

ARMED

TERRY SUTTON

RAIDERS at the Castle

*The Story
of the day
when a
young Wren
helped in
the capture
of heavily
defended
Dover Castle
at the end
of the
1939-45 war.*

*As told by
an old soldier,
Ken Fleet,
of Deal, who
was working
in the
underground
complex
at the time.*

IT WAS DECEMBER 1943 and Ken was on duty that night He had been driven, with others, through the cordon of sentries to get into the network of grey-green, rough-hewn, chalk underground tunnels leading to Combined Headquarters beneath the Castle.

Ken recalls: "Off the main tunnels were the Signals Centre offices with trim Wrens in navy blue skirts and white blouses and ATS and WAAF in their smart uniforms. All were busy as bees carrying messages, recording signals and typing on teleprinter keyboards. The ringing of telephones and the background of printer keys gave the impression of business-like efficiency. Wireless receivers were lined up on either side of the tunnel. All communication with distant stations - usually at Portsmouth - was by five-letter cipher in morse code. Small wonder then that when a door was flung open in the middle of the night, and a couple of men stepped quickly inside and ordered us to get away from our keyboards, that we took some time to react. The intruders were armed with sub-machine guns, had darkened faces and had the conventional woollen caps of raiders."

Who were they? And what were they doing in such a heavily defended communications centre? They were Royal Marines from Deal staging an exercise to test the castle's security.

Ken says it took some time before the raiders could persuade the operators to line up in a group. By then, he says, they had realised the intruders were 'on our side'. Perhaps they would have moved with more alacrity if their uniforms had been German army grey!

But how did they get in? Ken says it is only recently he discovered what happened. He says a former Leading Wren, Sheila Jennings, née Leuty, was the key to the success of this amazing infiltration.

She had been instructed to carry out an unobtrusive 'recce' of the castle, well in advance, and she discovered a gap below a well-secured door that led into the castle. The gap had, apparently, been worn away by generations of booted feet and the passage on the other side was a sally port built so that defending troops could get out of their defensive positions to surprise besiegers.

She informed the leader of the Royal Marines at Deal and convinced him that, stripped of their packs and equipment, slim Marines would be able to squeeze under the secure door. And that's just what they did and how they came to surprise Combined Headquarters at Dover Castle.