

THE WAR STORY
OF EDITH EVELYN GUYVER, NEE BINSLEY
a reconstruction of her experience in World War 2

By Robert Guyver, July 2024- January 2025

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FOREWORD

That this story exists is all thanks to a single name on an official document, a small, thin, yellowing scrappy thing with a brief handwritten note upon it. It was my mother's Army leaving form from almost 80 years ago near the end of World War 2. The place of service was named, very specifically, as 'Woodhouse Eaves' and I thought the internet may hold an interesting fact or two about the place, maybe an old picture. Instead I discovered a whole fascinating story and gained a new, deeper appreciation of my mother and the impact of war on her life.

Robert Guyver July 2024



Fig 1 - Mums ATS leaving form.

MUM'S WAR STORY UNCOVERED



<Fig 2 Edith Guyver January 1944>

My Mother (Edith Evelyn Guyver nee Binsley 1921-2001) very rarely spoke about the past and even less so about the war. She just mentioned a few times that she had intercepted radio messages sent out by German Panzer (tank) divisions, although she added with obvious relish that they were "crack" divisions and their Morse code was extra fast.

In fact, she was at the heart of operation 'Ultra', so called because it was more secret than the War offices' highest category 'Most Secret'. It was a special initiative fully backed as a priority by Winston Churchill in 1941 to crack the German code systems and gather intelligence up to the highest level of German command. It was a huge success, estimated by some historians to have

shortened the war by 2 years and saved hundreds of thousands of lives and many more from untold misery.

The code breaking was done at station 'X' at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire, famously involving Alan Turing and arguably the first ever computer as we know them today. It was also here that decoded messages were analysed and intelligence reports compiled.

However, the messages themselves were intercepted at dozens of 'Y' stations around the country, run by the War Office 'Y' Group (WOYG) the headquarters of which, for the army branch, was at Beaumanor Hall, Leicestershire, where my mother served for two and a half years.

Bletchley Park remained a secret until the mid-1970s but Beaumanor Hall remained so until the mid-1990s. Many that worked there, like my Mum, died never having revealed the secrets they had pledged to protect during the war, perhaps at least part of the reason she never spoke about it. However, security at Beaumanor was all pervasive, with groups of staff separated from one another and not allowed to discuss work. As a result, like others in similar situations have reported, it is possible she never realised that she was part of something so major.

BEAUMANOR HALL

Beaumanor Hall was a Victorian country mansion set in its own grounds just outside the tiny village of Woodhouse (not to be confused with Woodhouse Eaves next to it) about 3 miles South of Loughborough. It had been quietly requisitioned in 1939 for more standard war work but in 1941 it became a Y station and was startlingly modified with the help of a local architect.



<Fig 3-5 Beaumanor Hall above and, right, Listening Hut H as fake workers cottages, outside and inside>

Whilst many 'Y' station operating rooms were set up in large houses, here a whole set of additional buildings were added, disguised as simple estate buildings. An admin building was disguised as a cricket pavilion, the canteen a greenhouse and the listening huts as estate worker cottages, a cart shed and stables (see Fig 10).

This is hut H looking like 2 workers cottages. The ground floor windows are fake, like the other huts they had thick solid blast proof walls 8 feet high, only the windows in the upper story were real. Inside it was just an open space



The whole set up was overseen by the Royal Corps of Signals, with the actual interception and other work done initially by male civilians, eventually 300 of them, called Experimental Wireless Officers (EWAs). However, as the war proceeded and the station's work expanded it became difficult to find enough men, and those they could get were often needed elsewhere. As replacements the government started to train up women of the ATS, the Auxiliary Territorial Services, the newly created (1938) and misnamed women's branch of the army.

Over 1000 women of the ATS came to work at Beaumanor, 900 as radio interceptors but referred to as the rather less grand Special Wireless Operators (SWOPs). The first few hundred were billeted in various requisitioned buildings in Quorn, a substantial village a couple of miles away, just outside Loughborough. Later was added military huts around Garat's Hay, a small old mansion in the tiny village of Woodhouse right next to Beaumanor Hall and finally Brand Hill Camp by the mansion Brand Hill House outside the slightly bigger village of Woodhouse Eaves, also a couple of miles away but deeper into the countryside.

The women were ferried back and forth to and from Beaumanor Hall in troop carriers: little more than lorries with benches and so high the women had to hitch up their skirts to climb into the back. There was no heating and in snow the couple of miles could be very slow indeed. Mostly however, according to the memoirs of others, the journey was done at breakneck speed by the women drivers of the ATS, all of whom seem to have been maniacs, especially one nicknamed Red from the colour of her hair.



<Fig 6 OS map labelled to show key places around Beaumanor Hall>

The women were classed as serving with the Royal Signal Corps but remained members of the ATS, my Mother's company was called "No. 4 Wing Y Sigs ATS", so they continued to wear ATS uniform but with the badge of the Royal Signal Corps on the left breast of their jacket and blue and white diamond insignia on their upper sleeves. The picture to the right is my Mother's Royal Signal Corps (RSC) badge, which she kept as a memento.



<Fig 7&8 ATS soldier with RSC cap badge and cloth badge on tunic>

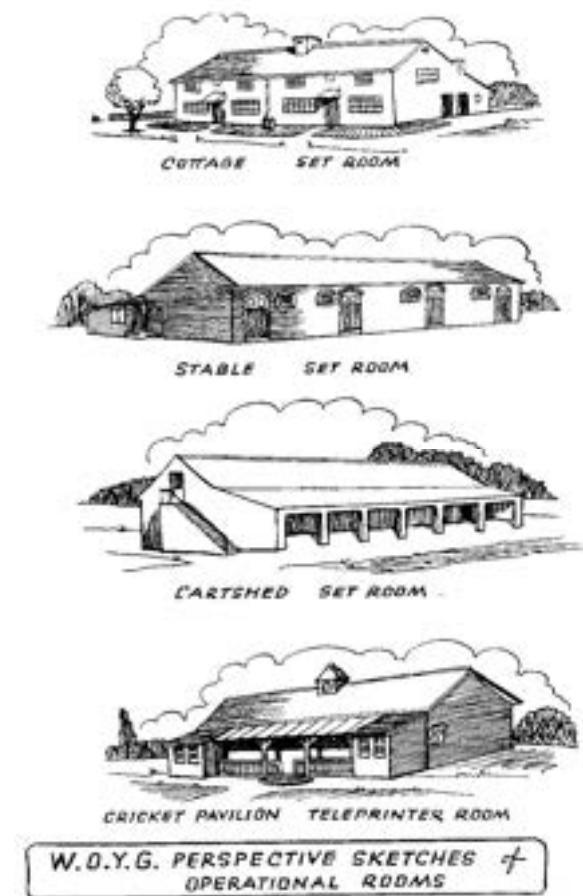
This is Ethel Bamford, a teleprinter operator who worked in the 'cricket pavilion' at Beaumanor, beautifully showing off the Royal Signal Corps badge and associated diamond insignia on her arm. Note that she still wears the ATS badge on her forage cap and if you could zoom in you would see a ATS badges on her epaulettes and ATS brass buttons.



<Fig 9 Mum's Royal Signal Corps badge>

THE LISTENING OPERATION

There were 4 listening huts (set rooms) at Beaumanor, each 56x 16 feet in size and built with blast proof walls in case they were bombed and, as an extra precaution, built 200 yards apart so a hit on one would not destroy the others [Note 1].



<Fig 10 The listening huts>

Each hut came with 40 radios sets, 36 for the interceptors' normal daily use in pairs either side of a central aisle and another 4 to cover for breakdowns or special additional jobs. Originally all of this would have fitted in snugly but newer better radio sets were introduced and these were so much larger that the huts became cramped and the operators had to be careful not to back into the dangling cables of the sets behind them, not least to avoid an electric shock.

