

# HMS CAROLINE

AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR



The Betty McCabe Story



**HMS CAROLINE**  
BELFAST

**After the First World War, HMS Caroline was deployed to the East Indies and later made her way to Belfast to serve as a drill ship for the newly formed Ulster Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.**

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, and unfit to travel at sea, Caroline became a Northern Ireland Depot Ship to an anti-submarine striking force of vessels.

When Germany took control of French ports, all shipping was directed around the north of the island of Ireland, making Belfast and HMS Caroline even more important. She acted as a hub for signalling and cypher for 70 vessels in support of merchant convoys.

Following the outbreak of war, the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) was re-formed. 50 women from across Belfast enlisted during the first year of war. **Betty McCabe** followed soon afterwards. Wrens, as they were commonly known, took on a variety of roles from radio operators to meteorologists, as well as maintaining small craft, patrol boats and aircraft.

This Key Stage 3 education resource explores Betty's story through her own words, her reasons for enlisting, her duties, the impact of the Blitz in Britain and her life post-war.

Visit HMS Caroline today and learn all about how the cruiser played an important role during the Second World War.

[www.hmscaroline.co.uk](http://www.hmscaroline.co.uk)



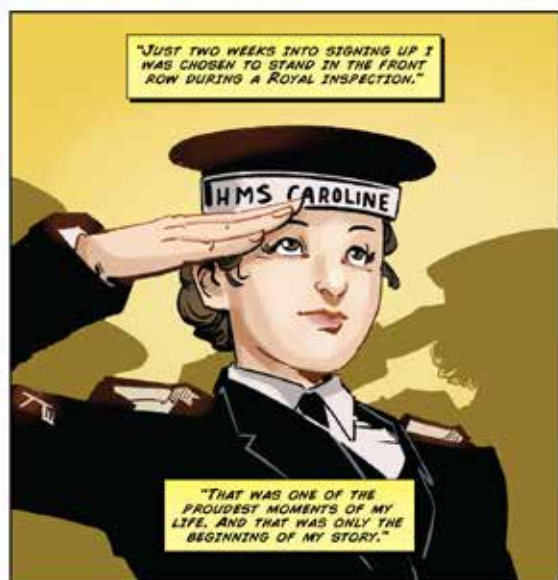
**HMS CAROLINE**  
BELFAST

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**The National Lottery**  
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Comic designed by:







"I WAS ATTACHED TO HMS CAROLINE AS A MAINTENANCE WREN..."

"...AND I WASN'T ALONE."



"THE BLITZ HAD AN IMPACT ON MANY WOMEN AROUND BELFAST. SOME OF MY FRIENDS JOINED THE WRENS TOO."

"SADIE AND MARGARET CHARGED THE BATTERIES FOR THE TRAWLERS. GERTIE AND YERA WERE ON THE BOAT'S CREW. WINNIE WAS A TORPEDO WREN WHO WORKED IN THE DEPTH CHARGE SHOP AND PEG CHECKED THE PROPULSION OF THE TORPEDOES!"



"I REMEMBER MY ROUTINE WELL... I CHECKED IN TO THE WRENNERY AT EAST POLLOCK DOCK EACH MORNING, THEN CAUGHT 'LIBERTY' BOAT OYER TO WEST POLLOCK DOCK WITH GERTIE AND YERA ALONG WITH THE SAILORS. I HAD TO CLIMB DOWN A STEEP LADDER TO ACCESS THE BOAT. IF THE TIDE WAS LOW, IT WAS A LONG WAY DOWN. IF THE TIDE WAS HIGH, THE WATER WAS MUCH DEEPER, SO I HAD TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO FALL IN!"

"I WAS PICKED UP BY THE SAME 'LIBERTY' BOAT AT LUNCHTIME AND AGAIN AT 5PM WHEN DUTY FINISHED."

"OUR MAIN DUTIES WERE CHARGING BANKS OF BATTERIES AS WELL AS MAINTAINING THEM USING A HYDROMETER AND DISTILLED WATER. SOMETTIMES WE EVEN ENDED UP WITH HOLES IN OUR TROUSERS BECAUSE OF ACID SPILLS."

"THEN WE'D ENSURE THE ELECTRICAL CONTACTS IN THE WHEELHOUSE WERE IN WORKING ORDER..."

"THEY WERE LONG DAYS..."

"EVERYTHING HAPPENED SO FAST AFTER WE JOINED UP. OUR LIVES CHANGED DRAMATICALLY. IN THOSE FIRST WEEKS, AS WELL AS THE ROYAL VISIT, WE DRILLED IN ROWING AND WERE TAKEN DOWN BELFAST LOUGH ON A TRAWLER."



