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Shortly after midnight on Tuesday, June 6th, 1944, 24,000 soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy in Northern France. What followed was the largest seaborne invasion in history. Their mission: to liberate Europe and defeat Germany. Who were these soldiers? And who worked secretly to plan the operation and ensure its success?

In this episode of On the Record, Chloe Lee speaks to colleagues Sophie Stewart and Alice Bell about the people who contributed to this operation, whose stories we may not be familiar with: a tank driver on the front line, one of the first black women in the Royal Air Force, and a femme fatale whose coded telegram saved many lives on D-Day.

Documents from The National Archives used in this episode: [WO 171/995](#), [KV 2/2098](#).

For more information about the records covered in this episode, look at our research guides to [British Army soldiers of the Second World War](#) and [Intelligence and security services](#). Read our blog, [The double agent who hid D-Day from the Nazis: Elvira Chaudoir](#). For help navigating our catalogue, you can watch our [top-level tips on using Discovery](#).

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Transcript

Chloe Lee: Shortly after midnight on Tuesday, June 6th in 1944, 24,000 soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy in Northern France, it was the largest seaborne invasion in history. Their mission: - to liberate Europe and defeat Germany.

The troops were fighting for the USA, Britain, and Canada, against the Nazis, in one of the most dramatic moments of World War Two. As ships and planes bombarded the area from sea and air, at 6.30am, the allies' amphibious vehicles landed on the beaches along with the troops.

But who were these soldiers? And who worked secretly to plan the operation and ensure its success?

I'm Chloe Lee, a Migration and Citizenship Researcher at The National Archives. I also host our podcast, On the Record at The National Archives, uncovering the past through stories of everyday people.

Known as D Day, or the Normandy landings, this operation in early June 1944 began the liberation of France, and the rest of Western Europe, laying the foundations of the Allied victory on the Western Front.

In this episode of On the Record, I want to learn about people who contributed to this operation, whose stories we may not be familiar: a tank driver, one of the first black women in the Royal Air Force, and a femme fatale whose coded telegram saved many lives on D Day.

To guide me, I've invited two guests onto the podcast who have found traces of these remarkable

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individuals among the collections we hold here at The National Archives in Kew.

Welcome to the studio, two of our education officers, Sophie Stewart and Alice Bell. Hi, guys.

Alice Bell: Hello

Sophie Stewart: Hello

Chloe: Welcome. I'm looking forward to talking through these stories with you. We are in the week of D-Day celebrations. This will be released much later. But I think it's really interesting to hear stories that we're not familiar with and Alice, I want to start with you. Whose story are we bringing?

Alice: I'm really happy to be here Chloe. I wanted to tell you about Lillian and Ramsay Bader, and they were both people of colour who served in the British forces during the war. And I really wanted to explore lesser told stories of service people, and those whose contributions had perhaps been less recognised, in the sort of traditional retelling of this history. So I'll start with telling you a bit about Ramsey. He was born in Chiswick and his father was from Sierra Leone. His mother was white British, and Ramsay was actually adopted at a young age and brought up in Essex. Ramsay faced quite a bit of difficulty finding employment due to racist discrimination. He worked in one of his adopted father's factories, but when war broke out, in 1939, he felt really compelled to fight. I think this was quite a personal thing for Ramsay because he'd heard about the racism of the Nazi regime. He recalls hearing about the treatment of Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics. So he felt really...

Chloe: And Jesse Owens, he made a stand didn't he, a very public stand against the Nazis and their

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regime at the Olympics, didn't he?

Alice: Yeah that's right, and clearly this had an impact on Ramsay. He felt very strongly about wanting to enlist when war broke out. Despite the fact both his adoptive parents were actually pacifists, so that was sort of the attitude when he was growing up. But he does go on and enlist and he ends up being a tank driver in the 147th Essex Yeomanry field regiment despite having never driven before joining the army.

Chloe: I assumed that would have been the case for quite a few of the people that were enlisting at that time.

Alice: Yeah, I imagine it must have been quite, quite terrifying.

Chloe: So Alice, what were Ramsay's experiences of D-Day itself and how do we know about them?

Alice: Well, actually, here in the archives, we have the war diary for Ramsay's regiment on the day of the D-Day Normandy landings. And what stood out for me most when looking at this specific page for the sixth of June 1944 was actually how short it was for such a significant pivotal day.

Chloe: You mean the details captured within the war diary are very scarce almost.