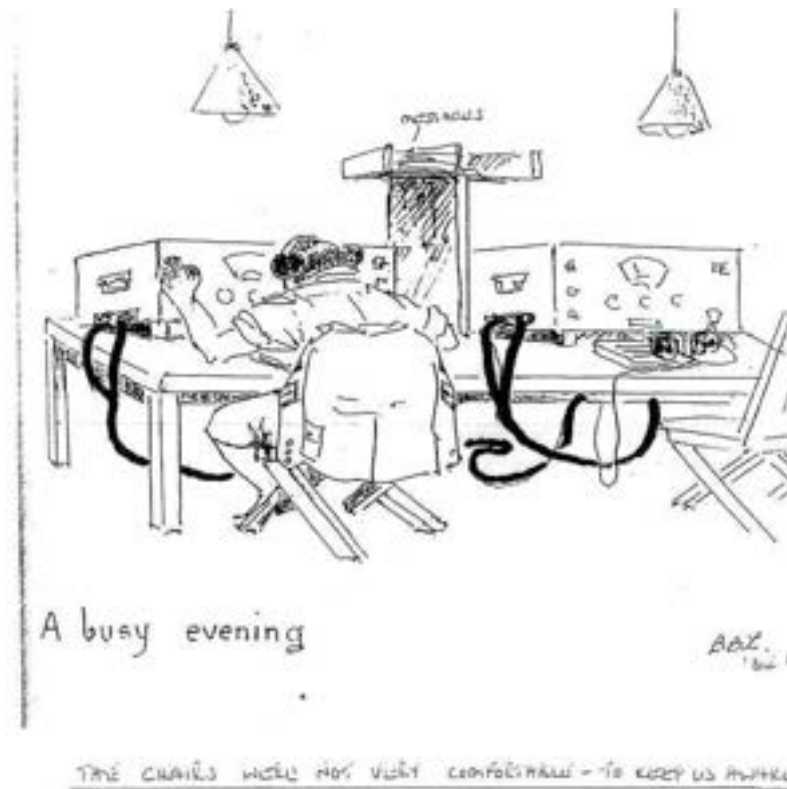


<Fig 11&12 Radio set and headphones used at Beaumanor>

The radios were in constant use and never turned off, except for maintenance and the ATS worked on them around the clock in 4 x 6-hour shifts, 7-1 and 1-7 day and night.

Security was very tight on site, with the grounds patrolled by military police with dogs. The huts themselves were designed for security, each having only one entrance, clearly visible to the hut supervisor and always kept locked, and its own toilet and small cloakroom.

As additional security, to ensure nobody learned too much, each hut was manned by a different ATS Squad, billeted separately: those manning hut 'I' were in Quorn, 'J' at Garat's Hay and 'K' at Brand Hill Camp. They could have mingled in the Beaumanor canteen during the half hour teabreak they got but talk about work was not allowed and the women seem to have kept very much to their own Squads.



<Fig 13 Drawing by ATS soldier Gwendoline Gibbs>

Each Squad was in turn divided into 4 Watches each with their own shift pattern and, again with security in mind, once a Watch had been established it remained unchanged for the rest of the war. It was within their own particular Watch that most women seemed to have formed their closest friendships.

At the start of each shift the SWOPs would be given a list of the radio frequencies they were to scan, as determined by military intelligence on site or from Bletchley Park. They would not be looking for any random Morse code but that being sent out by a particular target enemy group that they had been trained to recognise.

The women themselves could often identify the right broadcast just from the sound of it (perhaps tinny, soft or deep) and could sometimes even identify individual operators by what they called their "fist", the music of the way an operator keyed in the long and short tones of the Morse code (they were not of fixed length).

The SWOPs ability to recognise their targets became particularly important when the Germans increased security by adopting random call signs (used to identify who the transmission was from). This skill was something of which the women themselves were particularly proud along with the ability to handle the complexity and amount of code of really busy transmitting enemy groups.

That they were able to detect any Morse code at all was a great achievement. What they were intercepting was just a stream of long short notes, often quiet and weak, hidden among a sea of noisy crackling static, overlain by the squeaks and pops of atmospheric interference and sometimes almost drowned out by the loud sounds of German jamming equipment. There might even be more than one radio station transmitting on the same frequency. Often the Morse code faded in and out and sometimes without warning it was switched to a new frequency, forcing the operators into a frenetic search to pick the signal back up again.

The work required a great deal of concentration to capture the Morse and great perseverance to withstand the hours of horrible noise assailing the senses. Adding in the physical turmoil induced by shift work on eating and sleeping patterns made this a job, according to one key historian, one only the young and most resilient could handle without burn out. Mum said that one day it broke one of the women who threw off her headset and ran out of the hut screaming, others' memoirs report the same. She also said that on the odd occasion that "Top Brass" came to visit and wanted to hear what the SWOPs were listening to, the women would turn up the volume before handing over the headphones to impress upon them what they had to put up with.

Almost worse for some of them were the long periods in which there were no transmissions at all, especially during the night when the women had to fight off an often-overwhelming desire to sleep. It was vital they remained alert and ready, at a moment's notice to be working again accurately and at top speed.

At such times the civilian men got on with little personal activities such as drawing up sports schedules but the ATS women soldiers were expected to sit silent and alert, although they were allowed to smoke (a common activity in those days). They did of course talk to each other at these times and even played noughts and crosses or did crosswords but very surreptitiously.



<Fig 14 Cartoon by ATS soldier Dot Spencer>

S.1319
Est. May 1925 Revd Nov. 1931 **W/T RED FORM.** Reg. No. _____
Page _____

Ship or Station	Sat 2	Date 10.6.42	Operator's Remarks *
	Op- JB	Time of Day 0815	O.N.A. 3
	To ED	Frequency & System	
	From PGL		

Text: **C 1035 KR 4TKE ITL 247 BFP RST**

Text: Time of Origin, Signature etc. Write across the page, under each letter

TSNOC	AYCNG	REPOF	MTAEC
QERFE	NGISF	RMINE	RRANG
OLNXF	YSTUP	SLNBR	AYZTL
SDAPB	RUFGE	MNSOU	GTVAW
FXNLG	UTYSM	BNRSL	ANUGL
RTFGR	LPHRE	FGORK	SLNOJ
SDXNA	KJWYB	LZRFT	BTSNM
FHDTM	GLKZY	RRLFN	ULNPF
OTDEP	FGUBR	TCGAZ	YTHOS
ILNPG	RTFMN	SNPLU	VRLNK
PTRQG	SFNAR	GPTZT	FPEST
GERSN	TRPOQ	NLSKB	JOLNU
BSTLD	RP		

Do not use Left Margin

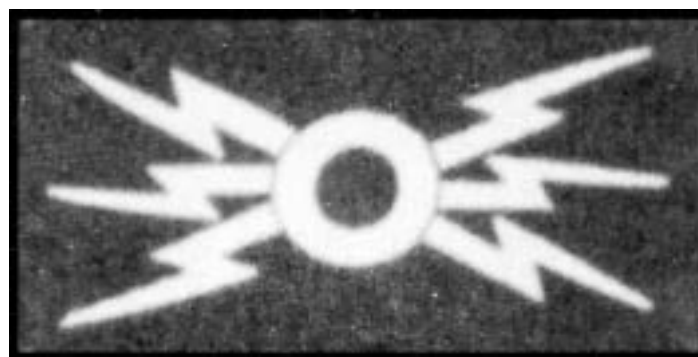
Q. 659673 * Consistency and reliability of signals, quality of recording, handwriting, decipherability etc. Grade of Station: (if not known enter blank)
No. 100
No. 10031
1003191 No. 1003191799 1003191 1003191 1003191 1003191
S.1319

<Fig 15 Morse code transmission recorded>

When the Morse code did come through, it was broadcast at a very high rate, difficult to capture and made worse by the fact it was seemingly just random letters. These were recorded as groups of 5 letters on a special form called the 'red form', red denoting 'secret'.

The completed forms were constantly gathered up by the hut 'runner' and sent immediately by vacuum tube underground to the 'cricket pavilion' (in the photo of the inside hut H you can see the tube on the end wall). Here the content of the most sought-after target groups were copied over immediately by teleprinter (by the likes of Ethel Bamford) to Bletchley Park and the code breakers. The rest of the forms were also sent there but by motorbike overnight and worked on but as a lower priority.

Even if the content of the message was never decoded, there was still valuable information to be gleaned from these forms. The sections at the top indicate which enemy group was talking to which and that was used in what is now called 'traffic analysis'. This can show such things as where the enemy are moving troops from and to and so reveal their strategies.



<Fig 16 Beaumanor Battledress SWOPS Insignia>

The listening huts were never comfortable places to work, cramped and dingy, some believed that the chairs provided were actually designed to be uncomfortable to keep them awake, but they were at their worst in winter. To avoid detection by spy planes the huts were not heated, except by the radio sets themselves, and became unbearably cold for the women, even wrapped up in their great coats and wearing gloves when not actually copying down Morse.

By the time Mum's first winter came the women were being issued with army battle dress: trousers instead of skirts and a thick loose tunic under which many layers could be worn. There was still a strong general notion in society that women should not wear trousers and it is probably the only time in her younger life that Mum did so. Many of the women particularly liked the soft tunic instead of the stiffer formal jacket and wore them all the time, although strictly against regulations. One of the women in the earlier years even designed a special badge for the tunic and got official recognition of it as denoting a SWOP at Beaumanor Hall alone (Fig 16).

Secrecy was such that the SWOPs were really working in a bubble they had no real idea what they were intercepting and what, or even if anything, was done with the red forms they completed; they had no idea that Bletchley Park existed. Mum was told that she was listening in on German Panzer (tank) Divisions but it was certainly not chatter between tanks, which used only short-range transmissions. If she was intercepting tank transmissions at all it would have been traffic at a much higher command level, including regional HQs and perhaps on occasion messages from even higher up, occasionally all the way up Hitler himself.

