

Julie Hallett



Former member of the 'Wrens'

By Richard Laramie

Women's advancements in the workforce during WWII

Women took on an increasing role in the workplace during WWII, which led to a more active role in the public sphere. The three ways that they became more active in the public sphere are through replacing men in the factories, a greater need for their traditional jobs and even taking on military roles.

Women's big leap into the public sphere was in taking over factory jobs left by men. They had to do this because men had to go off to war but they behind the jobs they had. Furthermore, the new jobs needed for the war effort this left a big gap between jobs available and people available to fill them. This caused employers to recruit women into fields of work that they had not been involved in before, such as munitions, uniform making and even aeroplane assembly.¹ Some women had to move to the area surrounding the factory to be able to work there, but they were paid more because of this.² Even with this introduction of new jobs for women the pay stayed pretty much the same: a skilled female worker was paid the same as an unskilled man.³

Traditional jobs for women also took on more importance during the war and improved their role in the public sphere. These jobs included, but are not limited to, teachers, secretaries and nurses. These were all important jobs before the war, but once it broke out they became imperative positions that began to become more respected. Schoolteachers were needed before the war, but during the war most of them were used to look after children being moved to the countryside.⁴ This kept the future generations safe and allowed parents to focus more on the war effort and not the safety of their children.⁵ Also, nurses and secretaries took on much more important roles in the public sphere. Instead of travelling from the office or hospital to their home day in and day out women started to be deployed to other areas, such as the front lines, to use their skills. Nurses were deployed to medical units and secretaries became assigned to important people in the army to record their messages and send them.⁶

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- The last place where women's roles in the public sphere advanced was in the military. There was a need for women to join the service, which produced units such as the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, Women's Volunteer Service and the Women's Royal Naval Service. All of these units provided essential services to the war machine, but they also gave women new positions that were unheard of for women before the war. Shocking new positions were created, such as women flying in the Auxiliary Air Force. They did not fly combat missions but more domestic ones, such as delivering mail, but nevertheless they were essential services provided by women. Dangerous roles were not only reserved for the men; rather, there was also the Women's Special Operations Executive. This unit was less in the public eye due to the fact that the women were secret agents, but it shows how women were moving up the ladder in what they were capable of. In the unit members were parachuted into occupied France or glided in on gliders, tasked with gathering information that could be used for the landing at Normandy. This job was no walk in the park: if an agent had one slip up it was not uncommon for them to be tortured and then killed.⁷

- As a result of these tasks, women's roles in the public sphere improved greatly due to the Second World War. Thanks to the introduction of women into the factory, traditional women roles becoming more important and the need for women in the military, women's roles improved for the better and have continued to do so to this day.
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- ¹ Chris Trueman. http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women_WW2.htm (accessed 28 November 2011).
- ²Carol Harris. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/women_at_war_01.shtml (accessed 28 November 2011).
- ³Trueman.
- ⁴Julie Hallett, Interview (3 November 2011).
- ⁵Harris.
- ⁶Trueman.
- ⁷Ibid.

Julie Hallett

This is a picture taken of Julie Hallett when she was in active duty during WWII. She volunteered for the Wrens at 17 $\frac{3}{4}$, the minimum age for service. Unlike other military units, the navy had enough applicants it could pick from among the volunteers the people it wanted for the service.



Picture of Julie Hallett

Julie and her future husband

This picture shows Julie Hallett with her future husband Dennis. It was not common for service members to marry or find their mate while in the service. They were married while Dennis was on embarkation leave. This one of the practices of the time to “seize the moment”, whereas others waited until the war was over because they didn’t want to be committed when survival of the war was in doubt.



Julie Hallett and husband Donald

Wren Training

Julie's training took place at Mill Hill. She first received a medical examination, then basic shots were administered for protection from disease. They were then taught the basics of the service, such as the ranks and how to march properly. After this they are given their uniforms and interviewed to see where they would be placed in the service.



Wren classroom

Julie (middle) with her coworkers

Women and men worked side-by-side in the Marconi Research Lab, which until this point was unheard of. When WWII started there was a change in mood as to what women were capable of doing. With so many men leaving for war, women had to take positions which were traditionally reserved for men. Julie first worked shifts analyzing the activities of the ionosphere making sure that there are no radio blackouts.



Julie and coworkers

Julie's jobs

After her shift work looking at the ionosphere Julie was a temporary lecturer in the training program when her former lecturer was sick. She was essentially a young, shy woman talking to a class of sailors her own age. Later, one of the sailors she taught asked her to marry him and she did.

Later on, Julie was assigned as an assistant to a scientist, working from nine to five collecting data and bring it back for analysis.