Alice: Yeah, it was just a few sentences but that's because war diaries are an official record, kept by military units of the activities during wartime, and the purpose is really to record information that can be later used for improving training and tactics. So another reason it was so short probably on that day is because they were really busy, so they didn't have time to record the same

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level of detail, on that day. But some of the things that are mentioned, it says “Attempt to set sail for Overlord. Overlord postponed for 24 hours owing to adverse weather conditions.” And actually, as a result of this, many soldiers had to remain on their landing crafts, for the whole time waiting to set sail. So this would have been really unpleasant due to the weather conditions.

Chloe: So you can imagine a lot of seasickness.

Alice: Oh, definitely and you know, perhaps this is something that Ramsay experienced himself.

Chloe: And so how else might we find out about Ramsay's experiences on D-Day?

Alice: Well, that's a really good question because the war diaries do give us glimpses into what it must have been like the conditions on the day. But if you really want to find out about the experiences of those who were there like Ramsay, you might need to dig a little deeper and look beyond the official military record. So you could look at things like letters and diaries and that's what I wanted to do. So that brought me to the Imperial War Museum and Ramsay had recorded an oral interview there in 1989.

Chloe: Sure and oral history interviews, they're, perhaps, like a conversation. It's a methodology that we use as historians to get a sense of people's lived experiences of the past, right?

Alice: Yeah, exactly and it's a really brilliant way to find out about someone's personal experiences and reflections. And in this interview, Ramsay does speak about some of the details that we see within the war diary, for example, there's a quote where he's talking about the conditions during the channel crossing. And in this quote, he says,

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Ramsay Bader: We by then had felt very sick, having not experienced this type of heavy swell which you get in the channel.

Alice: And some of it is pretty hard listening, because he also speaks about witnessing the terrible loss of life. And these are images that he says in the interview that he will never forget.

Ramsay: The frightening part was to see so many of the infantry shot down, blown up by mines, helpless in the sense that you couldn't rescue them because your duty was to get in and establish that bridgehead which was finally done. Later I suppose other LCTs would have helped wounded and those that were killed. This to me, would seem something that you never forget.

Chloe: So yeah, I mean, we're hearing from Sophie, that some reactions to that, how does that make you feel that kind of recollection from Ramsay?

Sophie Stewart: It's so moving to be actually on the front and hearing that, but I mean, he mentioned LCTs, do you know what they are? I didn't, I didn't know what it is.

Alice: So those are the landing crafts, in this case landing craft tanks.

Chloe: So that's the amphibious vehicles.

Alice: Exactly. And he also speaks about how lucky he felt to have survived and there's another quote that I think is also really poignant.

Ramsay: We may as I say have been lucky, we could have hit a mine but luckily, we made it. We

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kept going and well I am here today, to think that I am one of the lucky ones.

Chloe: Is so interesting, because we hear lucky so much in these testimonials from service people and we've been hearing them a lot this week. And it just reminds you how small people are in that kind of theatre of war, but also how important it is to revisit these stories going beyond the war diaries to hear from them in their own voice like the oral history interview, right.

So we've talked about the war diaries here at The National Archives, we've talked about the Imperial War museums oral history archive. What are the limitations with sources like this when we're trying to investigate this history?

Alice: That's a really good question. I think it just highlights the importance of using lots of different types of sources, different types of records. So for example, here at the National Archives, because we were the official government archive, I always think it's really important that we sort of fill in the gaps of what's on the official record. And we might, especially when we're researching individuals, because we might find traces of them in the official record, but to get a full picture of somebody's life and identity, you need to go beyond that.

Chloe: I also think there's something in here, maybe Sophie can speak to this about, you know, the lucky ones, the gaps, those that didn't make it and actually being able to attend to gaps and absences in the past.

Sophie: Yeah, I think with the research I've done the lens of a kind of government or people in power at least, means that none of these experiences were actually well...glimpses of, are told in those people's own words, which kind of results in this potentially quite dry narrative. So it can be really amazing to look elsewhere and get those interviews and get those oral testimonies to really

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add that kind of emotional depth to it.

Chloe: And I think you know, something like the war diaries is so efficient, we have to acknowledge the other side to those you know, it's an efficient information taking, that's where it was for, but when we think about individuals, we have to think about their whole experiences. And that's why it's great to hear from Ramsay directly in that oral history interview. So we've already heard about Lillian Bader Ramsay's wife, can you tell me a bit more about her?

