

Register

walk along a board to get to her bedroom, a feat which was doubtless made more difficult the larger the drink.

She was well aware that she was participating in a significant moment of history, but, more importantly, she saw her work for the tribunal as a means of revenge.

"It was payback time," she recalls. "My office in London had been bombed and we were ticked off. Thanks to the Luftwaffe, I had spent too much time in basements next to coal piles."

For Barbara Bitter, who was born as Barbara Buttery in 1918, the war had robbed her of a lot more than an office and a livelihood.

Her brother, Robin, had been shot down and killed early in the war, and she lost her husband, Laurence Pinion, to German ack-ack when he was attempting to bomb a gasworks outside Paris in April 1942.

With the loss of her husband, Bitter was available to be conscripted to work, and the local Labour Exchange offered her a job in a jam factory. Blessed with a sharp brain and the ability to speak German, she felt that she would be better off employed in the WRAF, and she soon started working as a research analyst at Bletchley Park, studying German night fighter codes, tactics and locations.

It was at Bletchley that she met Telford Taylor, who would become an associate trial counsel



at Nuremberg, and it was Taylor who rescued her from a dull postwar job in the Bombing Survey Office at Frankfurt.

"Telford asked me to lunch," she recalls, "and I told him that I didn't like the work, and so he asked me to come to work at Nuremberg as a document analyst," she says.

As a result, Bitter was one of the first people outside the Nazi regime to study the documents that revealed the extent of the barbarism.

Much of her analysis can still be found at the US National Archives, and it makes for grim reading.

In one document that she analysed, a senior SS officer, Hans Kammler, revealed that he "had 30 people hanged as special measure" to discourage rioting at

a factory, after which "everything has been to some extent in order again".

Bitter says: "I found what I read to be incredible." She was also among the first to analyse the enormous collection of documents that were produced by the office of Heinrich Himmler, including reports generated by the murderous Einsatzgruppen.

"I found it extraordinary how these people could boast about what they had done, and then ask questions about how Mrs Himmler and the children were doing."

Bitter was allowed to sit in during some of the proceedings, and she even attended an interrogation of Albert Speer, who she found to be a "very civilised man", although she was not, of course, blind to his crimes.

It was when she saw Hermann Goering in the dock that she realised quite "how far the supposedly great had fallen". She "thanked the heavens" that the tribunal was taking place. Nevertheless, "there was a lot of dull work to be done," she says, "and there was really no feeling of glory."

For both women, their work not only provided satisfaction, but also led to finding love, and both were married to Americans they had met in Germany. Today, Bitter lives in Florida, and Niebergall in Virginia, and Wednesday will mark the first time they have seen each other since the 1940s.