"I WAS PRESENT ONCE FOR GUN TESTS ON THE EASTCOTES TRAWLER. I HAD TO HAVE MY EARS SYRINGED THE NEXT MORNING! IT WAS THE ONLY TIME I HAD TO ATTEND THE SICK BAY ON HMS CAROLINE!"

"IT WAS OVERWHELMING LEARNING SO MUCH SO QUICKLY..."



"...EVEN MORE OVERWHELMING WAS THE RATIONING! US GIRLS WOULD HEAD DOWN TO POLLOCK DOCK TO THE NAVAL, ARMY AND AIR FORCE INSTITUTES (NAAFI) CANTEEN."

"WE DIDN'T GET MUCH, JUST THE TYPICAL FOOD STUFFS - MEAT CUTS, BUTTER, MARGARINE, COOKING FAT, BACON, SUGAR, CHEESE, EGGS AND TEA. AND THAT WAS FOR THE WHOLE WEEK!"



"THEY HAD CHOCOLATE IN THE NAAFI AND IT COST TWO PENCE, BUT IT WAS ONLY FOR THE SAILORS."



"WITH A LITTLE BIT OF PERSUASION YOU COULD EGG ON THE MANAGER TO SELL YOU A BAR. CHOCOLATE BARS WERE BIG AND THICK THEN - NOT LIKE THE SKIMPY BARS YOU GET NOW! IT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF OUR WEEK TO GET SOMETHING LIKE THAT."



"IN MAY 1942 THINGS WERE TO CHANGE EVEN MORE..."

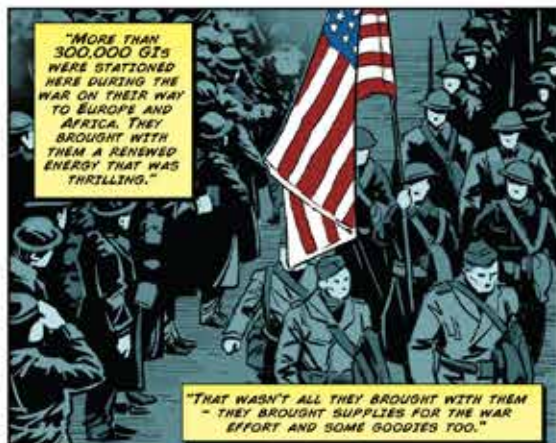


LOOK! WHO COULD THAT BE?

I KNOW WHAT THAT IS...



"WE DASHED ACROSS CLARENDON DOCK AND THERE WAS A SHIP SITTING HIGH IN THE WATER. IT LOOKED LIKE IT HAD 3 OR 4 DECKS WITH FORTHOLES EVERYWHERE, CRAMMED WITH AMERICAN SOLDIERS."



"MORE THAN 300,000 GIs WERE STATIONED HERE DURING THE WAR ON THEIR WAY TO EUROPE AND AFRICA. THEY BROUGHT WITH THEM A RENEWED ENERGY THAT WAS THRILLING."

"THAT WASN'T ALL THEY BROUGHT WITH THEM - THEY BROUGHT SUPPLIES FOR THE WAR EFFORT AND SOME GOODIES TOO."



"WHEN THE AMERICAN SHIPS CAME IN, THE ONES ON WEE BOATS WOULD GET TINS OF FRUIT FROM THE SAILORS. WE HAD SUCH A GOOD TIME IN THE 'WRENNERY' WITH ALL THE GOODIES THAT WE HADN'T SEEN BEFORE."



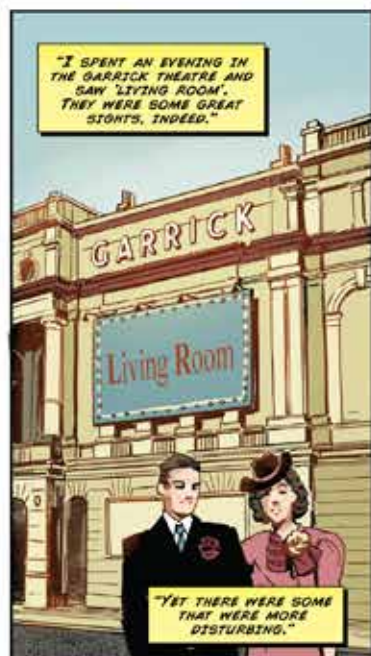
"THE AMERICANS WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO GOT TO TRAVEL... I LEFT FOR LONDON ON LEAVE IN '43. I STAYED IN THE GATEHOUSE AT SANDHURST."



