of my story...</p>
01:44:12	<i>Great story lovely story...</i>
01:44:14	End of Films