Alice: So Lillian was born in Liverpool in 1918. And her father came to the UK from Barbados, and her mother was of Irish heritage. Sadly, Lillian was orphaned at a young age, and she was actually brought up in a convent and she remained there until she was 20. Because she, similar to Ramsay, struggled to find employment due to the racism she experienced at job interviews. And when war broke out in 1939, Lillian was only 21 at the time, she felt determined to support the war efforts. So in 1939, she applies for a job at the Navy Army and Air Force Institute in Yorkshire, and she works there in the canteen. But seven weeks into her role there, she was dismissed, because her father's heritage was discovered. And at this time, there was still a colour bar in the armed services. But then, in 1940, Lillian listens to a radio show on the BBC called Hello West Indies. And it's a group of men talking about how they were similarly rejected by the army, but then they were recruited into the RAF. And this is when the colour bar is starting to be eased. So Lillian in 1941, she decides to sign up and enrol in the women's auxiliary Air Force. And she was actually one of the first if not the first black British woman in the RAF. She trained in instrument repair. And she became one of the first women to be allowed onto planes to check for faults, and repair them and make sure the planes were all safe.

Chloe: So she was completely integral to that. Yeah, those, you know, big, big operations.

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Alice: Absolutely and she went on to become a leading aircraft woman, and she was promoted to the rank of acting Corporal. So a real trailblazing pioneering woman.

Chloe: I mean, it's really incredible hearing stories like Lillian's because you can just from that very short summary that you've just beautifully given us, Alice, all of the adversity she had to really overcome and also face, you know, discrimination from the very services she's trying to work for and support. Why are stories like Lillian's lesser known?

Alice: It's a really important question, because you're absolutely right, very little attention has been given to Black British servicemen and women who supported the British war efforts. And there's several things at play here. I mean, it's to do with how this history, how the history of the Second World War has been told, who is doing the telling. And after 1945, historians of the Second World War, as well as the media portrayed the conflict as one that only involved white servicemen and women. And this was all despite the enormous contribution from the colonies, you know, millions of people.

Chloe: So can you tell me a bit more about that, Alice?

Alice: Yeah, so it's to do with racism in the post war period and concerns at the time to do with immigration from former colonies. And all of this influenced the way the war was remembered after 1945. But that's not to say that these contributions haven't been remembered by the communities themselves. Of course, for example, West Indian Ex-Servicemen and Women's Association was founded in 1970. However, stories like Lillian's and Ramsay's haven't made it into the public consciousness just yet, but that is beginning to change.

Chloe: And I guess it highlights you know, the importance of using different sources like the oral

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history interview that we touched upon, but does Lillian, can we hear from Lillian in her own voice about her experiences?

Alice: Yeah, absolutely. Lillian actually spent a long time later in her life speaking out about this and the fact that her story and other stories haven't been recognised and celebrate. She was interviewed on BBC Radio 2, on a show called The Forgotten Volunteers in November 2000. And she also published her own memoir called Together, Lillian Bader. So it really, I think it's really important to hear things from her own voice.

Chloe: It reminds me as well how you know, records don't record the details that we want to see from them now, things like ethnicity, things like numbers and statistics. And if you do need help making your way through these records and navigating those series, we do have research guides on women in British military service, including the RAF.

Chloe: So why are we putting Lillian and Ramsay together, why are we talking about them as a pair?

Alice: Well, because they were married in 1943, just a year before Ramsay took part in the D-Day landings. So they were actually put in touch during the war by an ex-landlady of Lillian's and they exchanged letters and photographs. And they met in person for the first time in York.

Chloe: Have you seen the photographs? What do they look like?

Alice: Yeah, there's a beautiful photograph of them both together.

Sophie: They're cutting a cake aren't they?

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Chloe: And are they in their uniforms as well?

Alice: They are, they're in their military uniforms. And this is when they were they were getting married in Hull and as Lillian recalled it was a typical wartime wedding because obviously there was heavy rationing at the time.

Chloe: Scarcities, so what did they miss out on?

Alice: So their cake I think didn't have any icing on it. You couldn't have sugary icing, but I think they made the most of it. They had their honeymoon at the station hotel in Hull.

Chloe: Lovely, lovely. And what happened, what happened next?