Ironically and entirely unknown to her, she may well have been intercepting enemy transmissions that directly helped to keep safe her own husband Stan who was serving abroad [Note 2].



<Fig 17 Mum in her army battle dress at Beaumanor>

ABOUT THE WOMAN

I find myself quite amazed, and very happy for her, that my Mother should end up at the heart of Project Ulltra, for the one time in her life really using her abilities. She came from a respectable but poor family in Hampstead, London, Fleet Road to be exact, described as a small enclave of working-class people amid an area of lower middle-class and better-off homes. She went to the local state school, a girls' school which seems to have been particularly good and forward thinking. Here she did so well that instead of leaving at 14 as did most of the children from her street, she stayed on to do an extra couple of years studying commercial skills including typing. However, she was very reserved, almost timid and lacked self-confidence.

She was just about to turn 18 when war was declared and by that time had found work as a clerk in the area with a big company called Gilbey's the big gin and spirit distributor. This was a job quietly prestigious for someone of her background, however, she was not at all ambitious and her main focus was her childhood sweetheart Stan, whom she had already know for 4 or 5 years.



<Fig 18 Mum just prior to the war>

CONSCRIPTION

By late 1941, having just turned 20 and despite it being wartime, her life seems to have been stable, unremarkable and routine. She lived, like most young unmarried women, with her parents, the worst of the London Blitz was over and she simply went daily to work as a clerk, rarely going out except when Stan returned on leave. He had been one of the first to enlist in the army and was manning heavy artillery anti-aircraft emplacements in various locations in London and a little further afield but presumably was able to get home quite frequently. For a while he was manning the big guns on Primrose Hill just 10 minutes' walk away.

I have no doubt that my Mother, comfortable in this regular dependable life she had constructed, was rather alarmed when in December 1941 the National Service Act was passed making it law that all unmarried women aged 20-30 now had to either join the armed forces, work in a factory or in farming.

She would soon have received the letter directing her to register at her local Labour Exchange, a government office where jobs were advertised and social security money was distributed to the unemployed. In a brief mention she gives to this time, there is a sense of foreboding of waiting for the inevitable call-up. Although she did not know it at the time, she was right to think of it that way, when her call-up came she would leave not just her job but her home, her family and everything she had ever known in her life.

As an office clerk I suspect she was guessing that she would most likely be posted to a factory, working in the administrative offices, hopefully not terribly far away. So she must have been rather

alarmed to receive a letter telling her to enlist in the ATS, the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's' branch of the army that had been created just a few years before.

Her fears would have been tempered by memories of the many funny stories her own father had told her about his early life in the army as a professional soldier in peacetime as well as in World War One. She may also have been comforted by the fact that she would be joining the Territorial Army in which Stan too was serving. She may even have had visions of becoming one of the women that worked, like him, with the anti-aircraft guns around London but manning the spotlights and establishing the direction and range of the planes

It is almost certain she would have been directed to enrol at the local Territorial Army Headquarters in Handel Street in Kings Cross (now called Yeomanry House and still used by the army) just a short bus ride away and where Stan went when called-up [Note 3]



<Fig 19 Territorial Army Headquarters, Kings Cross, early 2000s>

Here she would have received a 'Procedure on Calling-up Form' and a list of items to bring with her when called up, the example here consisted of the standard short list thoughtfully supplemented by the local commanding officer.

TO BE KEPT IN A SAFE PLACE.

Army Form E.8182.

AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE.

**INSTRUCTIONS AS TO PROCEDURE ON CALLING UP
AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE.**

(To be in possession of all personnel of the A.T.S.)

NOTICES TO PERSONNEL.

I. Joining on Calling up.
In the event of the Auxiliary Territorial Service being called up for service you will receive by post a printed "Notice to Join," Army Form E.8111H showing you when and where to report. But should you become aware from posters, broadcasts, or through the newspapers that the calling up of the A.T.S. has been ordered, do not wait to receive the "Notice to Join," but report yourself at once at the Headquarters of your Company... 56, Davies Street, W.A.

II. Change of Address.
An officer or member who has not notified change of address and, therefore, does not receive the "Notice to Join," should nevertheless report to her company Headquarters. Fines will be paid irrespective of whether personnel are found fit or not.

III. Food.
Bring with you sufficient food for the day of joining.

IV. Order of Dress.
You join in uniform, bringing your sackcloth with you. Wear the regulation shoes you have got. Bring a bag or suitcase with you.

V. National Health Insurance Contribution Card and Unemployment Book.
Fill in now the following particulars:
Name of Insurance Society... The United Women's Insurance Society
Branch...
Membership number in Society or Branch... 174643

If you change your Society or Branch amend the particulars accordingly.

If your Health Insurance Contribution Card and/or Unemployment Book are in the possession of your employer or of the Employment Exchange, you should obtain them, if possible, and bring them with you. But if YOU ARE UNABLE TO GET THEM YOU MUST NOT DELAY JOINING ON THIS ACCOUNT. If you have to apply to the Employment Exchange for your Unemployment Book, you should take with you the Receipt Card H.I. 401, and your calling-up notice if you have received one.

If your Unemployment Book is with the Exchange and you cannot get it, you should bring the Receipt Card with you instead and hand it in on joining.

VI. This card to be brought with you when reporting at your headquarters.

<Fig 20 Example of the ATS form 'Procedure on Calling Up'>

For the present you will return home to sleep, and will therefore only require your compulsory kit for kit inspection.

RECEIPT FOR KIT INSPECTION
10 a.m. on 1st September 1939.
No. 13 (A.D.) County of London
Company
56 Davies Street,
W. 1.
29th March 1939.

Instructions on Requisition.

In the event of your being called up in a National Emergency, you should report, dressed in uniform, or in ordinary civilian dress if you are not in possession of uniform, and bring the following articles with you in a bag, or suitcase:-

- 1 Woollen cardigan
- 2 Complete sets of underclothing
- 2 Pairs of stockings
- 2 Towels
- 1 Knife
- 1 Spoon
- 1 Fork
- 1 Hairbrush
- 1 Comb
- 1 Toothbrush
- 1 Bootbrush
- 1 Polishing brush
- 1 Spare pair of shoes
- 1 Overcoat or sackcloth

A list of suggestions for extra items is as under:-

- Sponge and face cloth.
- 2 pairs of sleeping pyjamas (nightdresses are not advisable)
- A small supply of mending wool and cotton.
- Handkerchiefs (Knick if possible, they should not be white)
- Cake or soap
- A torch (batteries and matches will not be allowed)
- Hot water bottle (strongly recommended, must be rubber)
- A small first-aid outfit.
- A packet of stamped post-cards.
- A book (if every Member brings a 6d book these will form a lending library for the Company which will last some time)
- Aspirins.
- Toilet roll.
- Gum boots
- Eng. Spare button cleaner and button stick.
- Mirror.
- A pair of warm gloves.
- A pair of woollen turn-down socks (dark colour)
- Surgical spirit.
- Drying-up cloth.
- Civilian cap and shoes.

Do NOT bring:- Handbags, Cigarettes or jewellery. These will not be allowed.

If possible bring your National Health card, Insurance card and Unemployment card. If not possible, bring their numbers.

Suitcases should be clearly labelled with the name, rank, number of the volunteer, and should have locks and keys.

Theresa Hawley Company Sergeant Major

<Fig 21 Example of the ATS form, identifying what to bring'>

It is quite likely that nothing happened for some months and it may all have seemed like a non-event but all that was to change when she received the 'Notice to Join' which she did on the 18th of September 1942.

Army Form E. 211 B.
CALLING UP NOTICE TO BE SENT TO EACH OFFICER AND MEMBER OF THE AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE ON AN EMERGENCY ARDING.

AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE NOTICE TO JOIN

Surname _____
Christian name _____
Address _____

In accordance with the conditions of your enrolment you are hereby required to present yourself at the Headquarters of your Company 1st Coy. London City A.T.S.
Company 1st Coy. London City A.T.S.

You should therefore report at 1st Coy. London City A.T.S.
on 31st August 1942 not later than 6 o'clock bringing this notice with you.

If your Health Insurance Contribution Card and/or Unemployment Book are in the possession of your employer or of the Employment Exchange, you should obtain them, if possible, and bring them with you. But IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO GET THEM YOU MUST NOT DELAY JOINING ON THIS ACCOUNT. If you have to apply to the Employment Exchange for your Unemployment Book, you should take with you the Receipt Card (U.I.48) and this notice.

If your Unemployment Book is with the Exchange and you cannot get it, you should bring the Receipt Card with you instead and hand it in on joining.

You will receive travelling expenses from your residence.

Pay at the rates in force for the A.T.S. will, if retained for full-time service, be issued.

Notary Public Signature.
Company Commander Rank.
Place 1st Coy. London City A.T.S. Coy. Commander Appointment.

(FORM WASHINGTON 4040 (10) A.B.E.W.M. 6/42 Form E. 211 B.)