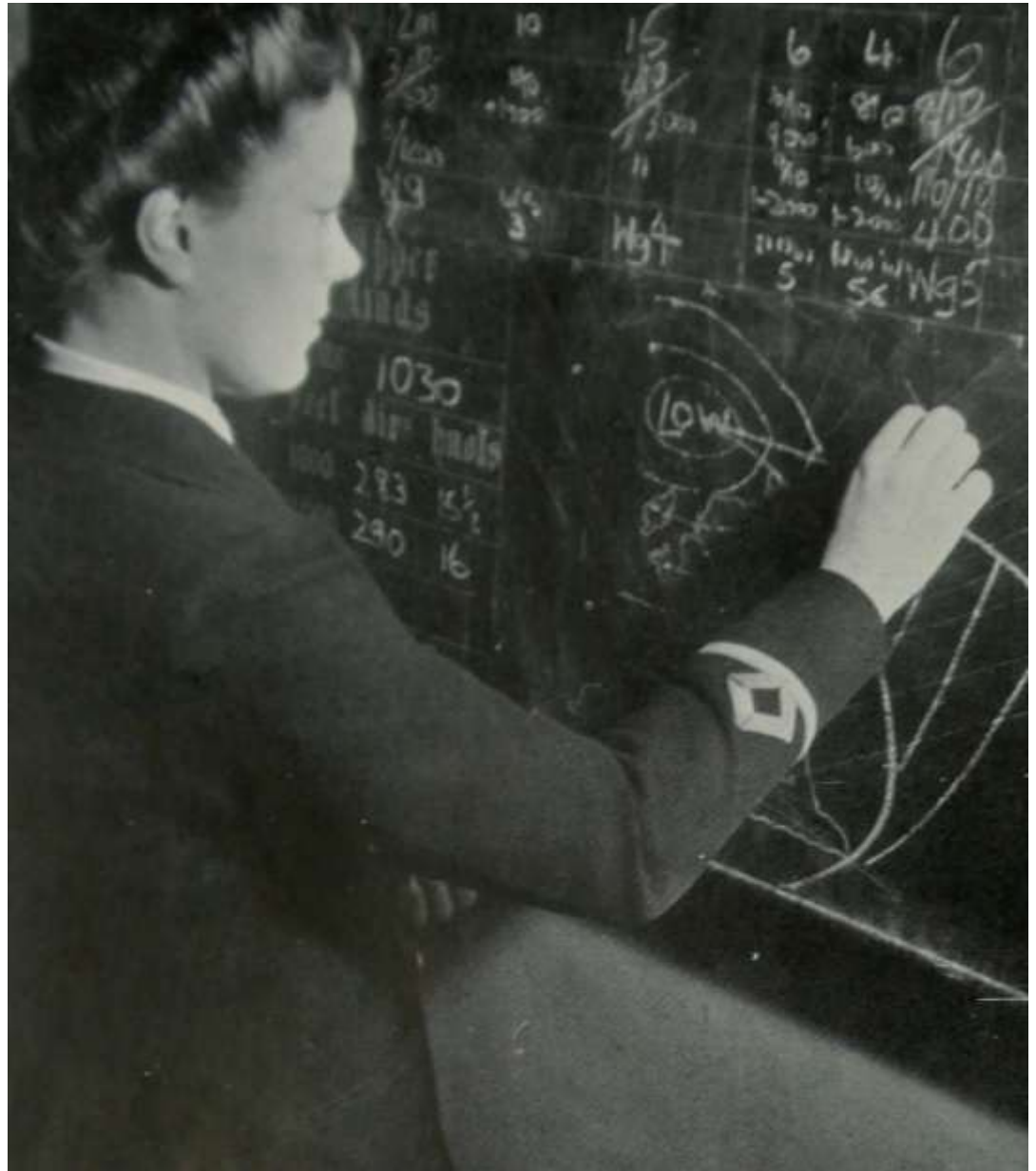


Julie at her job

Calculations

Calculations had to be made to determine the best and worst times radios for radio use. It had to do with the angles that the radio waves bounced off the ionosphere and back to earth. These calculations were extremely important to communication and a huge part of the war effort.

