

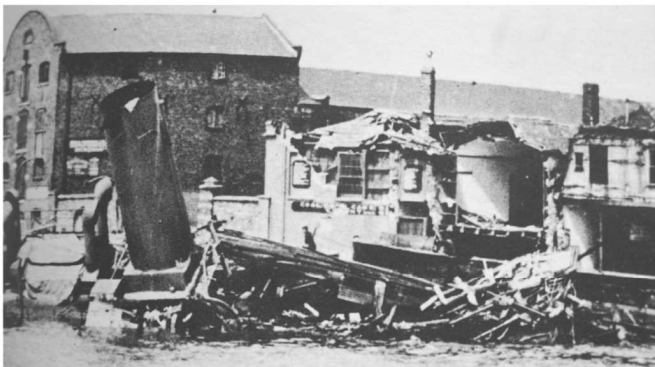
Wrens with RN Poole, and also at HMS Turtle (Combined Ops)

Jeanne Hudleston (née Robotham) when interviewed courtesy of the website www.froyle.com, recalled her WW2 Memories serving in the Wrens, from her enlistment in May 1941 at HMS Boscawen in Portland as an 'immobile', inc. promotion to Third Officer WRNS in October 1943 on the staff of Flag Off i/c London, thro' to *VE-Day at Poole*.

During her six years+ on active service, Jeanne experienced two interesting stints of duty within the Poole area: ~ Firstly, she arrived and reported for duty at Poole on the fateful day of the 11-12th May, 1941 when there was the Luftwaffe attack by Heinkel 111 *G1+ES* in returning from an aborted raid on RAF Bicester, and opting for another ! This secondary target was likely any Shipping or Flying Boats moored up at Poole or in the confines of the Harbour with a low pass over the Quaysides, before proceeding towards the Flying Boat Moorings, a little way off Salterns. Here, there was an attack upon BOAC's Short S.21 *G-ADHK Maia* (converted + deployed on Poole-Foynes Shuttles) that was sunk by the near-compression and also PBY *G-AGBJ Guba* that was damaged *but saved by prompt action*. Jeanne vividly recalled, that by then *G1+ES* itself was already doomed - having been hit by the Oerliken Gun salvo which had been expertly delivered from his vantage point '*on the coach roof of the Officers' accommodation ship moored at Poole Quay*' by Lt-Commander Vandy R.N.R.: *A compelling claim from among several others submitted.*

[See also the '[Friends of PFBC Newsletter ~ Summer, 2011](#)']

[*This ship then 'under the white ensign' was the luxury motor-yacht **Sona** *, which was destroyed in June 1942 by a delayed-action bomb, ironically not long after the **decoy site on Brownsea** had proved its worth in a Whitsun Raid.*



* *This luxury motor yacht built 1922 by Camper Nicholson*

The crumpled HMS Sona, as a tangled mass of wreckage: Lost on 7th. June 1942 at 0052, through a delayed-action bomb which also damaged nearby buildings - Poole Quay. Ref: PFBC HLM Harold Bennett ('Poole and World War II')

During WW2 it is reckoned that an approx. total of 10,000 bombs were dropped locally, some with devastating effect.]

Jeanne lodged with other Wrens (*some 85*) based at R.N. Poole: However, she was posted to **Combined Operations at HMS Turtle**, which was being set-up in the **Hamworthy area**. [*Eventually it would have a complement of 4,000.*]

This Camp was set in pine trees above the **District of Lake...** and would spread out across the **Rockley promontory** as it grew in significance, eventually also encompassing several other sites around Poole Harbour eg **Round Island**.

Yet, for the time being during 1941 she was the only Wren serving at **HMS Turtle** alongside 200+ men based there.