<Fig 22 Example of the ATS form 'Notice to Join'>

Within a few days, possibly sooner, it would have been followed by the -'Notice to Report for Duty' which would take her for the first time away from her home and for 3 whole weeks. What she did not know is that in fact she would not see her home and family again for 3 whole months.

Army Form E. 211 B.
AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE
NOTICE TO REPORT FOR DUTY

Date 19/9/42 Recruiting Office, Cardiff

I have to inform you that you are now required to report for duty in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

I am therefore to request that you will report to the Recruiting Office on 19th Aug. A railway warrant for your journey is enclosed herewith.

You should report as early in the day as possible. 9.15 AM General Station

Take me to London

Recruiting Officer, Cardiff

<Fig 23 Example of the ATS form 'Notice to Report for Duty'>

No doubt she was utterly dismayed to find she was being sent for basic training to the army barracks in Pontefract nearly 200 miles away to the North, the first time she had ever been more than 10 miles from home [Note 4] and then only with her parents. One can imagine what a tumult of emotions she felt as, suitcase in hand, she took the tram [Note 5], that ran past her home, to Kings Cross to join the train and a new, very unwelcome life.

BASIC TRAINING AT PONTEFRACT BARRACKS



<Fig 24 Front entrance Pontefract Barracks during World War II>

Mum never spoke about what happened next but Gwendoline Gibbs, whose army time was very similar to Mum's and almost certainly knew her well, has painted a vivid picture of this time in a short memoir.

Despite being a volunteer and self-possessed confident young woman, Gwendoline found her long journey to basic training utterly bewildering. She too had never been far from home and her destination felt as alien as would a trip to Siberia. The train, as most were in wartime, was packed with a mixture of civilians and service personnel and meandered slowly and mysteriously through an unknown countryside, stopping here and there for seemingly no reason but would have been due to the complications of war.

Eventually, late in the day Gwendoline reached her destination and stood on the platform wondering what was going to happen next. She could see a number of other young women here and there looking the same way. Suddenly a woman in Khaki came striding toward them herding them together and they were whisked off to the barracks where they would live for the next few weeks: weeks of cold, discomfort, bad food and drudgery.

Gwendoline does speak glowingly of the immediate camaraderie that was soon felt among the new recruits but even so many on that first night in the barracks wept quietly under their meagre blankets on their hard metal army beds.

The next day they had an introductory talk from the commanding officer but it was really more just a list of 'here's what you do, and this is what happens if you don't'. There seemed to be an endless list of regulations covering every detail of life and the underlying message was clearly not one of welcome but a brutal "you are in the army now and you will do exactly what you are told immediately, briskly and without complaint"

And it seems there was a great deal to complain about from the start: decorum at meals and food hygiene particularly. It started in a promising way with each being issued a personal knife, fork, spoon and, less promising, a one-pint enamel mug. At the first meal they discovered that if you wanted a drink you had to fill your mug by pouring tea into it from a bucket, and a great deal went everywhere but. And at the end of the meal there was another bucket in which to swill your cutlery clean(ish) and no tea towels to dry them. Outrageous behaviour by 1940s family standards.

After the 'welcome' talk, the women were issued with their uniforms. There was no measuring, if someone did not know what size they were they got a best guess. However, oddly, the army was keen that they looked neat in what they gave them and after a parade in their new kit, anything that did not look right was taken away for tailoring leaving many of the women looking crazy wearing half a uniform and half civilian clothes for a few days.



<Fig 25 Army kit being issued: Greatcoats and hats>

Gwendoline Gibb's Issued Uniform:

3 khaki shirts, 2 skirts, 1 jacket, a light khaki cotton tie and thick lisle stockings

3 bras, vests, white panties and long khaki 'bloomers' and 2 suspender belts.

2 blue striped winceyette pyjamas and towels

1 pair of flat heeled lace up shoes, made by Diana or Clarks (very good makes said Gwendoline approvingly)

The unloved 'official' cap - with a stiff brim and floppy top

A forage cap in dark brown with orange piping, only to be worn off duty or on leave.

A very useful khaki coloured zip fastened shoulder bag of thick canvas

Best of all, a greatcoat, long, warm and weather-proof

And a kit bag already stencilled with name and number

I am sure that as a young modern woman, albeit not terribly fashion conscious, my mother would not have been greatly impressed by the uniform, which was virtually unchanged from the one worn by women army-nurses and drivers in the first world war (there was no actual women's' army back then), albeit with shorter skirts. She may have been particularly contemptuous of the large khaki knickers, which many dubbed "passion killers", although they were actually only used for physical exercise, and the sort of bra no actress could have worn in a Hollywood movie from which, no doubt, my Mother's ideals had been formed.



Fig 26 1940s khaki bloomers



Fig 27 The 1939-model bra

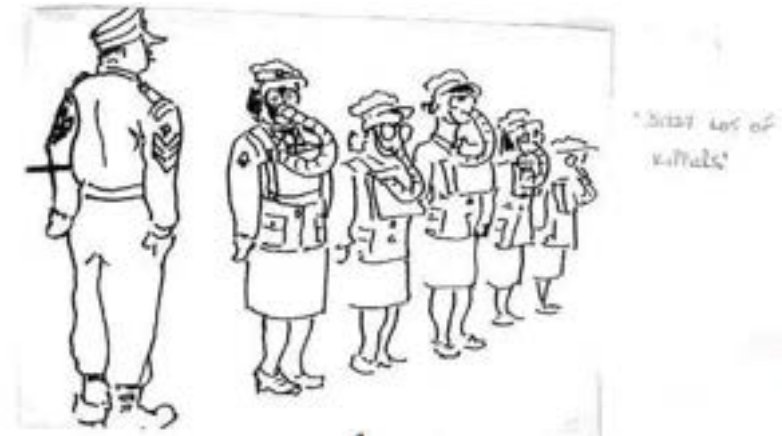
On 22nd September, just a few days in, Mum and presumably her group were given a medical examination and vaccinations. Gwendoline describes how the recruits that had been there a bit longer had warned them of the horrors of the vaccination and sure enough, by the end of the day most of the women were moaning or in tears with temperatures and sore and swollen arms. I do not suppose Mum and her group fared any better.

Basic training itself consisted mostly of learning Army Drill like how to salute an Officer and of course marching; they were soon to learn that ATS women were marched everywhere.

There was also a great deal of energy expended on domestic activities, for which there was never enough time allocated, like cleaning the barracks, making and unmaking your bed every day, laying out kit in the proscribed manner for inspection, polishing shoes and shining one's brass badges, buckles and the many many brass buttons. It was all very mind numbing.

I am not quite sure why I say this but I can imagine my mother responding quite well to this rigorous structure of dos and don'ts: not actually enjoying it but in knowing what had to be done, how and by when, finding some sort of freedom in just getting it done.

Not so mind numbing was the Gas Chamber Test Mum took on the 29th September 1942, sometime in her second week. It was something she mentioned more than anything else, I think it impressed upon something of the reality of war service. She particularly remembered going through what seemed to her to be a gas-filled hut and may have contributed to the claustrophobia she suffered later in life.



<Fig 28&29 Basic training Gas drill by ATS soldier Gwendoline Gibbs and photo from National Army Museum>.

Another thing not so boring in the second week was pay day. Gwendoline tells us of the special and seemingly strictly applied ATS Pay Parade every two weeks.

The women would queue up in alphabetical order and as the Sergeant called your name, you marched up to the desk, banging your feet down hard as you halted, saluted and said (this is what my mother would have said) "215638 Private Binsley, Ma'am". You then extended your right hand to receive the pay envelope, transferred it to the left hand, saluted again with the obligatory "Ma'am", did a smart about turn and marched out of the room.

Gwendoline added that, needless to say, the first time they did it they all made a complete hash of it.



<Fig 30 Example of the special ritual Pay Parade>

Pay seems to have been about 10 or 15 shillings a week, half or less of what Mum had earned as a clerk but with all meals and living accommodation provided free, perhaps she was better off than ever. There were certain things they were expected to buy themselves out of this like shoe polish and brass cleaner but of course all their main meals were covered and no rent.

No doubt some of this first pay was hastily spent on buying things they now realised they needed desperately having been away from home for a couple of weeks. Fortunately, assuming Pontefract was like other barracks in the country, once they had their uniforms, when not on duty the recruits could go into town, the centre being just under a mile away. I am sure that some of the other women would have encouraged Mum to go with them to explore the shops and perhaps, like Gwendoline, go to the cinema (1 shilling) and buy fish and chips (starting at 3 pence, a quarter of a shilling).

On 8th of October 1942, after 3 weeks, Mum completed her basic training. Following on is a photo she had taken of herself 2 days later and two weeks before her 21st birthday. It does not show the forlorn, homesick, timorous person one might expect but a young woman with a great sense of achievement and pride in the soldier that she has become.

