



DAME MARION KETTLEWELL DBE

1914 - 2016

Dame Marion Kettlewell DBE served as Unit Officer in the WRNS at HMS Woolverstone in the months leading up to D-Day. This was during the period when Bigbobs were being constructed beside the river Orwell as part of a massive deception plan known as Operation Quicksilver. Her period at HMS Woolverstone through her own words:



Landing craft were anchored in the river. I remember we had a party the night before they were supposed to go and when we woke up in the morning they were still there. Everything was delayed because of weather. I went out early next morning to watch them all go. It was quite a sight.

A regiment of Warwick's came and built dummy landing craft and moored them outside. One or two people were seen to walk about on them as if there were more to come. We used to go down and watch them making these under the trees by day and then they launched them at night.

We knew about D-Day before it happened. Some of the WRNS officers were right in the middle of it; secretarial and operational but very much part of it.

One of the Royal Marine officers was, in civilian life, a keen ornithologist. He took several of us, who were interested, bird watching in the estate. I remember particularly the woodlarks. He got me completely hooked and it has been with me ever since.

We used to go over to Ganges and Harwich to share some of their concerts and ENSA. (Entertainments National Service Association). My job was to see the WRNS were doing their work to the best and were happy doing it. I think it came naturally.

There was one married WRNS whose husband, I think, was in the Guards. She was an MT driver. We weren't allowed to go ashore but she managed to slip out in a Tilly. She stuffed her bed with pillows.

The Duty Officer had been very "with it" and had discovered, when she did rounds, that this bed didn't look as if it had been slept in. When she returned, I mean I can understand she wanted to see her husband before he went off on D-Day, she was up in front of the Captain and he was very good to her. She pretended to faint. I think she said she was pregnant. He said you're going to sit down and I'll see you again in 10 minutes. He didn't turn up but she got her leave stopped.

"I was the Unit Officer at HMS Woolverstone, which is on the Orwell just outside Ipswich. This was an "assembly and briefing" establishment for Landing Craft. It had been a lovely estate with a very elegant house which was the Wardroom. There were Nissen huts all around in which we lived and the sailors lived.

There was a cricket ground and tennis courts. It was very lovely and the Nightingale sang under the trees. You walked down to the "hard" and there were all these small Landing Craft and they were in training. Eventually, all the ships from Harwich and all the personnel came to Woolverstone to be briefed on the D-Day landing before they moved South. There were Royal Marine Majors in charge of the landing craft and we had some Women's Royal Navy boat mechanics who worked on them. There were about 200 WRNS there; writers and different sorts of jobs.

It was a very good place to start being Unit Officer because there was a very nice captain, James Mansfield, who had been retired but only recently and brought back. He was a natural leader and very friendly, I mean he had very high standards but he was a lovely person and he knew that I was as green as grass...He taught me in a most splendid way how to do all these things.

We were confined just before D-Day for about a month. Nobody was allowed to go ashore and so we had to arrange all sorts of entertainments: sports, cricket matches and bingo to keep everybody going. There were a number of cooks, stewards and writers as well as the mechanics and one girl maintained a gun in case an enemy aircraft came over."



D-Day was quite emotional, in particular the morning when we got up. I think it was a Sunday and we'd gone to church and they had all gone. The establishment went on for a little while after D-Day with these camouflaged boats being put out. The one place we could go to was still in the estate, it was a lovely little pub down at the end of the park. We used to go down there but then the locals weren't allowed to come in, it was Naval territory, but otherwise the locals were very friendly. We went for several meals with the local farmers and others around.

It was a lovely part of the world and I was very happy there."