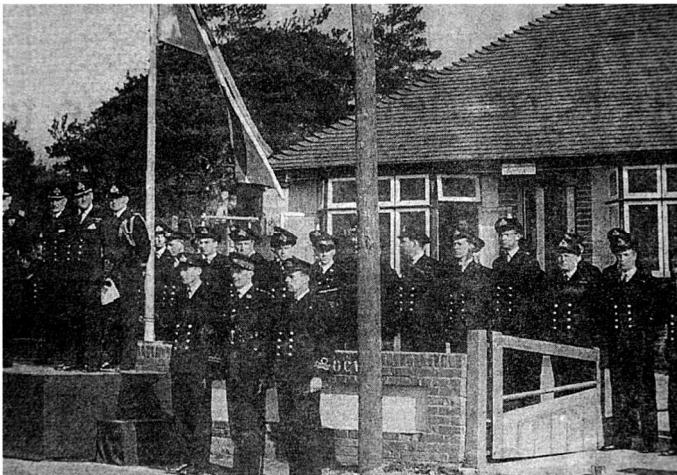
Her role was as the Captain's Secretary, so that later she fondly recalled the inspection by **Lord Louis Mountbatten** who was **the Chief of Combined Operations to HMS Turtle** as one of the first Combined Operations bases in WW2.

Lord Louis spoke with Jeanne, and enquired if she was *lonely* in her capacity as the only Wren among all the men...

to which she was to affirm that it certainly *wasn't the case*...where her response gave rise to guffaws of laughter !

" I was very happy there ~ and no sign at any time sign of sexual harassment... I had never heard of such a thing !"

After subsequent promotions, inc. 3 significant stints: at HMS Bee ~ a shore Coastal Forces' base at Weymouth; at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich for a 3 weeks Officer's course as a Cadet - CW Candidate; and at London; Jeanne returned to Poole, again to a posting at [HMS Turtle Combined Operations Base](#) (HQs) local to [Hamworthy](#).



Photograph: The Handover to the Officers of [HMS Turtle](#) of Facilities within the Lake District of [Hamworthy](#), Poole formerly under the auspices of [RAF Hamworthy](#) 1942-44 requisitioned for the Royal Navy /[Combined Operations](#), in the build-up to [Overlord](#) + invasion on [D-Day](#) 6th. June. [The RAF Roundel was then replaced by a White Ensign!]

These included the Flying Boat Base along the foreshore, together with a 'motley collection' of properties around the Lake Estate, [Hamworthy](#) and elsewhere in Poole etc., + various in S. Poole passed to RAF Transport Command.

Faced with the prospect of the Camp on Round Is., the Senior Wren secured a 50-bed Hostel on her own initiative !

"[Mount House](#), [Parkstone](#), the Wrens Hostel was the largest accommodation establishment in the base (RN Poole).

It always played a leading part in the corporate life of the N.O.I/c. staff. A large red brick mansion, it provided excellent facilities for entertaining, and many boisterous dances and parties were given by the Wrens...

The Wrens Officers Ward Room was a regular place for entertaining distinguished visitors and succeeding C-in-Cs and F.O.I.Cs lunched there. At times more than seventy-five were victualled aboard, but some of these slept out in requisitioned houses nearby." The Royal Navy at Poole: A Souvenir... [Lieut. H.M Linehan R.N.V.R.](#); Editor 1945

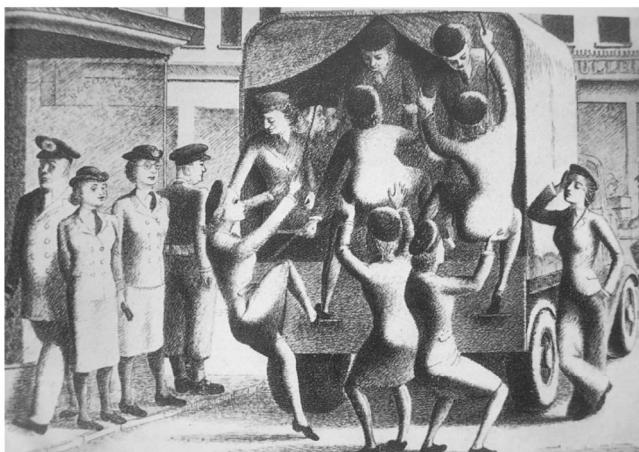
[Leading Seaman Lucas R.N.](#); Illustrator