Records show Mum was granted 2 days leave at this time, highly unusual according to others' memoirs but presumably related to the unusual plans the army had for her. I thought at first that she was intending to share with her family and fiancée Stan back in London, how she had fared. It would have been a very brief visit, the travel taking so long, and expensive as on this occasion the army did not grant a free travel pass that commonly came with such leave.

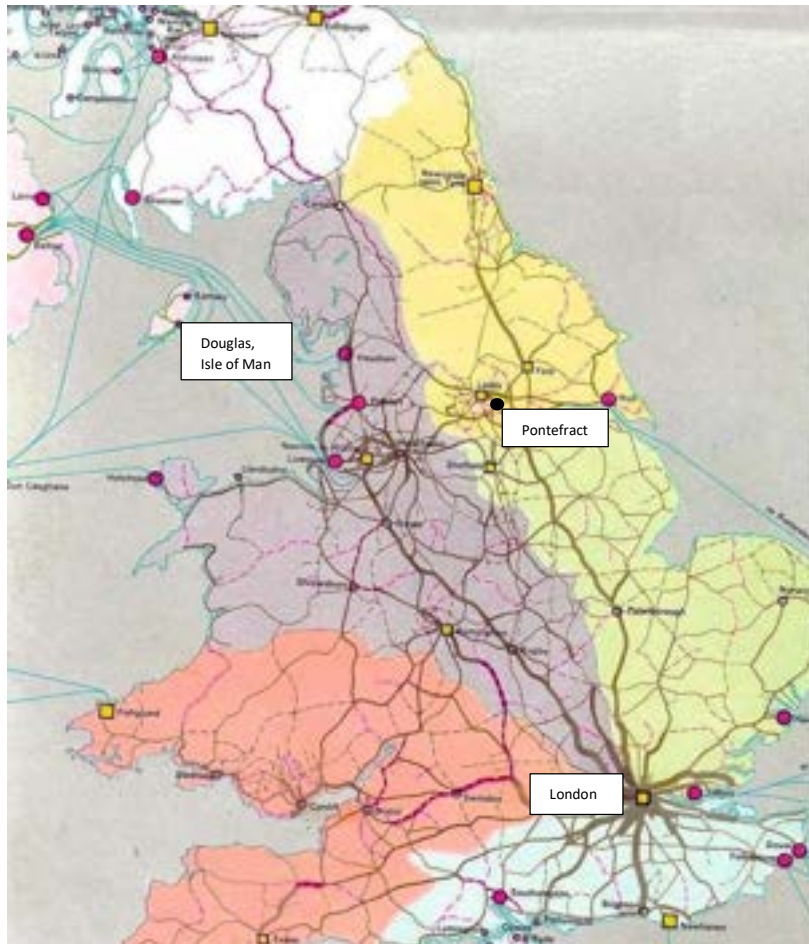


<Fig 31 Mum 10th Oct 1942 having just completed basic training>

However, I remember her talking once about a special day in the war she spent with Stan and I believe that this is when it happened. On the 9th of October, she travelled to a small town somewhere they could both reach and here they spent a romantic day, strolling around and happy just to be in each other's company. She told me an old lady noticed them and kindly brought them into to her house for tea and cake. They would have parted that evening to return to barracks and indeed it was the very next day that Mum had the portrait of herself in uniform taken, no doubt her special day with Stan adding greatly to her smile in it.

There had been one part of basic training that was quite the opposite of mind-numbing: a series of tests that Gwendoline describes as sort of intelligence tests to get some idea of how the new recruits could be used. As a clerk before being called-up Mum was likely to be given some sort of administrative role but she must have shown certain additional capabilities for she was selected for special wireless operations, although it is quite likely that, like Gwendoline, Mum was simply told that she was to be sent on to special training but had no idea what it was to be.

So it was that this woman, who had previously never travelled more than a few miles from home, now found herself with yet another 200-mile journey into the unknown. She was being sent to Douglas in the Isle of Man, which would take her on her first ever sea crossing, one that was often very rough indeed. Upon boarding, she would not have been comforted to be shown what to do in the event of attack by German U boat or planes. And she may well have had to do all this alone, as only about 1 in 100 ATS recruits were selected for this work



<Fig 32 The Isle of man train and ferry links just after the war>



<Fig 33 Example of an Isle of man ferry of the period>



<Fig 34 Douglas just before the war>

SPECIAL OPERATIONS TRAINING, DOUGLAS

Like Gwendoline, it is quite likely that it was only when she arrived that she was told she would be on an intensive course learning Morse code and that she would be there for the next 4 months. No doubt the 3 weeks of basic training had been a big wrench, it being the first time Mum had ever been away from home, but 4 months was on a totally different level. I imagine she was expecting perhaps another few weeks of training, another 4 months must have felt like she had been utterly cut off from her old life.

Fortunately, this new life was not more of the cold drudgery of Pontefract and the fact she always kept on display a brass pixie door knocker she bought on the island may indicate that she enjoyed life there. I have read several brief accounts of life for radio trainees at Douglas, it had some very big plusses. The women were billeted in holiday hotels on the Douglas sea front [Note 6], food was not rationed, there was a cinema they could get to and the pubs were open all day, not that that would have interested my mother. She may however, having been an avid ballroom dancer with Stan, been very keen on the Derby Castle Ballroom where dances were arranged and in Gwendoline's time, the year before, the standard of music was very good, the band having several peacetime professional players.

My mother had definitely not been a fan of sport at school, so she was probably much less keen on the ballroom when it was being used for Physical Training. One trainee tells of her group having to run to the ballroom past where the Prisoners of War were held and the inmates shouting out "encouragement" to them as they ran past in their issued khaki bloomers and vest. I am sure if that had happened to my Mother she would have told the story more than a

few times. She certainly told us about marching in formation along the sea front, when they were called to a halt by the male sergeant who shouted at her something like "Congratulations! You are the only one in step!". She was never sure whether he was being sarcastic or not but was deeply embarrassed either way as there were many men soldiers around laughing.



<Fig 35&36 Examples of ATS soldiers in physical training and marching>

Day to day life still included a certain amount of army drill, physical exercise, kit inspection, bed making and unmaking and cleaning, cleaning, cleaning but the main focus of their time was spent on radio training. It took up 5 or 6 hours a day said Gwendoline, and this was run by the Royal Signal Corps on the ground floor of one or more of the hotels in which they were billeted.

The radio transmissions they were being trained to intercept were sent out in Morse code, a set of short and long sounds representing letters and numbers. Training started with learning how to recognise them from Morse spoken verbally by the instructor, slowly at first and building speed and then the real thing delivered through headsets. Accuracy was essential but speed was key, they were even taught the simplest and quickest way to write down the letters they heard.



<Fig 37 ATS soldiers learning to read Morse code transmissions by
ATS soldier Gwendoline Gibbs >

Gwendoline said that within a couple of weeks the women soon began to realise that learning Morse code was one thing but taking it down for hours on end even at low speed was another. Many of the women could not handle the need for a continuous high level of concentration and indeed many dropped out.

In addition they had to memorise over 100 Q codes, special key letter combinations that were used in Morse signaling to manage the delivery of messages such as

QSL "Can you acknowledge receipt? "
or "I am acknowledging receipt"

QSM "Shall I repeat the last message which I sent you?"
or "Repeat the last message"

At the other end of the scale they were given an understanding of radios and signals in general, learning a little it seems about radio waves and the internal workings of the radio sets: about Ohms Law, the Stratosphere and the Appleton Layer. The couple of women that mentioned this in their memoirs said they soon forgot about it all.



<Fig 38 Mums Isle of Man Pixie>
"I Guide Ye Well Through Moor and Dell"

MARRIAGE

The women were expected to stay on the island training for 4 months but after 2 Mum must have been given special leave to return home to marry her childhood sweetheart Stan. The wedding, no doubt, had been long planned as clothing was rationed and it took time to acquire enough coupons to have anything like a wedding dress, or outfits for bridesmaids, and Mum had both. Food was rationed too and no doubt her parents ate meagerly as they saved for a little celebration.

However, the final timing, unless just lucky, seems to have been due to Stan who suddenly found he was to be sent abroad. So it was that Edie on 'special leave' and Stan on 'embarkation leave' met up once again, possibly for the first time in 3 months, and a couple of days later in Hampstead, London, on the 19th of December 1942, they were married.



There was no honeymoon, they just lived together in Stan's parents' home but I am sure that they were only interested in being together, wherever it was. My mother said they had just 10 days of married life together before they had to part, returning to their posts and that it would be nearly 4 years before they saw each other again.

According to records I have seen, the reality seems a little messier. Stan did not sail away until the 18th of January 1943 and standard embarkation leave was two weeks, so it would not have started until the 5th of January. It is surely no coincidence that Mum had 7 days leave between the 7th-13th January 1943

The journey between London and Douglas was long, slow, uncomfortable, expensive and not least dangerous, so I am sure Mum did not yo-yo between the two, or if she did she would surely have mentioned such an enormous struggle. My best guess is that Mum got a surprisingly generous 3 weeks special leave to marry and extended it by a week to be with Stan during his embarkation leave. However, it is quite likely that in this whole month they were actually together for only 10 days and it was a full three and a half years before they saw one another again.