"FROM MY WINDOW I COULD SEE OFFICERS TRAINING IN THE PARADE GROUND."



"I EVEN SAW A 'DOODLEBUG' V1 BOMB ON ITS WAY TO LONDON!"



"I SPENT AN EVENING IN THE GARRICK THEATRE AND SAW 'LIVING ROOM'. THEY WERE SOME GREAT SIGHTS, INDEED."

"YET THERE WERE SOME THAT WERE MORE DISTURBING."

"I SAW A LOT OF THE  
AFTERMATH OF THE  
LONDON BLITZ TOO."



"ALL THE SIGHTS REMINDED ME OF ROME...  
WHEN I WAS YOUNGER... ALL THE DEVASTATION...  
IT BROUGHT BACK THE HORRIBLE MEMORIES...  
AND REMINDED ME WHY I JOINED THE WRENS."



"IT WAS ALL SO  
HORRIFYING, I  
KNEW THAT PEOPLE  
NEEDED UPLIFTING."

"THAT'S PART OF  
THE REASON I TOOK  
UP SINGING."

"I BEGAN SINGING AT TRAWLERMEN CONCERTS QUITE EARLY ON AND WAS DUBBED 'MINESWEEPER'S SWEETHEART'. I REMEMBER I WORE A CRIMSON TYPE BRIDESMAID DRESS AND SANG A DUET WITH TOM McCAULEY. HE WAS A FAMOUS IRISH FOLKLORE SINGER AND MUSIC TEACHER, FOR WHOM I HAD TO GET SPECIAL PERMISSION TO ENTER THE DOCKYARD."



"TIS THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER LEFT BLOOMING ALONE"

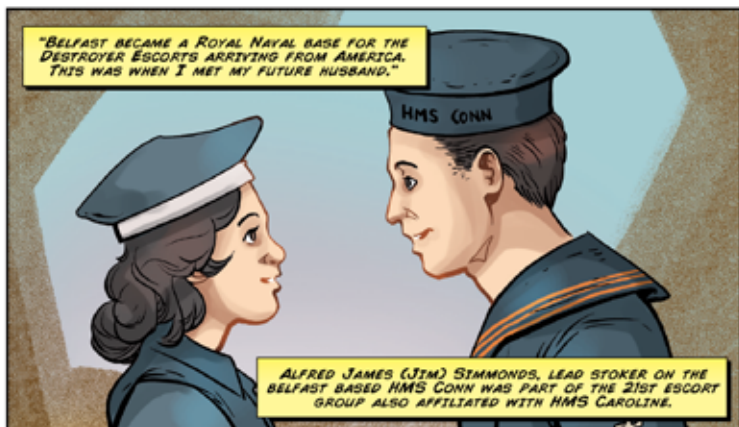
ALL HER LOVELY COMPANIONS ARE FADED AND GONE... NO FLOWER OF HER KINDRED, NO ROSEBUD IS NIGH... TO REFLECT BACK HER BLUSHES AND GIVE SIGH FOR SIGH...

"AROUND THE SAME TIME, THE E.N.S.A. (ENTERTAINMENT NATIONAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION) PUT ON SHOWS FOR THE THOUSANDS OF SAILORS WHO SERVED ON THE RUSSIAN CONVOYS AND ACROSS THE ATLANTIC. THESE SHOWS, IN WHICH I ALSO TOOK PART, BROUGHT TOP STARS TO BELFAST. I JOINED THE ROYAL NAVAL CHOIR TOO!"



"I LOVED THOSE DAYS!"

"BELFAST BECAME A ROYAL NAVAL BASE FOR THE DESTROYER ESCORTS ARRIVING FROM AMERICA. THIS WAS WHEN I MET MY FUTURE HUSBAND."



ALFRED JAMES (JIM) SIMMONDS, LEAD STOKER ON THE BELFAST BASED HMS CONN WAS PART OF THE 21ST ESCORT GROUP ALSO AFFILIATED WITH HMS CAROLINE.

HMS CONN TOOK PART IN ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL NAVAL CONFRONTATIONS IN THE WAR...

## Belfast-Based Ships' Three Kills in One Patrol

### BELFAST-BASED FRIGATES AS U-BOAT KILLERS

SIX frigates, the leader of which was sporting the "Jolly Roger," sailed into Belfast Lough in the early part of April. They were not pirate ships, but a naval escort group, and the "Jolly Roger" was flying in celebration of the "Jolly Roger" in enemy U-boat destruction, the group was on patrol for three days after many were searching the North Atlantic.



