

Florence 'Peta' Bird (1921-1982). Women's Royal Naval Service

Freshwater East, Pembrokeshire

West Wales Veterans Archive: 2021-22

Material: audio recording featuring Jackie Neatherway (Florence's daughter), written description, photographs.

Introduction

This resume of Peta's story has been brought up to date by her daughter, Jackie, after finally receiving her War Record in 2021 after much delay during the Covid 19 pandemic. This contains facts corroborated by wartime documentation. The audio story told by her daughter contains some anecdotal memories passed from mother to daughter post WW2 as well as material such as diary entries, newspaper cuttings, letters from her Wren colleagues which are lodged at the IWM. The Arromanches photographs were taken by Peta and are from her own album.

Description

Florence Jessie Paul, known as Peta during her time as a Wren was born in Gloucestershire in 1921. She joined the Women's Royal Naval Service as a Rating in March 1941 becoming a coder and was stationed at HMS Spartiate, the RN base on the Clyde in Glasgow until end April 1943, becoming a Leading Wren in early May. From May 1943 to February 1944, she was transferred to the Royal Naval base, HMS Skirmisher at Milford Haven. An Officers training course followed from Jan to Feb 1944 after which she was sent to HMS Eaglet, the RN base in Liverpool for cypher duties in the office of the Commander in Chief, Western Approaches from Feb 44 to Aug 44 in preparation for the D Day landings. She volunteered to be in the first party of Wrens to land in Normandy; as a newly promoted 3rd Officer, she sailed in the Ulster Monarch as part of Naval Party 1500 on August 29 1944 to undertake cipher duties for ship movements (including her future husband Tony's corvette HMS Clematis) in and out of Mulberry B on Gold Beach at the Signalling Station in Arromanches. As the Allies pushed the enemy back, she and her colleagues were moved first to Calais then to Brussels. Peta's service abroad drew to a close with transfers to Minden and Hamburg in 1945 and Berlin in 1946.

After demobilisation in October 1946, she returned to Gloucestershire and married Tony Bird whose story is also told on the West Wales Veterans Archive. They knew each other from their schooldays in Stroud, Florence's brother George Paul had been with Tony at school and was also in the RNVR. Remarkably both Peta and Tony contributed to the D-Day Normandy landings on 6th June 1944.

[Tony Bird \(1924-\). Royal Navy, Freshwater East | Peoples Collection Wales](#)

The couple had three children and moved to the village of Freshwater East in Pembrokeshire, where Tony's family had strong ties. Florence Bird (née Paul) sadly passed away in 1982.