The one unaccountable part is that Mum's special leave to get married is not listed with the rest of her leave in her 'Soldiers Book'. However she certainly did marry on the 19th of December and was away with the army the weekend before and unable to attend the wedding rehearsal at the church, her best friend Lily stood in for her

<Fig 39 Edith Binsley marrying Stan Guyver 19th Dec 1942>

TRAINING ENDS IN DOUGLAS

Back in Douglas Mum seems to have been teased a little about her marriage. On a couple of occasions she told me that the women had asked her how her "Old Man" was and that she had replied haughtily "He is not my Old Man, he is my Husband". The words themselves belie what she was hinting at: that the women had greeted her back with some ribaldry whilst she held on to that time as one of romance.

This second half of her training lasted for another couple of months after her marriage so she did not actually get to the end of the course until 5 months, rather than 4, after arriving in Douglas.

Gwendoline Gibbs recounts how the women were tested at the end of the course. They had to take continuous Morse for about half an hour, at a speed of eighteen words per minute, which they had to capture almost perfectly, something which required intense concentration. They were allowed only two mistakes: either to have written down one wrong letter or to have left a space for a letter they had failed to identify. They were also tested on their knowledge of the Q codes.

No doubt it was huge relief to Mum that on the 22nd of March 1943 she passed her test in "Operations Special, Group B, Class III". It was a very considerable achievement indeed. Gwendoline Gibbs says that of the 26 women with whom she trained, that is 26 of the 1 in a hundred hand-picked from basic training across the country, only 18 managed to complete the course and only 10 passed.

Joan Nicholls and Sinclair McKay, in their books lists the skills of those that passed as a combination of intelligence, supreme

accuracy, great endurance and a youthful stamina to handle pressure that could easily burn out the over 30s.

The women that had not succeeded were advised not to feel like failures as it was admitted that the course was very demanding and that in peace time it would have been 3 years long.

Mum now had what in military parlance was called a 'trade', Special Wireless Operator (nicknamed a SWOP), and would have received a pay rise but may have had little time to bask in her achievement. Gwendoline had almost none, she and the others that had passed the test were given the Official Secrets Act to sign and advised they would be posted, like Mum, to Loughborough, another 200-mile trek with that terrible sea crossing, leaving the following morning. Even then they were not allowed to know what they were going to do.

Courses and Schools, Specialist Qualifications, showing result.	Date.	Initials of Officer.
Exam Chamber Test	29.9.43	H.H.
Basic Training No. 9.7.43	11.11.43	H.H.
Passed Trade Test at Baynes	22/3/43	8/12
Approved Special Op.	1.6.43	

<Fig 40 Mum's training listed in her Soldiers Service book>

STATIONED AT BEAUMANOR



<Fig 41 The centre of Quorn 2023

Mum was sent to live in a place, arguably even nicer than Douglas: Quorn, a substantial village a couple of miles from Loughborough, quite handsome in parts and with many scattered quaint old cottages. Here the army had commandeered various properties for the women including Soar House, a big villa with a large garden that reached down to the little River Soar, a redundant pub called the Hurst on the main Loughborough Road through the village, an old cafe and more ordinary houses like The Towers, Southfields and Rose Cottage [Note 7].



<Fig 42-44 The Towers, Southfields and Rose Cottage, Quorn>

I am sure Mum would have mentioned living in a posh villa, or the oddity of a pub or cafe so I guess she went into one of the ordinary houses, I suspect Southfields. Below is a photo from Joan Nicholl's memoirs that claims to be of ATS SWOP trainees billeted in a lodging house called Homefields in Douglas in July 1943. However, the 4th woman from the left in the top row looks very much like my Mum, she certainly joined 47 Squad at some time and two women she knew well are also in picture. Could it be a photo not of Homefields but of Southfields misremembered?(Note 8)



<Fig 45 Is this really a picture of ATS billeted at Southfields?>

Life in Quorn is spoken of very warmly in any memoirs that mention it. The locals it seems were very welcoming, there were village social events and dances and an informal tea-room, really just a shed, where the women could meet and chat off-duty (Note 7). It was also easy to get to and from Loughborough to go to the shops and cinema, although it is described as a dreary place at that time. It was even possible to get the city of Leicester sometimes, with much better shops and even concerts although Mum never mentioned going there.

Mum must have been greatly relieved to find it was also relatively easy to get home on leave. The train has been described as crowded, slow and smelly but it probably went direct to London Marylebone from which it was just 2 short bus or tram rides to her own home front door. Today the journey would take less than 3 hours door to door so even in wartime she would easily have got home within a day. It is telling that for the rest of the time she spent at Beaumanor she seems to have saved up her leave and taken it in blocks of 9 days about every 4 months, presumably time she spent at home in Hampstead (Note 9).

Although the ATS women soldiers were organised and run like any other standard ATS unit, their duties were much lighter than at other postings to keep them fresh and alert for their arduous radio work. Nevertheless, they still were subject to a certain amount of drill, kit inspections, cleaning duties, PT ('Physical Training' sessions which almost all the women disliked) and route marches. They even had to march formally to meals in the Mess Hall at the Bulls Head (now 18 High Street) which had become ATS HQ with admin and officers' billets.

Although Mum looked a more self-reliant person by now, and a practiced traveler, she would not have been magically transformed into a new person with boundless self-confidence, so she was lucky to start work at Beaumanor Y Station as late as spring 1943. The year before all the interceptors had been men and initially were often abrupt and rude to the new female recruits, in part an expression of the sexist attitudes of the era



<Fig 46&47 The Old Bulls Head, ATS HQ and Mess Hall and Fearon Hall, Loughborough, home to the "commando course">

However, it was also due to frustration about the women's' lack of preparedness. At first, although the women were trained for 6 months, it was only in general Morse interception before being set to work immediately with the men: it was utterly inadequate (Note 10). Gwendoline Gibbs remembered feeling lost and petrified on her first day and a man looked at her pitiful effort and said "God Almighty another bloody useless woman", although he did apologise later.

Fortunately, Mum did not have to cope with this terrible baptism of fire, which I suspect would have hit her very hard. By the time she started training, the initial course had been reduced to 4 months with a further 2 in Loughborough on what was called the "Commando Course", specifically to prepare for the work at Beaumanor. For this The Royal Signal Corps had taken over church-owned Fearon Hall, in which they installed radio sets and taught the women every specific detail needed including exactly how to record the intercepted messages for use by Bletchley Park and to understand the complexities of how the particular radio traffic they were intercepting was broadcast in a structured way.

It is likely that Mum never had to work alongside the civilian men as by now there was at least one, possibly two listening huts manned exclusively by ATS. The first of these had opened in November 1942 covering certain important Mediterranean traffic and, ironically, by January 1943, quite possibly helping to keep Mum's husband Stan (my father) safer in his posting in North Africa.

In May 1943, Mum would presumably have finished her 2 months of specialized interception training and started working in one of the listening huts herself. Beaumanor seems to have been increasing in numbers and expanding its operation at this time so it is not clear exactly where she worked. However, by the end of the year the women were up to full strength and Mum would by now have been posted to 47 Squad C watch, in which she remained for the rest of the war (see Note 11), possibly helping keep Stan safer herself.

Her group manned listening Hut K, the fake stables and were billeted in newly built Brand Hill Camp. It may have been a nasty shock. The camp has been described in several memoirs as cold and uncomfortable but what made life here particularly unpleasant was its isolation, which made it very difficult to get away for a day or access any entertainment when off-duty.

There were a few concerts of classical music arranged, with travel laid on, and Beaumanor hosted several interest-groups including : Choral Society, Rambling Club, Cycling Club and various sports. However, the main leisure pursuit in WW2 was dancing and Loughborough Town Hall was the place to go. There was a bus to Loughborough that passed by but it seems to have been infrequent and unreliable. Different military groups in the area did put on dances and even arranged for troop carriers to get people there and back but these would have been too sporadic to satisfy the vitality of the ATS women: all young and some still only in their teens.



<Fig 48 drawing by ATS soldier Gwendoline Gibbs>



<Fig 49 "Gay Night Life in Brand Hill" by ATS soldier Dot Spencer>

However, Mum certainly enjoyed walks with friends in the countryside. Back in London, growing up, she had loved walking on Hampstead Heath but, better, the camp was right on the edge of what is now Charnwood National Forest, with Swithland Woods, noted for its Bluebells, right next door and just a mile away were the dramatic rocky outcrops and beautiful views from what is now called Beacon Hill Country Park. Later in life she would still never miss an opportunity for a countryside ramble on a holiday

However, except perhaps for a few, this really was not distracting enough, the intensity of their work created a need for something with some real clout for them on which to focus away from the radios. Mum mentioned several times going on country walks but seeing Morse in the way the birds arranged themselves on telegraph wires.