Meanwhile, in the centre of old town by [R.N. Poole](#), a familiar spectacle had become established on a daily basis: ~

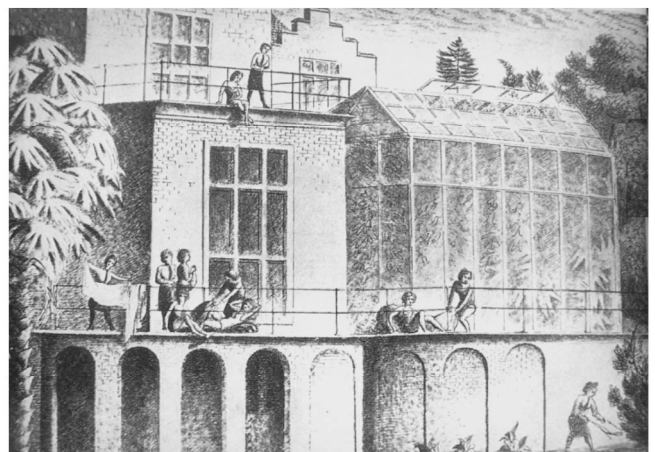
For... *"Sharp at 12.50, seven days a week, transport arrived to take the Wrens of the forenoon watch to dinner at [Mount House](#). A few minutes of indescribable confusion and 25 or 30 young ladies scrambled over the tailboard in an unseaman-like fashion; settled themselves on the benches and were whisked away to their quarters.*

The scene was reinstated at 1800 hours for the afternoon watch.

It seldom failed to attract a small crowd of spectators in the High Street." [Lieut. H.M Linehan op cit](#)

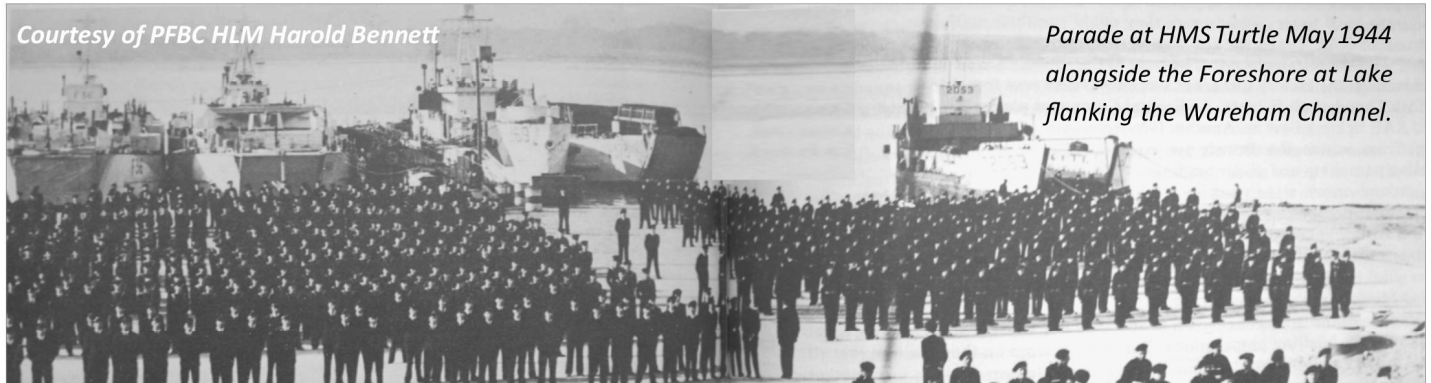


Transport collecting Wrens of the Forenoon Watch
[Leading Seaman Lucas R.N.](#); Illustrator / Cartoonist



Wrens' Hostel [Mount House](#), [Mount Rd.](#), [Parkstone](#)
[Leading Seaman Lucas R.N.](#); Illustrator / Cartoonist