Alice: So then Lillian was discharged from the Air Force in February 1944, because she discovered she was pregnant. She was expecting a baby, but this of course, was only a few months before Ramsay was to take part in the D-Day landings. So you can just imagine how...

Chloe: It must have been terrifying.

Alice: Yeah, young, pregnant Lillian newly married, and how scared she must have been and how anxious about Ramsay taking part in this massive military campaign. And she actually does recall in her interview, the one I mentioned earlier, how she felt in this moment. So I'll, I'll read out the quote from here:

"I didn't know if Ramsay was alive or dead. I remember kneeling in the chapel and praying like

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blazes that Ramsay would be saved. It was a terrible time because you knew some people were going to be killed, and Ramsay couldn't swim. He hated water. That's what worried me more than anything, but he came through."

Chloe: Yeah, I can picture her now on her knees in that chapel. I mean, it must have been just so just put you completely off kilter to know that your loved one is in that place and position.

Sophie: Yeah, I think she mentions as well about the sheer act of swimming in military uniform. It was like such a large killer on D-Day that we don't really hear about. And it's such a huge fear, especially if you can't swim, it comes up so often in the records as such a big fear on the day.

Alice: Yeah, absolutely. I know the heaviness of the uniforms. But as we know, luckily, Ramsay did survive. He actually found out after the war that he had a biological brother, who, at the same time that Ramsay was fighting on the beaches in Normandy during the D-Day landings, was fighting in the same war on the other side of the world.

Chloe: So, the other front.

Alice: Yeah, in the Burma campaign in modern day Myanmar. So yeah, this Burma campaign was one of the longest in the Second World War, because of the rainy season in Burma, which made the fighting really, really difficult. And I think this link with Ramsay's biological brother is a really important reminder that this was a global war, it took place on many fronts around the world. And this, again, is something that hasn't really been celebrated in the same way.

Chloe: Yeah it reminds me about how conflicts like this are remembered and marked. D-Day is marked in such a big way nationally here in Britain. But you've also got that, you know, forgotten

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army West African troops in Burma experiencing such difficult theatres of war, in the jungles of what is now Myanmar. And yeah, talking about Ramsay, his brother, Lillian, and those experiences is so important to understand fully, that history, right?

Alice: Well, when I first set out to research these stories, it was because I really wanted to find out about how D-Day was experienced by ordinary people who were there. Because the story of D-Day is often told through the lens of decision makers, the generals, but I wanted to know about ordinary people, as I said. So, because this event involved over 150,000 people, it's just too much to comprehend. So I decided to zoom in on one or two, and then as I started to learn about Ramsay, and then it led me to Lillian, I realised that this is actually part of a much bigger story than just D-Day and just these two individuals.

Chloe: And part of a wider Black British history, right. You know, these were Black Britons who had experienced much challenge in the countries that they called home, and that decided to, you know, volunteer for service in this way, certainly in Lillian's case.

Alice: So to highlight this point, I'd actually really like to include a final quote from Ramsay's interview.

Ramsay: And didn't feel too much prejudice in the sense that everybody was fighting for the same cause, until after the war then I seemed to have the same problems again that no-one wanted to employ you and yet I'd served my country.

Chloe: So let's turn to you, Sophie. Who are you bringing into the studio with you today?

Sophie: Yeah, I'm bringing a woman called Elvira Chaudoir, also known as Agent Bronx. She was

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the daughter of a Peruvian diplomat living in France when the war began. But she soon comes to Britain and is wrapped up in a huge kind of Double Cross mission as a double agent for the British Secret Intelligence services.

Chloe: So we're talking MI5?

Sophie: Yes, she has a brief stint in MI6 and then moved over to MI5. But yeah, so most of the documents we have about her are KV files and MI5 files. And they kind of end up here, through what MI5 decides to give to us, they're often those that are being monitored. So agents who maybe aren't completely trustworthy, we can maybe go into a bit more detail about that later. So she gets up to a lot of stuff. She's writing secret letters, she's going on these huge missions to France to meet with German officials. She's writing kind of anti-German articles to kind of prevent the Germans, the British, sorry, from thinking she works with the Germans, which of course they do know. It's all very confusing.

Chloe: So lots of double crossing sounds like you know, she had a lot going on during the wartime. How did she become involved in the first place?

Sophie: Yeah, so she grows up in Paris. Her father works in Paris. She's clearly quite intelligent. By the time she's 18 she can speak Spanish, French, English and Italian. When she's 23, she marries the Belgian banker where she gets her surname obviously, his name's Gene Chaudoir. But she becomes quite in her own words, she finds marriage to him exceedingly dull and she runs off to Cannes to kind of gamble and have fun with her friends.

