

Past and Present: Continuing Our Stories of Women at War

I joined the Wrens in September 1940 and was sent to Milford Haven. I was a writer, the Navy's name for a secretary or clerk and worked at an office on the docks, which supervised the repairs of the flimsy converted trawlers which escorted convoys on the Western Approaches. We Wrens slept in double bunks and lived a happy, communal life.



working in the underground headquarters of C.in C., The Nore, at Chatham. I remember there was great excitement when the German 'E' boats came out into the Channel and our MTB's went out to do battle.

Ceylon to New Delhi

Finally – overseas to Colombo in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. We sailed in one of the first convoys to go through the Mediterranean, after the

The Ladder of Promotion

Then I was sent to H.M.S. Duke, in Malvern, a very different set-up. It was an entry depot for new recruits and was run very formally, as a ship. The Captain was piped on board, that is through the entrance gate, and ratings had to run across the parade ground. I was a Petty Officer by then and was allowed to walk, having climbed a little on the ladder of promotion. After a year of church parades and bugle calls I escaped by climbing another rung and went to the Royal Naval College in Greenwich for officer training. We lived in those beautiful, classical buildings and dined in the Painted Hall; it was all very impressive. We had a uniform allowance of £20, which bought two made-to-measure suits, a great coat and a tricorne. I was commissioned as a Third Officer, learnt Naval cipher and found myself

conquest of North Africa. We travelled in an overcrowded troop ship, but ate white bread and bananas. Used to the blackout at home, we were amazed at the city of Aden, ablaze with lights. We spent a fortnight in Bombay before getting another ship to Colombo. Ceylon was a green and peaceful island with staggering sunsets over the Indian Ocean. It was here that I met my husband, a Lieutenant in the King's African Rifles. Someone wrote a poem 'One Woman to a Thousand Men' and although not quite correct, the Wrens were certainly in great demand!

I ended up in New Delhi where we had to endure the hot season, with welcome leaves to Kashmir and Dharamsala, in the foothills of the Himalayas and visits to Agra and the Taj Mahal. So the Navy took me to see the world.

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