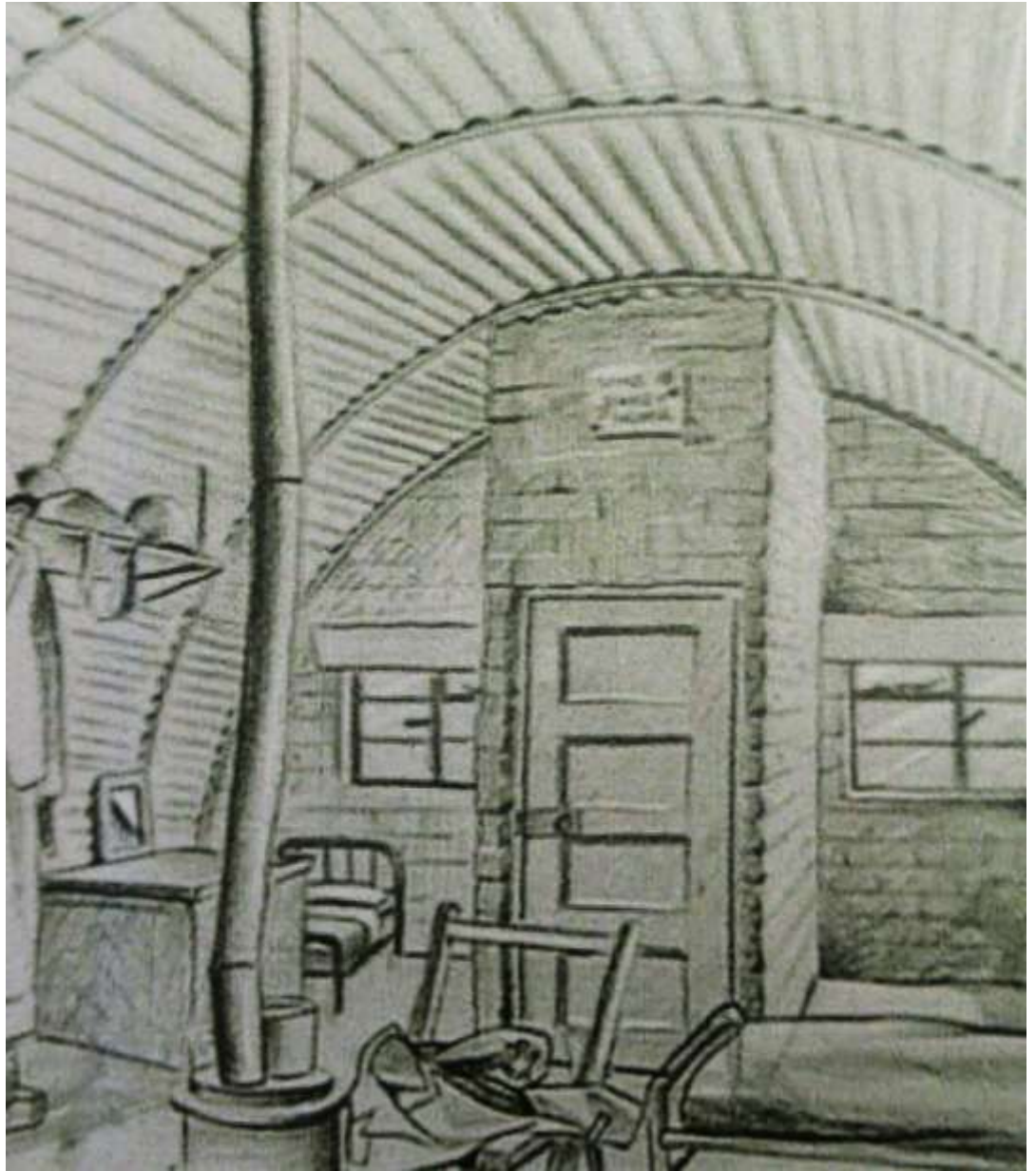
Other calculations that Julie made were at the Director Finding sites. These were used to pinpoint enemy troop movements by pin pointing where their radio signals were coming from.



A Wren conducting calculations

Accommodation

Julie was put into a billeted house taken over by the government called a Wrenneries. If one did not get a place in a billeted house, they lived makeshift huts called Nissen huts, as pictured right. In the middle of the Nissen hut there was a small coal stove, which if left unattended in the winter would lead to snow being formed on pillows.



An illustration of a Nissen hut

House keeping

Even with all the tasks given to the women they were still expected to keep their quarters spick and span—after all, they were part of the royal forces!

The standard kept in the barracks was very high for the Wrens because they were part of the naval service. If they were stationed on the ship they would have very little space to store their belongings, so practicing cleanliness on land was imperative.