Chloe: So she's living quite a charmed life. Sorry. Sure. Yeah. She's very privileged, she got a lot of

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attributes to get her through the world, way making across Europe.

Sophie: Yes, yeah, she is all over the world. She is in every casino having a great time. But unfortunately for her that is interrupted when the Nazis invade, of course. So she moves to Britain, so she can kind of the black market there is a bit better in her own words again, and she can kind of continue that life of luxury in Britain. And it's, it's whilst she's there that she has racked up some debt from gambling and she's looking for work and she's finding it really difficult to get work. Likely because of her kind of Peruvian descent. She's not necessarily trusted in translation and things like that. So she's actually at The Ritz of all places. She's had a few drinks and she's with her friends and she's complaining about not being employed, little does she know there's an RAF officer on the table behind her listening to everything she says. And he's thinking, oh, she's got some friends in very high circles. She's speaking between French and then English and then French and then English. She would be a really good double agent. So he passes her on to Claude Dancy, who's head of MI6. And he essentially sends her on what's called a coat trailing mission. So she goes off to France and she's told to kind of hover around where German officers might be, in hope that they would then employ her. So we have this amazing kind of description of her first trip, which is completely written in her own words. That tells a really good story of going to Cannes and what happens there.

Chloe: So is this like a report or a letter that we're getting this information from?

Sophie: Yeah, so she's writing a report, which she then provides, in an interview when she returns. She's considered for something called the Twenty Committee, which is kind of a play on the Roman numerals XX or double cross. So she tells this amazing story, which, which I'll go into, if that's, if that's all right. So she goes off to Cannes, and while she's there, she is hanging out in all these really, really expensive restaurants. She kind of speaks about her friend that she just

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bumped into called Henry Chevelle. He tells her this incredible story that he was a prisoner of war, in the French army, captured by the Germans, but he actually owns a really expensive casino in Cannes, and manages to use this influence and wealth to kind of convince one of the Germans to employ him and he becomes a collaborator in Vichy France. He comes across as very mercenary in her descriptions he's talking about, I'm making so much money.

Chloe: So he's showing off basically? He's showing off without the knowledge that she's working for MI5.

Sophie: Yes, which is what makes it that bit better. He makes some statements about furnishing his new flat from furniture sales, which comes with that when you read between it, they are likely furniture from Jewish families, and there's always that... so as much as it's a really fun story, there are kind of these really quite harrowing story details that kind of shine through some of some of those elements

Chloe: And we have to bear that in mind when we're discussing things like intelligence histories, because it's so tempting to just get caught up in the glamour of it all.

Sophie: Yeah, and so much with Bronx, she is all about glamour. So, he Henry Chevelle, her friend, the collaborator, he kind of mentioned to her, I know this German guy, he's been kind of employed by Herman Goering, who is Hitler's second in command. You should meet him. Obviously, her ears prick up, this would be brilliant. This is exactly what we want.

Chloe: This is a high-level Nazi, who she's been employed to infiltrate, in some ways?

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Sophie: Yeah, so she meets with this man, she describes him. In her own words, she says, He is very tall, pitch black hair, dressed rather like an Englishman. His name is Bibi, but I never knew her surname and whenever I met his friends, he'd walk away to avoid being introduced. He's really mysterious. She meets with him and they seem to get along. She talks about him quite sympathetically, which is quite surprising. She kind of talks about how he has a severe drink problem, his hands always shaking. He's extremely nervous being in unoccupied France. He kind of asks her, do I look like a German? And she says no. And in response, "he seemed very happy when I said he didn't." So he's really scared about being identified by the resistance and she seems sympathetic to that. So again, we can't be sure where her views on everything fall.

Chloe: So it talks about the nuances of high society at that time, and the games that people were playing in those social circles.

Sophie: Absolutely

Chloe: So what else did she get up to as a double agent?

Sophie: Yeah so, Bibi whose name is actually Helmut Bliel. He kind of tells her to report on bombed cities and write back and the way she will do this is through letters written in regular cursive. But then over the top, she writes with a matchstick in this secret ink that only she ever uses. And there's only one recorded example of someone using this type of ink, and it's agent Bronx. So she does a bit of that, she goes to cities, she reports back on damage, but she's really, really clear that she doesn't want to do anything that would result in the loss of life.