SHIPS INCLUDING HMS CONN DESTROYED 3 ENEMY U-BOATS IN APRIL 1945 AND RETURNED TO BELFAST FLYING THE JOLLY ROGER FLAG...

"TOWARDS THE END OF THE WAR, I CHANGED ROLES AND TOOK UP A POST IN THE SIGNALS DISTRIBUTION OFFICE, WHICH WAS PART OF THE BELFAST SIGNAL STATION AT BELFAST CASTLE. I SPENT THE REST OF MY SERVICE HERE TAKING MESSAGES."



SOMETHING WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

"NOT LONG AFTER THAT, I REMEMBER SEEING THE SHIPS LINED UP READY TO LEAVE FOR D-DAY. SOME SAID THAT YOU COULD HAVE WALKED ACROSS FROM BANGOR TO LARNE ON ALL THE TRAWLERS, AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, BATTLESHIPS, CRUISERS AND DESTROYERS STATIONED IN BELFAST LOUGH."



"I WAS ON DUTY THE NIGHT OF 4 JUNE 1944 AND WAITED FOR THE SIGNAL FROM REAR ADMIRAL BEVAN (FLAG OFFICER IN CHARGE OF NORTHERN IRELAND). THE NEXT DAY I LOOKED OUT, AND ALL THE SHIPS HAD WENT AWAY IN THE NIGHT. IT WAS SO STRANGE TO SEE THE SEA SO ABSOLUTELY EMPTY. IT WAS SO SILENT, SO QUIET..."



6 JUNE 1944

...D-DAY HAD BEGUN!

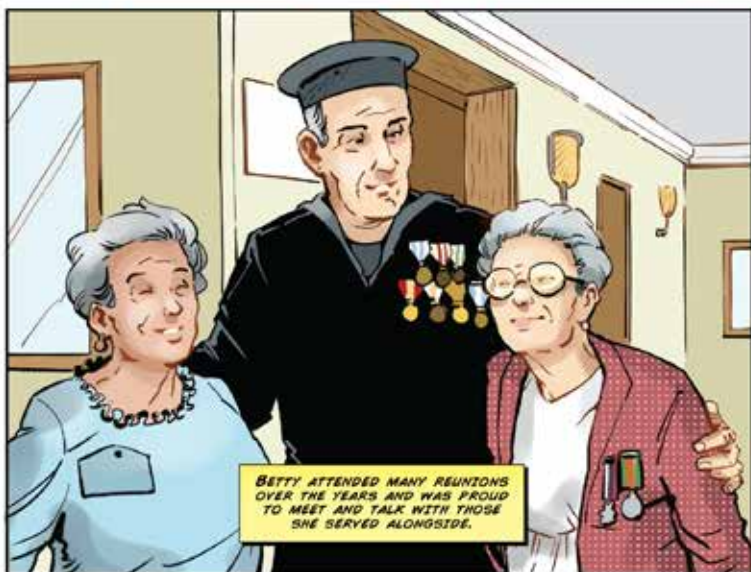


THE HUGE EFFORT OF THE D-DAY LANDINGS IN NORMANDY PAID OFF. ALMOST A YEAR LATER BELFAST WAS CELEBRATING VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY. CROWDS OF PEOPLE TOOK TO THE STREETS OF BELFAST TO CELEBRATE THE MOMENTOUS OCCASION.



"JIM AND I WERE MARRIED IN 1946 AT CRUMLTN ROAD METHODIST CHURCH. WE LIVED IN ENGLAND FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS BEFORE EVENTUALLY MOVING BACK TO NORTHERN IRELAND IN 1973. JIM DIED IN 1986."





BETTY ATTENDED MANY REUNIONS OVER THE YEARS AND WAS PROUD TO MEET AND TALK WITH THOSE SHE SERVED ALONGSIDE.



BETTY VISITED HMS CAROLINE FOR THE LAST TIME IN 2006 DURING AN OPEN DAY. SHE PASSED AWAY IN DECEMBER OF THAT SAME YEAR, AGED 85.

...THE END.

# TIMELINE



**2 FEBRUARY 1924**

HMS Caroline towed from Portsmouth and taken to Harland & Wolff in Belfast to be converted into a drill ship for use by the Ulster Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR).



**1939-1945**

Moved from her berth in the Musgrave Channel to Milewater Basin, acting as a base depot for ship trawlers, drifters and other small craft.



