

## CLAIRE'S STORY

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### Prologue

Claire Dymant was born on New Year's Day of 1918 at the city of Międzyrzec Podlaski (מעזריטש *Mezri'tsh*), Lublin Voivodeship, Poland. At the time of her birth it was formally in Russia. Some 45 miles west of Brest and 85 miles east of Warsaw, it lies not far west from the border with Belarus. It is on the rail route from Moscow to Warsaw<sup>1</sup>.

The first official mention of Międzyrzec Podlaski as a town dates back to about the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. A period of peace and prosperity ended in about the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century when it was raided by Cossacks. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century it had been home to a large Jewish community.

From 1795 to 1918 Poland was split between Germany, Austria and Russia and had no independence finally coming under the control of the Russian Czar. At the end of WW1 in November 1918 the town became part of the reborn Republic of Poland whose independence was confirmed through the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. At the end of the 1930s approximately 12,000 inhabitants, or ¾ of its population, were Jewish. Fewer than 1% of the Jewish population of the city survived the Holocaust.

In 1939, during the Nazi–Soviet Invasion of Poland (1 September), the city was overrun by the Wehrmacht on 13 September, and ceded to the Russians on 25 September, in accordance with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (23 August). Two weeks later, it was transferred back to Germany after the new Boundary Treaty.

### Family

Claire was the 10th child and 5th daughter of Manisz Dymant b. 1876 at MP and Rejzla Limoner b. 1880 at MP. She was the last child born 'in Russia'.

After 1918 the family moved to Leipzig<sup>2</sup> and were there by 1920/23 where and when the last two children, two girls, were born.

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<sup>1</sup> It was passed through by this author in a train in May 1967. It had become a stop on the Polish Railway in 1867.

<sup>2</sup> There had been a Jewish population in Leipzig since at least 1349.

Her mother died there in late November 1931. She left behind 10 of her 12 children (5 sons and 7 daughters). The family history has it that Claire's father and her two younger sisters died at Warsaw in 1942/3, her older brother Gedalliah in Auschwitz in 1941 and her nephew Max in Sachsenhausen in 1941.

At the end of January 1933 life changed rapidly for the Jews of Leipzig, for both the longer assimilated citizens and the new so-called 'Russian' immigrants.

Sometime after this - by 1935 - members of the family emigrated to Israel (then the British Mandate of Palestine) and it is believed that at some time Claire also went there. Later, probably by sometime in 1938, Claire moved to Britain, probably directly by ship. On 26 June 1939 she married Francis Charles Jarrett (also born in 1918) of Poplar, London, who was then a lorry driver and motor fitter. In so doing Claire acquired British National status which was most important for her, given the high possibility of another forthcoming European War.

### **Jarrett's War**

After the war began in September 1939 her husband was called up and joined the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC). By 1941 he had become a casualty/prisoner of war according to his Red Cross record. In time he was gradually moved east, finally reaching the prisoner of war (POW) camp Stalag VIII B at Teschen<sup>3</sup>. From late January 1945 he endured one of the terrible forced POW winter marches west to Nuremberg in southern Germany.

In April 1946 Claire and her husband divorced. He married again and died in 1989.

### **Claire's War**

In December 1941 the British National Government introduced conscription for women. On 17 August 1942 in London Claire enlisted in the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force – Service Number: 2130888).

She underwent her initial WAAF training – spit and polish, military discipline etc., and also testing for personal and technical skills – at RAF Bridgnorth from 28 August (No. 1 WAAF Depot, a first site for recruits – created on 6 Nov 1939) and then RAF Morecambe (No. 3 WAAF Depot). She was most fortunate to do her outdoor training at Morecambe in the summer! It is likely that she had already been marked for her final destination, probably from the time of her first interview. Her joining the WAAF had very possibly been delayed because of extra security checks. Her service record carries a security note, in capitals, about not moving her without higher authority.

On 9 October 1942, after 6 weeks, she arrived at RAF Kingsdown in Kent where she was placed on their staff roster<sup>4</sup>. Kingsdown was by then a major part of the RAF Y-Service

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<sup>3</sup> Český Těšín, Czechslovakia – Ciesyn in Polish

<sup>4</sup> In joining the Y-Service Claire became, in essence, an 'employee' of Bletchley Park and, in essence, an 'employee' of the SIS. She later married an actual wartime agent of the SIS – Joseph Scheinmann aka André Peulevey.

signal intercept structure, collating intercepted German Air Force (GAF) – particularly fighter aircraft – Radio Telephony (R/T) messages from a number of stations, called Home Defence Units (HDUs), on the south and east coasts of England.