By then, in April 1945 there was a scaling-back from the significance of **D-Day**, and the part that Poole had played. For during 1944 there was an incremental build- up of forces here under the auspices of **Combined Ops - Marines**, **the Royal Navy**; the presence of the **USN Rescue Flotilla One** (with 70 coastguard cutters) + **USN Metrological Unit**; **Free French tank battalion**; and several hundred **Landing Tank Craft (LTCs)**, with their crews in preparation *etc., etc.* 38 LTCs were based at the former **RNAS Sandbanks** - which was on *care & maintenance* in Oct. 1943 before closure, whilst **BOAC** was ready to move *on a temporary basis* a month before D-Day, to **Neyland** near **RAF Pembroke Dock**...



Courtesy of PFBC HLM Harold Bennett

Parade at HMS Turtle May 1944 alongside the Foreshore at Lake flanking the Wareham Channel.

The Port of Poole & Harbour had been the third largest embarkation point for D-Day Landings with an array of craft: The *armada* from here had included blockships which were scuttled to protect Mulberry Harbour B at Arromanches. Also an Officer i/c of a rocket boat: author **William Golding** who'd been based at HMS Turtle + enjoyed dinghy sailing, when preparing for D-Day and was wonderfully inspired in sailing up & down as far as Brownsea Island's Pottery Pier.

"Ships berthed three and four and even seven abreast in the dock. The passage between the quays resembled the eye of a needle, but it was negotiated by young officers experiencing their first command... sometimes their first spell on the bridge."

Lieut. H.M Linehan *op cit*



PFBC Archive's Website 'The Story of Flotilla One'

Photograph left: **USCG Flotilla One** with 70 cutters, berthed alongside Poole Quay preparing for D-Day
USCG 8 and USCG 48 would be severely damaged, ~ whilst USCG 27 and USCG 47 were unrepairable:
Ref. PFBC Archive Website [The Story of Flotilla One](#)