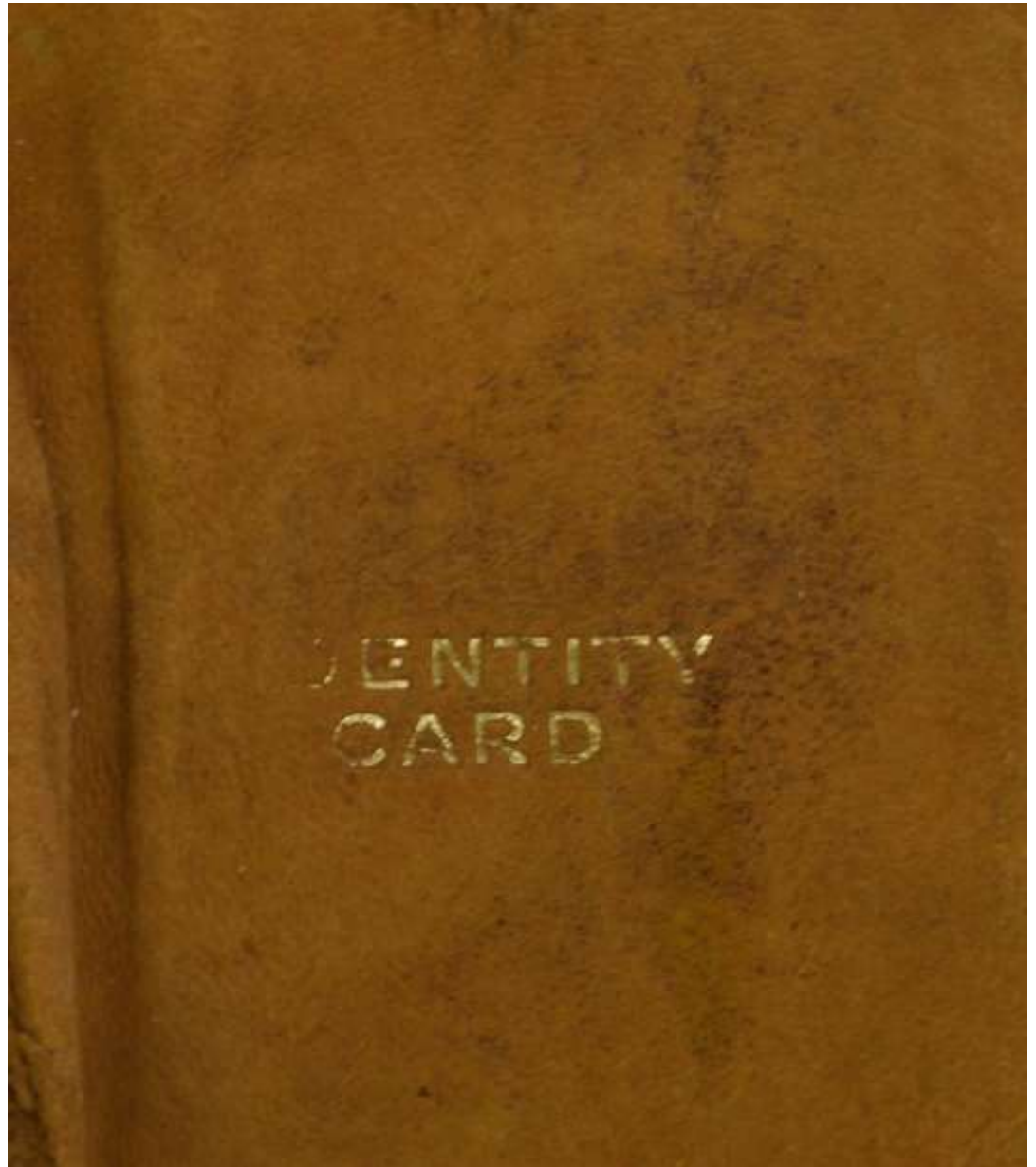


Identity card

This photo shows the identity case which held Julie's identity card.

Identity cards were important during wartime in Britain because it allowed the easy identification of someone who was a British citizen and also helped identify bodies after bombings.

Every citizen was issued one with a civilian gas mask in case of a gas attack.



Impact Moment

Impact moment titles:

1. Who did you live with at the start of the war?

2. Why did you choose the Wrens

3. What happened while and during training

4. What do you remember the most on remembrance day

- 1. Impact moment here is when Julie mentions she is told she was not pulling her weight by her billeting family. I would not be aware of people expecting people they were billeting to pull their weight because they were being paid by the government for billeting them.
- 2. Julie informed me from this question that she chose the Wrens because of the shirts they wore, this is because she thought no more baggage was needed in the chest area. I don't think I will ever be able to forget that experience.
- 3. It was presented that during her training she became a lecturer in front of a class of people her age. Julie explained that she was a shy girl but got help from her students one of which she ended up marrying. The image of Julie in front of a class of her peers and ending up marrying one will be with me forever.
- 4. On this question Julie took a moment to pause and explained about all the people that were lost. The sadness expressed was seriously touching and brought a whole new meaning to remembrance day for me personally

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