Chloe: So just to clarify, Helmut thinks she's working for him, but she's actually working for MI5,

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and the secret ink is the way she's doing that through these letters.

Sophie: Yeah, she writes these secret letters reporting on bombed cities, economic details. She is credited by John Masterman, who's head of The Twenty Committee as preventing a huge chemical attack on London, because she essentially says if you attack London, they've got loads of chemical reserves, and they will, you know, retaliate to the extreme. So he credits her that's, that's one of the many things she does, through these letters. Some of the information she's giving is true, some false. But alongside this to keep up this idea to the Germans, that the British don't know she's working for them. She writes articles that are really negative about Germany that we have some extracts from. So they are written for the Sunday Graphic. She goes to France, and it's in her own words, she kind of talks about how the Russians in occupied France are terrible compared to Britain. But she also talks about her privileges as a diplomat, daughter. So she briefly kind of laments being in the hotel for ambassadors. And it's almost like this microcosm of the war where there's this amazing, amazing line she says, the Italian representative haughtily ignored the Americans, whilst the Japanese glared and cold anger at the Chinese opposite them. It's just really amazing that she's witnessing all these interactions and reporting back. So to kind of cover that she writes a secret letter that we have to Bliel saying, "Please forgive my article in the Sunday graphic, as it was essential that I should get the reputation for hating Germany." It's quite nice.

Chloe: Yeah, you can see the kind of the way that she's trying to carve out this image for her different employers. And so what's Agent Bronx's linked to D-Day?

Sophie: Well, kind of her largest contribution to D-Day, undoubtedly her kind of biggest role within her double crossing, is something called Plan Ironside which fell underneath Operation Bodyguard, which was the kind of entire deception plan for the Second World War, I suppose. Plan Ironside was to deceive the German army on D-Day, to kind of go to the wrong part of France, or

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at least, some of the army to stay in the wrong area. So she creates this really amazing code to warn of an imminent attack. Now, as I said before, she's normally been writing with letters, letters take forever to arrive. So her and Bliel have come up with this idea: if there's an imminent attack, you need to send a telegram.

Chloe: I mean, it's such forward planning, isn't it. To be like, this is the thing that's going to trigger this and we've already, I've already pre-planted that in your mind as to what we're going to do. And then she uses the telegram.

Sophie: Yes so, she does. So, she writes this telegram, whereby the amount of money that she references means the location of the attack, the money, whatever she needs, the money for, is the certainty of the attack, and then the urgency at which she needs that money is the imminence of the attack.

Chloe: So what does the telegram read?

Sophie: The telegram reads, "I urgently need 50 pounds to pay my dentist" That actually means I'm certain an attack will take place in the Bay of Biscay within two weeks.

Chloe: Which is false information.

Sophie: Yes, completely false. So the whole of the 11th Panzer Division, which are the tank division of the German army, stay in Bordeaux. Now, the best part about this is that she covers her own tracks, because obviously that's going to blow her cover. She's lied to them. So alongside this, she sends a letter saying, I was told this by a drunken diplomat at a party, then sends another letter. He came back down the next morning, and he said, I'm so sorry, I was really drunk. I didn't mean any of that, the plans actually changed.

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Chloe: I mean, it's a risk, isn't it? I mean, you're gambling on letters, the, believing you this relationship was built up with her contacts. All to keep everyone on side.

Sophie: Yeah, they do believe her, though. She's referenced as being highly trusted by the Germans. She's considered for postwar work as a result. She declines that though she's kind of just had her moment.

Chloe: Wow, I mean, what a swerve?

Chloe: So I mean, what are the limitations of these sources? We talked about historians, you know, trusting their archival records, can we do this with Agent Bronx? What are the boundaries and limits of that?

Sophie: It's a really difficult one, because almost everything we have about her is written by her kind of male handling officers, and with that kind of reflects, this kind of social expectation of a single woman, I suppose. What's really interesting is that they certainly don't trust Bronx themselves. In the beginning, when she's kind of first been recruited, she brags to a friend, I'm a secret agent, she gets in trouble for that. She's Peruvian, she's not British. She has huge gambling debts, so a reason therefore to be a secret agent, they don't trust her, which makes it really tricky for us. We do get glimpses though, of her broader life where extra research is obviously required. So I think the most important here is that she has her phone calls tapped and her flats watched by the police, and they reference that she has lesbian tendencies. That's a quote. That in itself was such a odd way for us to phrase it but with a bit more research, we can kind of see glimpses that she's in a romantic relationship with a woman called Monica Sheriff. She kind of speaks about after D-DAY when she's really unsure of if she's safe or not. She says to her handling officer who asked her if something has to happen to me, tell Monica Sheriff and he says, Oh, I've met with her.