*Wireless operators, many of them civilians, but also service personnel – in particular WRNS (females-Navy), WAAF (females-Air Force) and ATS (females-Army) – tracked the enemy radio signals across the frequencies, carefully logging every letter or figure. The messages were then sent to Bletchley Park, then the HQ of the SIS/MI6 Government Code & Cypher School (GC&CS)<sup>5</sup>, to be deciphered, translated and fused together to produce as complete an intelligence picture as possible of what the enemy was doing. This ‘fusion’ of Y-Service messages with the high-grade ENIGMA decrypts was vital in the deciphering process. The ‘Traffic Analysis’ (numbers, times, places) of the Y-Service messages was also an important added value to that done for the ENIGMA messages. A lot of intelligence could be worked out from what the radio operators were saying to each other and their locations could be tracked down using radio direction-finding equipment. But most of the important messages were in code or cipher and had to be decrypted. The Y-Service Signals Intelligence (now known as COMINT) was an important integral part of Bletchley Park’s operations to produce Signals Intelligence (now known as SIGINT). SIGINT was a vital part of the intelligence sent to the military services for day to day operations and to the relevant British Intelligence organisations, in particular the Combined Intelligence Section (CIS) in London which collated all the intelligence used for the planning of the D-Day Operation Overlord<sup>6</sup>.*

### **Claire’s Postings**

After about a year at Kingsdown, on 10 August 1943, Claire was recorded as posted to ‘Great Yarmouth’ (Norfolk). This was actually a posting to RAF Gorleston – a HDU on the North Sea Coast. At that location, she was one of the female operators involved in ‘Operation Corona’. First discussed in concept in mid 1943 and described in official documents as a “spoofing and jamming operation”, Corona started ‘at’ Kingsdown on the night of 22/23 October 1943 on a RAF bomber raid on the industrial centre of Kassel and caused immediate “chaos in the enemy night defence organisation”. The operation persisted into 1945. Impersonating Luftwaffe operators, top level ‘native’ German linguists like Claire redirected, incorrectly, German fighter pilots in the midst of RAF bombing missions<sup>7</sup>.

In April 1944, after a short return to Kingsdown, she was posted briefly to RAF Coltishall (Norfolk, not far from Gorleston). It is thought that there she acted as an interpreter for the first arrival of the Polish Air Force, the 316 “City of Warsaw” squadron, newly operating with North American P51-B Mustangs.

On Sunday 4 June 1944 she is recorded as officially back at Kingsdown. This was the day before the original date for D-Day and Operation Overlord. It finally went ahead, successfully, on Tuesday 6 June.

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<sup>5</sup> Bletchley Park: Hut 3 - Intelligence and Hut 6 - Decryption

<sup>6</sup> Based substantially on Information from Bletchley Park

<sup>7</sup> Female operators were used first on the night of November 25/26 1943.

The V1-flying bomb attacks on Britain started on 13 June 1944. On 20 July 1944 Kingsdown was accidentally hit by a stray V1 which caused some damage but no fatalities.

On 8 August 1944 Claire is recorded as having been posted to a station called RAF Canterbury. This planned move was designed to position their VHF receivers closer to the continent as the battle moved further inland in France.

This date was also the date of the start of the operations to finally break out of Normandy. The Falaise Pocket was closed on 17 August and Paris was liberated on 25 August.

It is still not clear to researchers where the 'Canterbury station' was but it is thought probable - but this is not yet known definitely - that this was *then* a cover name for the HDU site at RAF Hawkinge, near Folkestone, the original station of the operators who had moved to Kingsdown in the summer of 1940.

Claire remained there until 7 August 1945 when she had a short term posting to RAF Chigwell in Essex prior to being officially released. She was given a 'Category A' release – 'services no longer required and not liable for a recall' – on 14 September 1945, effective on 9 November 1945.

For her war services she was awarded the British War Medal.

She had indeed come some way from the time and place of her birth. She had given her new country valuable service in a time of its very great need. Her life would soon take a new and very happy turn.

### **Claire's WAAF Classifications & Ranks & Trades**

*(as best understood)*

ACW2 - Aircraftwoman 2 - Clerk General Duties at enlistment

ACW1 - Aircraftwoman 1 – 'Acting' Sergeant – Clerk Signals

by the end of 1943

LACW - Leading Aircraftwoman – 'Temporary' Sergeant – Clerk Signals Linguist

by the end of 1944

*(In this terminology Temporary means that this is a wartime rank)*



1939 Passport - 1950 Passport

War Photo as Sergeant

WAAF Eagle Symbol





British 1939/45 War Medal



Bletchley Park Veteran's Badge  
to which she would have been entitled

# Government Communication Headquarters

## GCHQ Badge

to which she would have been entitled



## Acknowledgements

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Particular thanks are also due to Diana Mara Henry, editor of André Joseph Scheinmann's memoirs - *Call me André* – and keeper of his flame, for telling me about this story and encouraging and helping me to tell it as part of the overall family story in WW2. An amazing combined story of how two immigrants, from Germany to France and Poland to Britain, delivered most valuable service to British Secret Intelligence.

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Any other publication or re-publication requests should be addressed to Diana Henry [www.dianamarahenry.com](http://www.dianamarahenry.com) as the author of the forthcoming book ***Call Me André***.