<Fig 50 Colleagues out in the countryside>



<Fig 51 Making their beds in a Brand Hill hut, Mum right, Note 12>



<Fig 52 Mum's birthday? in Brand Hill Camp 23rd Oct 1943 Note 12>

Being a purpose-built military camp and somewhat isolated probably meant that life here had a rather stronger military flavour. No more distant mess hall, the women now had to help out with kitchen duties and keep up military drill.

Mickey Marshall a sergeant at the camp at the time remembered with glee taking out squads for 5-mile military route marches through the countryside, singing all the wartime songs as they went. Joan Nicholls, a private, remembers such marches but only just how exhausting they were. I suspect Mum would be half way between these two and the singing may well have won her over completely.



<Fig 53 ATS 'Spud bashing' probably in Brand Hill Camp>



<Fig 54 Fire drill, Mum right [Note 8]> .

The fire drill picture above appears in Joan Nicholls memoirs and this tells us that Mum was in Hut 97 at Brand Hill along with the others in the photo. From left to right, the gang consisted of Jean Taylor, Margaret Gibbon, Joan Priesnall (?), Hilda Gee, Heather Garland and finally Mum herself (some names are possibly misspelled and questionable see Note 13). Some unfinished correspondence Mum left behind confirms she knew them all well but that Margaret and Heather were probably her special friends.

Surprisingly, Jean and presumably the other women knew her not as Edie, as she was known by everybody else all her life, but the more formal and dignified 'Edith' and it is tempting to conclude that this was an echo of a new, stronger person that she had become

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Despite its miserable reputation, I suspect that the isolation of Brand Hill was not such a burden to Mum, who was something of introvert and never seemed interested in meeting new people or going out. However, it may be telling that late 1943 and early 1944 she embroidered the picture below, not something she had ever done before or did after (well not until old age); she got it framed in Loughborough and gave it to her parents. It is tempting to see in the choice of subject matter a very positive attitude to being in the middle of the countryside.



<Fig 55 Mum's embroidery done 1943-44>

Indeed, Mum really seems to have thrived at Brand Hill and Beaumanor and she appears in the few photographs that exist looking very happy in herself, confident and fulfilled, perhaps more so than in almost any other photo I have of her.

Within 6 months she was upgraded to Ops Special (Wireless) Group B Class II, which meant she now had the ability to intercept Morse of much higher speeds of transmission (up to 25 'words' from 18) and got a pay increase.



<Fig 56 Mum, right, with two fellow ATS soldiers at Beaumanor>

A year in, she was awarded a good conduct stripe and 6 months later a second one, both also meaning a pay increase. On her ATS demob form her Commanding officer, Bridget O'Dowd, described her as cheerful and reliable member of the ATS and said that she deserved an award for exemplary military conduct (Note 14) but sadly Mum was a couple of months short of the necessary minimum 3 years' service needed. The praise would not have been for her work as a SWOP but as an ATS soldier. The radio interception was so secret even the ATS women's officers were not allowed to know what they actually did for the Royal Signal Corps.

Very oddly Mum never mentioned something of which even those in isolated Brand Hill must have been thoroughly aware and affected by: the arrival of 2000 American paratroopers in February 1944, training in preparation (it is now known) for D Day in June. By all accounts it was a cultural earthquake. They were camped in Quorn itself and between active campaigning returned there until they were moved over to the continent in early 1945.

The men were paid several times more than British soldiers, they had spare food and sweets galore, such as had not been seen by the British since before rationing 4 years before, and they were very generous in handing it out. Soon these glamorous young men were forging relationships with the ATS women, some of whom became "G.I. Brides" and others who just became pregnant and sadly disappeared. For the many it brought just fun, friendship and romance but eventually also the stark reality of war.

Joan Nicholls remembers that as D-Day approached, all the women could sense that something special was imminent and on the day itself she, as would most of the women there, saw the sky "black with gliders" and guessed that these were the American paratroopers from Quorn going over to France. It was the last many of these men would be seen, killed in action, and many of the ATS women were devastated by their loss.

I am guessing that being married to Stan, to whom she was devoted, and being rather introverted and socially shy, she steered clear of the Americans. She may have never mentioned to Stan their presence in Quorn: British soldiers did feel terribly eclipsed by them and perhaps she felt it better not to give him any irrational concerns, although actually he always had total faith in her.

From the photographs she left behind I get the impression that Mum, was content with and hugely enjoyed the company of her fellow ATS soldiers and the fun they created for themselves.



Fig 57 & 58 Off duty, Mum middle, and possibly playing the pyjama game, Mum bottom left [Note 15]>

Mum could play many popular songs of the day on piano but never mentioned doing so in the army and there are no annotations in her collection of sheet music to imply she ever did. Presumably there was not even a single piano at Brand Hill or perhaps she was little too shy. However she did greatly enjoy singing and the young women of the ATS seemed to have done a lot of that. Even on the wild commute by troop carrier to and from Beaumanor they would sing throughout the journey, day or night.

< Fig 59-62 some portraits of Mum's Beaumanor crew [Note 16]>



It caused some problems with the locals who did not appreciate being woken in the early hours of the morning by "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain When She Comes" and often complained.

Below are some war photos that Mum never showed me. At least 3 of the women in them are to be found in photos actually or very likely taken at Beaumanor and the originals of these portraits are all of the same sort, so presumably they are all Mum's colleagues there (Fig 59 is a later addition I found on the internet).

< Fig 63-66 continued>



AFTER THE WAR

By the end of January 1945, the German Army in Europe was in retreat, a situation from which they would not recover. It is unclear when Mum was finally withdrawn from Beaumanor. She was officially demobbed on the 10th of July 1945 but claimed to have been back in London on the 8th of May 1945, although no leave was recorded in her service book [Note 17]. This was "Victory in Europe" day and Mum with her father, little sister Betty and sister-in-law Isobel joined the crowds celebrating in Trafalgar Square. That day, for the first and only time in her life she got drunk; it was not a happy experience, she just sat on the kerb feeling terrible.

After VE day at least some women were retrained to intercept Japanese Morse transmissions and some advised to prepare for a posting to India and the Far East but as a married woman Mum would have been one of the first to be considered for release.

Gwendoline Gibbs says that as demob approached, she and the ATS women where she had been posted got a lecture on careers and each even had an interview with a careers officer. Whether or not Mum got the same, she chose, as did most it seems, to go back to life as it was before the war.

As there was relatively little commercial activity in the country, there were not enough jobs for those leaving the army but as Mum had been conscripted she would have been able to go back to her office job as a clerk, at Gilbey's. She never exploited her new professional training and what must have been her new confident attitude to the work environment. Instead she yearned for Stan to

come home and, as expected of a married woman in those days, to give up work and become a mother.

Stan returned in the middle of 1946 and became a milkman. The couple moved into 2 rooms in the Victorian tenement house shared with Stan's parents and a couple of other households, the sort of housing most working people lived in and in May 1947 she gave birth to Carol, the first of their 2 children.,



<67 Mum, Dad and their first child Carol July 1948>

Mum remained a housewife until her late 40s when she went back to work but only in very easy roles well below her capabilities. It is as if, when she left the Army, she returned once more to the more withdrawn and unsure woman she had previously been.

She did however keep as a memento the regimental badge of the Royal Corps of Signals, a single ATS brass button [Note 18] and her kit bag which was used for family summer holidays for years after. It seems very poignant that we never knew the remarkable history attached to it.



<Fig 68 Mum's old army kit bag in still in use 2024>

NOTES

[1] There was a 5th listening hut built much later, toward the end of 1944, but as fears of bombing had passed it was just an ordinary military hut.

[2] Joan Nicholls in her memoirs tells of intercepting transmissions from a German Panzer Division in the North African campaign with two operators on the network that would sign off with the same flourish "- - . - -" to which the other would reply "- -" which allowed the Division to be tracked from N Africa to Sicily, Italy and beyond. Mum's young husband Stan (my father) was part of the campaign that pushed the Germans back up along this path and so the intercepts may well have been of very considerable relevance to his safety and it is possible that Mum herself unknowingly intercepted messages of direct relevance to keeping Stan safer..

[3] She probably took the No 1 bus to Handel Street from South End Green, Hampstead, , just a hundred yards from 59 Fleet Road.

[4] That is not quite true, her father took her to Birmingham once aged 4 or 5, visiting relatives, but no doubt long forgotten.

[5] The tram could have been a 3 or a 5, one went via Camden Town, the other via Prince of Wales Road and Kentish Town. Kings Cross to Pontefract takes 3 hours today, in wartime it could easily have taken 6 hours.

[6] The women however could not forget about the war here. Some of the hotels on the front were surrounded by wire fences topped with barbed wire for use as internment camps for British residents that were actually German or Italian. It seems there were prisoners of war here too.