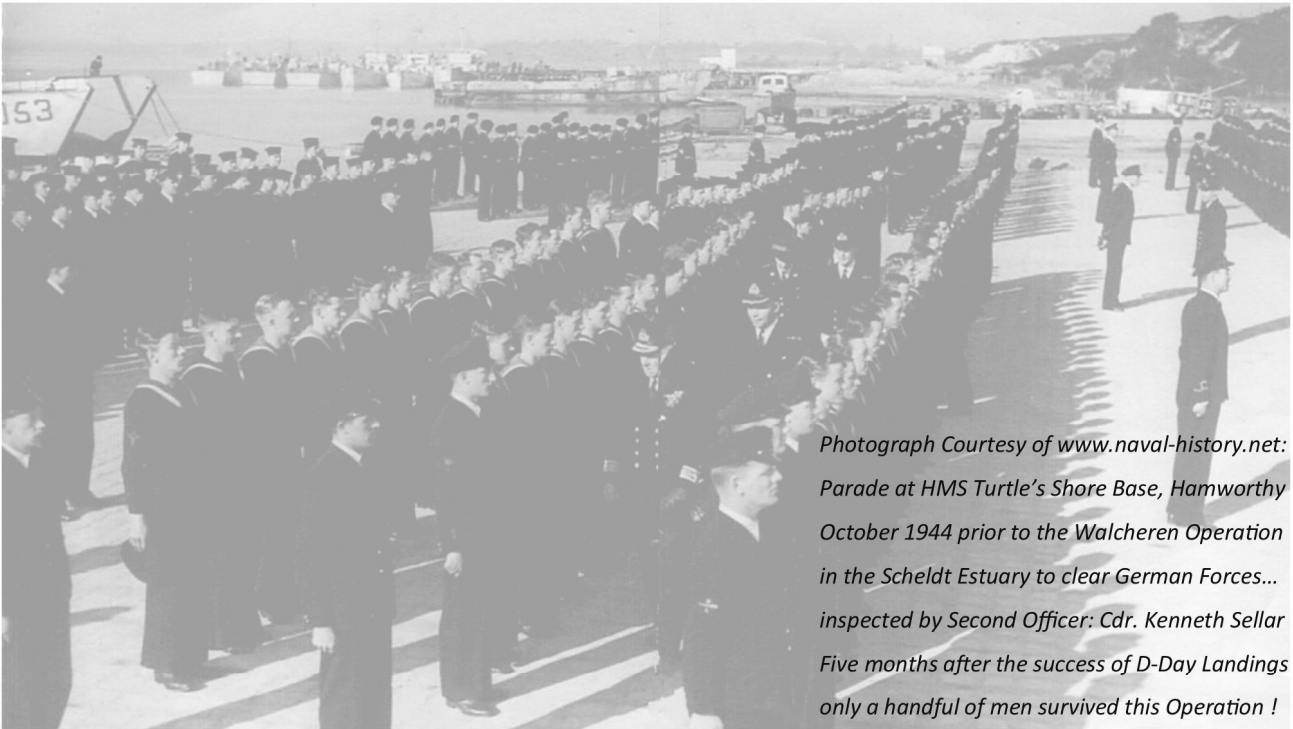
Courtesy of PFBC HLM Harold Bennett

Photo Eyes Right: 'March Past' of HMS Turtle HQs in the Lake District of Hamworthy, home to former RAF Hamworthy, which had closed prior to 1944... HMS Turtle was spread over a relatively large area and with sub-stations dotted around the Harbour !

"Amidst this, the merchant trade of the port carried on without interruption even if sometimes at inconvenience."

"4th. June... The fleet sailed in spite of everything, 320 vessels of all sizes, for the most part in the hands of young and inexperienced officers and crews."

Lieut. H.M Linehan *op cit*



Photograph Courtesy of www.naval-history.net:
 Parade at HMS Turtle's Shore Base, Hamworthy
 October 1944 prior to the Walcheren Operation
 in the Scheldt Estuary to clear German Forces...
 inspected by Second Officer: Cdr. Kenneth Sellar
 Five months after the success of D-Day Landings
 only a handful of men survived this Operation !

Highspot of Jeanne's 2nd Poole posting came with *VE-Day* when in the evening she was part of a crowd that went to a fun fair in Poole recalling that she rode in a large swing boat, and enjoyed the lights for a first time in 6 years:

"It was wonderful !"

Jeanne Hudleston *ibid*

"Finally, VE-Day Free beer, free gangway, free for all. Warm pleasant day, good natured jollification everywhere."

"The Poole Navy had done its duty."

Lieut. H.M Linehan *op cit*



Photograph left: One of the Street Parties held in Poole as part of the Festivities to Celebrate *VE-Day*, 8th. May, whilst ships at Poole Quay were bedecked with bunting. (see Poole History Online for photographs of the vessels moored at Poole Quay)
 Photo courtesy of *Dorset Life*: 'Cider's Poole' April 2012 by Mark Vine, about his grandfather Tom 'Cider' Vine...



Photograph right: Splendid Street Party in Bournemouth as part of Festivities to Celebrate *VJ-Day*, 15th. August: Held at Wheaton Rd. it attracted lots of local residents, who enjoyed their food, with impromptu fun & games ! In the USA *VJ-Day* isn't commemorated until 2nd. Sept., the date of the formal signing of the surrender by Japan

The Festivities of *VE-Day* (8th. May) was not the last occasion for Celebration at Poole as crowds turned-out again in full with the acclamation of *VJ-Day* (15th. August), yet Poole's largest turnout followed on **17/18th. September 1945**: This was the return via **RAF Transport Command Sunderland** of the first former **Prisoners of War** held by the Japanese when tens of thousands upon Poole Quay, celebrated the arrival of the **BOAC Launch** bringing the first men ashore !
 On Christmas Eve Jeanne Robotham was posted to Malta as PA to The Chief of Staff, before being demobbed in 1947.
 (Aimée - with acknowledgement to Harold Bennett ~ also Ian Andrews, Brian Galpin, Robin Moy and David Warhurst)