



Sheila relaxing in uniform, 1944.

Sheila (Orr) Gribble

In 1944, when Sheila Orr turned eighteen, she knew exactly what she wanted to do. A romantic, patriotic girl from Toronto who spent her summers on the Muskoka lakes, she had always wanted to join the navy, and when she was old enough, she became a Wren.

Basic training involved marching, discipline, and learning about naval history and traditions. At HMCS *Cornwallis* in Halifax, she received duty-specific training from the naval official she would replace, enabling him to go to sea and fight in the war. Sheila worked in the Action Room of the Wheelhouse – the training facility nerve centre with an artificial horizon that imitated the position of a convoy to practice ship and submarine tracking, identification, and sinking.

Sheila worked in the Action Room for two shifts every day that corresponded with the times that the ship's company came in to train. When asked what a Wren did in the Action Room, she laughingly replied, "What she's told." Sheila remembers using SONAR, back then called ASTIC, to track the position of a ship and send a submarine to "wreak havoc" on it.

Sheila thoroughly enjoyed her time as a Wren, and "life was good": there were always new things to learn, the work was exciting, and the base was fully equipped with amenities. In addition, Wrens constantly received positive reinforcement from their superiors and reminded of how important their work was to the War effort.

Her best memory from being in the Wrens happened on V-J Day, 1945, which also happened to be her birthday. That day, a huge party at HMCS *Stadacona* celebrated the end of the War, where a large crowd joined hands in a snake dance.

When the war ended, Sheila was desolate, not knowing what to do next. Navy-subsidised education at Queen's University was the best answer, where she met her husband. Sheila remembers her brief time as a Wren as a "wonderful, stimulating time," during which she developed lasting friendships.



Sheila standing proudly in front of the Wrens commemorative poster at the Archives and Collections Society, 2010.