**1 OCTOBER 1946**

Reinstated as a drill ship for the newly reinstated RNVR Ulster Division.



**2009**

The Ulster Division move to Thiepval Barracks, recommissioned as HMS Hibernia.



**31 MARCH 2011**

HMS Caroline decommissioned and her ensign laid up in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. The National Museum of the Royal Navy took responsibility of the ship in April 2011.



**JUNE 2016**

HMS Caroline opened to the public as a floating museum.



## DID YOU KNOW...

### Pre-war

Betty worked in Ewart's Linen Factory. In 1941 it was one of the many buildings damaged in the Belfast Blitz. Soon afterwards, Betty signed up to the WRNS and worked in Mackies factory while waiting to be called up.

### Changing Roles

At first, single women and widows without children, and aged between 19 and 30 were called up, although this was later pushed out to 43 years old. As the war progressed and the navy expanded, so too did the Wrens, taking on new tasks the Royal Navy once thought they were incapable of doing.



### **Beam**

41 feet 6 inches / 12.7 metres



### **Weight**

3,750 tons



### **Cost**

Construction of Caroline cost more than £300,000, around £300m today



### **Wrens**

Formed in 1917, later disbanded and re-formed in 1939 after outbreak of Second World War



### **Numbers**

5,000 women had served by the end of the First World War. At the peak of the Second World War there were 75,000 members



### **Fatalities**

First Wren to die was Josephine Carr from Cork in 1918, on board RMS Leinster. An 18 year old Wren died of illness on HMS Caroline during Second World War

# THE SECOND WORLD WAR & THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The Battle of the Atlantic began in 1939 and would be a major military campaign throughout the Second World War. It was centred on controlling shipping lanes and, as Caroline was not seaworthy, she became a Northern Ireland Depot Ship to an anti-submarine striking force of vessels.

After France fell in 1940, Germany took control of French ports meaning all shipping was directed around the north of the island of Ireland, making HMS Caroline and Belfast more important. Caroline acted as a hub for signalling and cypher for 70 vessels in support of merchant convoys.

In 1943, HMS Caroline became the strategic operations base for a force of Destroyers and Corvettes protecting convoys in the North Atlantic. Operations were planned and conducted directly from Caroline where a total of six escort groups, each composed of six frigates, were controlled.

## Wrens

The Women's Royal Naval Service (popularly known as the Wrens) was the women's branch of the Royal Navy. Revived after the First World War, slogans to encourage women to enlist during the Second World War included: 'Join the Wrens - free a man for the fleet.'

Wrens took on roles as meteorologists, cooks, clerks, electricians, weapon analysts and mechanics. They also maintained small craft, patrol boats and aircraft. After the Second World War, Wrens continued on active service before finally being integrated into the Royal Navy.



### Contact HMS Caroline

if you would like to organise a learning visit to the ship themed around Betty McCabe's story and the role of HMS Caroline in the Second World War.

[www.hmscaroline.co.uk](http://www.hmscaroline.co.uk)



## RECRUITMENT POSTER

Students will design a poster encouraging women to enlist with the Wrens during the Second World War. The recruitment of women was a strategic move in attempting to secure victory in the conflict. Examine the different types of posters and slogans used at the time, including the portrayal of women, and think about how wording would have been used.

**i TIP:** Include a mixture of imagery and text in your design.

### Key Stage 3 Curriculum Links

Key Elements	Cross Curricular Skills	Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities	Areas of Learning
Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding; Moral Character; Citizenship; Cultural Understanding; Media Awareness; Ethical Awareness	Communication; Using ICT	Managing Information; Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making; Being Creative; Working with Others	The Arts; English (with Media Education); Environment & Society



## NEWSPAPER

Students will use digital imaging software to develop a newspaper front page reporting on the Belfast Blitz. The Blitz occurred in 1941 when German air raids targeted strategic locations in the city. It was one of the deciding factors in Betty McCabe enlisting with the Wrens. Research the impact that the Belfast Blitz had on the city and its people. Your newspaper should have a headline and a number of stories recalling different aspects of the attack.

**i TIP:** Research newspaper coverage from the time for inspiration.

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## FILM

Students will use filmmaking software to tell a story of the Wrens and their involvement during the Second World War. Students will work in small groups, research the various activities undertaken by serving women and develop a short film that conveys some of the main roles, responsibilities and achievements. Your film should include a mixture of images with text or a voiceover to convey your findings.

**i TIP:** Watch the 'Wrens of HMS Caroline' Oral History Film on YouTube about life as a Wren.

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