

Rita Gissen of White Plains dies; helped break WWII secret codes

'Ultra Secret' project major factor in Allied victory

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Rita Gissen, a longtime White Plains resident who, as a translator during World War II, helped break secret German codes and later worked as a press attache in the British Foreign Service and NATO, died Friday at the King Street Nursing Home in Port Chester. She was 90.

Born July 9, 1919, in Glasgow, Scotland, to William and Rose Davis, she was raised in Scotland. She received a master's degree from Glasgow University and completed graduate courses in French

and German literature and languages at the University of Grenoble and the University of Strasbourg.

As a young woman she worked for the British Foreign Service and was assigned to the "Ultra Secret" project at Bletchley Park, outside London, as part of the successful effort to break the German "Enigma" code that was used to send high-level command messages during the war.

The code-breaking project, which historians have said saved thousands of lives and was a major factor in the Allied victory, remained classified for decades.

"She couldn't even tell my

dad that she was involved with it until the effort started coming to light in the 1980s," said Gissen's son, William.

After the war, she served as a press attache at British embassies in Nice, France, and Brussels, Belgium. From 1950 to 1955 she served in the information division in Paris under Lord Ismay, the first head of NATO.

She met Harold Gissen during a visit to the United States. The couple married on Long Island in December 1955 and lived in White Plains.

She is survived by her husband, of White Plains, and her son, of Hartsdale.

Funeral services are to be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday in the Chapel-in-the-Woods at Kol Ami Synagogue, 252 Soundview Ave., White Plains.



Rita Gissen