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I've met with Monica Sheriff and I trust that she doesn't anything about Bronx's kind of involvement, which the fact that he met with her implies that's a really important kind of relationship

Chloe: And reveals the amount of deception.

Sophie: Absolutely

Chloe: Even Bronx was, you know, having to utilise in her own relationships with people closest to her.

Sophie: A really nice way to kind of wrap that up, is that we found a really nice photograph, provided by the Goadby Marwood Hall history group, that's a photograph she gave just before her first mission to Cannes and it says to darling Monica, Elvira, July 1942, and it's a really incredible image of her.

Chloe: So, I mean, you've already mentioned Sophie, this idea of the male handlers and the lenses in which women like Bronx were viewed, is there a hint of sexism or overt sexism in how female agents like Elvira and Webb were perceived?

Sophie: Yes, I think it goes without saying there's quite a few descriptions of her that can be said to be quite sexist. She's kind of referred to as being highly intelligent but lazy about using it, for example, but we see that come up with a lot of other secret agents, other women, Nor Khan's a good example. We see that with other women on The Twenty Committee, like Lilly Sergio, who's also known as Asian treasurer, or Maritza Mihajlovic, also known as the Snark, which in itself feels

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quite sexist.

Chloe: I mean, it reminds me as well, you know, when Lillian story we didn't really touch upon that she didn't really talk about that in her interviews, but I'm sure again, as a Black British woman, she encountered sexism as well as racism throughout wartime.

Chloe: It's great to hear these stories that we don't see so often covered. And it makes me wonder what else is in the archive?

Alice: Yeah of course, because a lot of these records are still closed, especially records that contain personal information there are subject to the 100 year rule. And so things are being opened up all the time.

Chloe: Yep and we see that in a transfer, big transfer project of World War Two records at the moment happening here at Kew. Well, thank you, Sophie. And thank you, Alice, for bringing those stories to light here on the podcast. See you soon.

Sophie: Yeah, thank you so much for having us.

Alice: Thank you, Chloe.

Chloe: Thanks for listening to On The Record from The National Archives. To find out more about The National Archives, follow the link from the episode description in your podcast listening app. Visit nationalarchives.gov.uk. to subscribe to On the Record at The National Archives so you don't miss new episodes, which are released throughout the year.

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Finally, thank you to all our experts who contributed to this episode. This episode was written, edited, and produced by Tash Walker and Adam Zmith of Aunt Nell, for The National Archives.

Clips of the oral history with Ramsey Bader recorded in 1989, courtesy of the Imperial War Museum ©IWM.

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TRAILER

Chloe: Shortly after midnight on Tuesday, June 6th in 1944, 24,000 soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy in Northern France, it was the largest seaborne invasion in history. Their mission:- to liberate Europe and defeat Germany.

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But who were these soldiers? And who worked secretly to plan the operation and ensure its success?

Ramsay: We may as I say have been lucky, we could have hit a mine but luckily, we made it. We kept going and I am here today to think that I am one of the lucky ones.

Chloe: I'm Chloe Lee, a Migration and Citizenship Researcher at The National Archives. I also host our podcast, On The Record at The National Archives, uncovering the past through stories of everyday people.

Alice: Well, when I first set out to research these stories, it was because I really wanted to find out about how D Day was experienced by ordinary people who were there. Because the story of DD is often told through the lens of decision makers, the generals, but I wanted to know about ordinary people.

Chloe: In this episode of On the Record, I want to hear about some of the brave people we might not be familiar with: a tank driver, one of the first black women in the British Royal Air Force, and a femme fatale whose coded telegram saved many lives on D Day.

Sophie: I'm bringing a woman called Elvira Chaudoir, also known as Agent Bronx. She was the daughter of a Peruvian diplomat living in France when the war began. But she soon comes to Britain is wrapped up in a huge kind of Double Cross mission as a double agent for the British Secret Intelligence services.

Chloe: The episode is coming soon, so hit follow or subscribe wherever you listen.

