

**Written by Doris Grant (7 June 2010)**

I was too young to be “called up” at the beginning of the War, even for the Land Army, but I was eventually drafted to an office in Berkeley Square as a Typist.

During the War the Merchant Navy was known as Min. of War Transport (Shipping Division). The Headquarters was in the old Trades Union Offices and we were in a Hotel right opposite. This had a direct hit, but the bomb never exploded, just left a gaping hole through the middle of the building, but the blast killed 12 girls across the road.

I always think never enough publicity was given to this office. We had to work 9 hours a day, 7 days a week, 51 weeks of the year. The messages from the ships came into the decoding office, they were then passed to us to type them on a Stencil and then run off the appropriate number of copies. So, there were de-coders, Typists, Gestetner Operators, Security Guards, etc., etc.

I was lucky as I lived in Outer London and could go home to a fairly quiet night, but most of the other girls lived in New Cross, Deptford etc - real “East Enders”. If they were late coming in we guessed what had happened.

At the back of the building was a sealed off area; we were not allowed in it, but every so often, Security would be tightened and Winston Churchill would arrive to see what SECRET WEAPON had been invented. As Lord of the Admiralty he oversaw any new “Weapons of Destruction.”

We survived the V 1s and V 2s but towards (as we know now) D-DAY there was this peculiar noise heard even over our typewriters. We all thought it was a new bomb, but I was hoisted up to a window and there were hundred of aircraft pulling gliders. We all ran into the street and cheered, everybody was crying, laughing etc., but back to work.

My Boss always used to send me to Shepherds Market for her cigarettes (as I had an innocent face and could get them from “under the counter”). I was innocent, or ignorant, of the ways of life because it always puzzled me why a gorgeous girl should be standing in the Square, but there were Yankee Officers Clubs, Free French, Polish etc. I found out afterwards why she was there.

After the War in Europe finished we still had to work until Japan capitulated, but I was demobbed and sent to Ministry of Transport, Food Research Laboratories, where I was lucky enough to be at the beginning of the Motorway Research.

Another rather amusing story: We were very ignorant of sex etc; our parents never told us anything. Birds and Bees were just that. The shops in Praed Street were very sleazy, plus they had big double

front windows, large on one side and smaller on the other with a passage in between and the door set right in the back.

I had to get out at Paddington Station (which was bombed once while I was around) and go up Praed Street into Edgware Road and so on into Oxford Street. I was in Praed Street when the sirens went, but before I could shelter (you could go in the Hospital Shelters) there was a dog fight overhead between a Spitfire and a German plane. I couldn't cross the road because of the flack, this could rip you to pieces, so I dodged into a shop doorway until the All Clear. It happened to be a Book shop so I started reading the titles and one greatly intrigued me, and still does. It was called "72 Ways to Seduce a Woman." Even now that still puzzles me - 72 !!

Ironically enough, after the War, I went to Cookery Classes and we were given pamphlets (I think one of them was from Stork margarine). It was called "72 Ways to Cook a Potato." They both still puzzle me.