

featuring Ruth Ive



Ruth Ive as she is now and, right, in the 1940s when she worked in the Postal and Telegraph Censorship



There may be many celebrity authors who live on the Suburb, but I am not aware of anyone else residing here who has achieved that rare status at the age of ninety. Ruth Ive's book, 'The Woman Who Censored Churchill' was published in Autumn 2008 and since then she has been presented to the Queen and has addressed the International Churchill Society in America – her book will be published there in March. Not bad for someone who started beavering away on an old Amstrad in the back room of her house in Oakwood Road some twenty years ago.

Ruth had to wait until 1995 when Churchill's private files were finally declassified to prove and research her story. Sadly, every one of her wartime transcriptions had long been shredded. Ruth said her work was so secret that she never received written instructions and even her fiancé was unaware of her role until the war was over.

The story that Ruth relates in her book is of her experiences in the Second World War when she joined the Government's Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department. Initially in 1940 she was reading troops' mail to ensure that they were not revealing any secrets. When she decided she would like something more exciting she applied for a job entailing telephone censorship. Her prior experience in censorship and the fact that she had verbatim shorthand made her the ideal candidate and she was duly appointed – but she did not know exactly what the job would entail until she was briefed by a rather fierce colonel. "He told me I was going to censor the calls on the transatlantic radio telephone line. I didn't know what he was talking about. I had absolutely no idea that the line existed." The background to this was that earlier in the war

all telephone cables between Britain and North America had been disconnected to prevent the Germans from intercepting important information. For the remainder of the war only one top secret transatlantic hotline existed and that was only used by Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt, senior members of both governments, as well as the military and civilian leaders of governments in exile. This was the line that Ruth and only seven others would be responsible for censoring.

Ruth was on duty in an undercover location close to St Paul's working eight hour stints with one day off in eight. During her night shifts she could take a nap on a camp bed. Before each caller was connected – even if it was the King – she had to read aloud the following warning: 'The enemy is recording your conversation and will compare it with previous information in his possession. Great discretion is necessary. Any indiscretion will be reported by the censor to the highest authority'.

Soon after completing her training she was told that Mr White wanted to talk to Mr Smith. "I wondered who on earth they were talking about, but on came Mr Churchill and the US President. Even they were both very amused to be called by those names although I thought even the dumbest German would be able to recognise their voices, especially when Mr Smith asked Mr White, "How is the colonel?" But the colonel was Roosevelt's nickname for Mrs Churchill!"

Although from the start the line was scrambled, as the war developed a more elaborate code system was introduced. "When possible, they signalled 24 hours beforehand that they wished to speak and they set out on numbered paragraphs the subject that they wished to discuss. Consequently they never mentioned the actual subject; they just referred to the number of the paragraph and went on from there."

By listening to Churchill's telephone conversations over a period of time Ruth did feel that she got to know him.

"He was enthusiastic, positive and confident. He really had the most incredible eye for detail and if he didn't get the information he needed, no matter what time of day it was, he would phone them up and ask them "What the hell?" He also had some idiosyncratic ways. One time Churchill ended his conversation with something that sounded like KBO to me. So I wrote down K, B and O. The colonel came up to me afterwards and said, "Don't you know what KBO means?" I replied, "No sir." "It means Keep Bugging On!" – and Ruth is certain that a bemused Roosevelt didn't understand the phrase either.

Ruth's book is absolutely full of interesting historical information about the Second World War matched by amusing and interesting anecdotes relating to her unique work and the people she dealt with. And yes, Ruth – 'The Woman Who Censored Churchill' – did have to do so, just the once. But to find out why and when you will have to read this superb book!

'The Woman Who Censored Churchill' is published by The History Press ([www.thehistorypress.co.uk](http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk)) and is available at Joseph's Bookstore, 1257 Finchley Road, Temple Fortune and in the Garden Suburb Gallery, Willifield Way.



'Beauty Chorus coloured telephone in the Map Room, Cabinet War Room

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