[7] Soar House is on Soar Road has been converted into flats, so too The Bull Inn, now called 18 High Street. The pub used for billets was The Hurst at 23 Loughborough Road and after becoming the Royal Chequers Chinese Restaurant, was demolished to make way for a small Co-op supermarket. Rose Cottage was at 21, just the other side of small side road. It was demolished in the 1960s and became a petrol station, which seems in its turn to have been demolished and the site rebuilt as homes. The Towers still exists but I have not been able to identify Southfields. Another house used to billet ATS was May Cottage, possibly 17 Nursery Street. The tea hut was on the corner of Meeting Street and Spinney Drive but has been rebuilt and in 2021 was the Scout and Guide hut.

[8] The women in this picture definitely known to Mum are Olga Roche, first left back row, and Jean Taylor, Second left front row. The woman I think is Mum, 4th left back row, is labelled in Joan Nicholls book as Betty Tupman, about whom I know nothing. I suspect the photo was sent to Joan Nicholls for her book of memoirs, England Needs You, by Jean Taylor who is named in the acknowledgements. If I am right then I would guess that Mum had already been at Beaumanor for some months when 47 Squad arrived from the Isle of Man and as eventually transferred into the group to build a team with which to man hut K. If it is her, Mum looks shy and reticent in this photo, as well she might if she had just joined them.

[9] At some time during the war Mum travelled to Birmingham to see her father's relatives, whom she had not seen since the age of 4 or 5 and with whom there seems to have been little contact ever.

This must surely have taken place while she was at Beaumanor, which is only 40 miles away. She only ever mentioned once or twice that she had been and never said any more about it but just before she died, in passages she wrote for her grandchildren, she said she was sad that they had not followed it up and that no relationship had been formed. This is odd because she always seemed disinterested in reaching out to people and keeping in contact with them, perhaps this indicates that whilst in the army it had encouraged her to be more gregarious. This social trip is certainly very revealing of just how much Mum's confidence had grown.

[10] In her memoir, Joan Nicholls explained that such was the secrecy that the Morse instructors did not actually know exactly what the women were being trained to do and so could only give them a generic introduction.

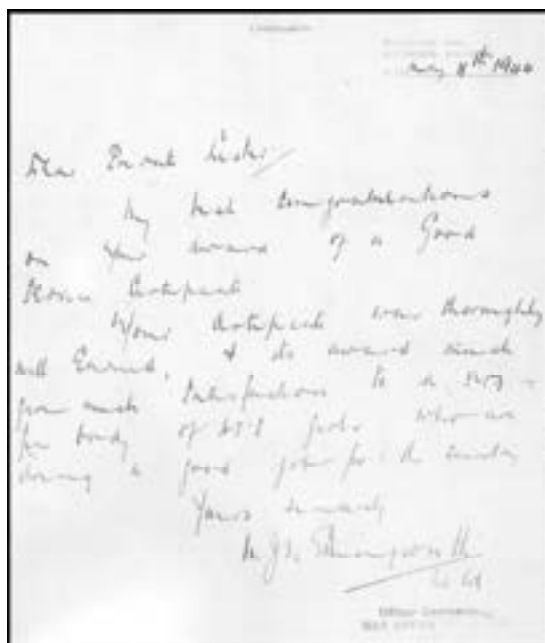
[11] In part this was a security measure. Security was built into the structure of how Beaumanor Y station was organised. By keeping a group together once it was formed it limited the breadth of knowledge any one soldier could learn about the place, they would not be able to get an overview.

[12] Describing these photos as Brand Hill and October 1943 is really a best guess based on what one can see in the photos. The beds are not the common standard army type as appear in the drawing by Dot Spencer, which she states is of Brand Hill, nor in the drawing by Gwendoline Gibbs but that might be a different place. However in Mum's photos the window wall certainly seems to be prefabricated and there is a strut sticking up from it at about the right place and orientation for a prefabricated military hut of the mid-20th century. So my best guess is that the non-standard extra

low bunk beds were from the bedrooms of the ATS billets in perhaps low-ceilinged rooms in ordinary houses in Quorn and had not yet been replaced. This would date the photo to mid-to- late 1943 as Hut K started operating and Brand Hill Camp opened to house the operators. The apples on the bed suggest being gathered by the women from the trees around, making a likely date for the photos of September or October, and the birthday cake would fit nicely with Mum's birthday on the 23rd of October.

[13] The names of the people in the fire drill photo are not entirely certain. They come from Joan Nicholl's book *England Needs You* (see section References, 17) but she provides only 5 names for the 6 women: left to right are Jean Taylor nee Coates, Margaret Gibbon or Gibbin nee Priestnell, Hilda Gee, Heather Garland, Edith Guyver (Mum). I know the first and last are correct and it is unlikely Joan would have accidentally left out the names of the second and fifth woman in the photo. My guess is that Joan missed out the name of the third woman, who is probably Joan Priesnall. Having written down the second woman's maiden name, Margaret Gibbons nee Priestnell, it made it seem to her that she had already noted down the name Priesnall.

[14] Following is an example of a commendation an ATS soldier received for exemplary military conduct. It came with a handwritten letter of congratulations from the senior officer in charge of Beaumanor, Lt Cmdr Ellingworth RN



<Fig 69&70 Army Commendation and congratulatory letter>

[15] I have seen on the internet a photo (now lost) of a group of ATS women at Beaumanor in their pyjamas and labelled 'the pyjama game' No more was known about it but it does imply it was indeed some special game the women played.

[16] Olive Spinks is Fig 59, top left; Margaret Gibbons Fig 61 bottom left . The woman in Fig 60 appears in Fig 52 behind the bed on the right and the woman in Fig 65 in Fig 53, "spud bashing". It is likely their names appear in the list below.

This is a list of names that Mum wrote after receiving a Christmas card from fellow ATS interceptor Jean Taylor in 1995, which prompted her to jot down some of the names she remembered, all it seems from C Watch:

Barbara Lullan (or Lulham)
 Heather Garland *
 Hilda Gee
 Ithan Timms
 Jean Dodswell
 Jean Taylor (nee Coates)
 Joan Morley
 Joan Priesnall (or Priestnall)
 Mable Marples (or Marple)
 Margaret Gibbons (or Gibbins) nee Priestnell
 Olga Roch, (or Roche) married name Churchill
 Olive Spinks
 and from 'D' Watch - Sheila Taylor

She put asterisks against the names Heather Garland and Margaret Gibbons, with whom perhaps she was particularly close. I have added in brackets additional names or spellings from Joan Nicholls book.

[17] I think Mum actually was celebrating Victory in Japan day (VJ Day), which meant that the war was over in its entirety. This was in August 1945, a month after she was demobbed and therefore back in London and without any need for army leave.

[18] The brass button, is not a standard ATS one. It shows a coronette surrounding a decorative M which standard Princess Mary, Princess Royal, the sister of wartime King George VI and nominally Controller Commandant of the Auxiliary Territorial Service. The button is usually identified as denoting the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC), which the ATS became in 1949. Perhaps it was sent to her by someone she was close to at Beaumanor that stayed in the army to become a WRAC.

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FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS USED

GG	Memoir Gwendoline Gibb, Bletchley Roll of Honour
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JN	Joan Nicholls, England Needs You
NAM	National Army Museum
QST/JB	Quorn in WW2, Sue Templeman/Joan Bradshaw, Quorn Village Online Museum Online

1 Family document: Mum's ATS leaving form 10/07/1946

2 Family photo: Mum, Edith Evelyn Guyver nee Binsley 08/01/1944 aged 22, a photo she sent to her husband, my father, who was abroad at war.

3 Beaumanor Hall, promotional picture contemporary
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/brianaw2010/9367748535/>

4 Beaumanor Hall listening hut H built to resemble 2 estate workers' cottages <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1392306>

5 Inside listening Hut H, Beaumanor Hall, IWM

6 OS map edited to highlight Loughborough, Quorn, Beaumanor Hall, Garat's Hay and Brand Hill

7 Ethel Bamford, Bletchley Park Role of Honour
<https://bletchleypark.org.uk/our-story/ats-80th-anniversary/>

8 Royal Corps of Signal arm flash
<https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/385174269925>

9 Family photo: Mum's Royal Corps of Signal cap badge worn by her and her ATS comrades ATS on the tunic

10 The listening huts and admin block, drawn by the architect; JN

11 Radio set form as used during WW2 at Beaumanor, Beaumanor Hall Exhibition 2017,
<https://www.morsecodebeaumanor.com/Exhibition-2017.html>

12 Headphones as used during WW2 at Beaumanor , Beaumanor Hall Exhibition 2017,
<https://www.morsecodebeaumanor.com/Exhibition-2017.html>

13 Cartoon of member of ATS intercept a transmissions; GG

14 Cartoon of radio interception by Dot Spencer, ATS soldier at Beaumanor, QST/JB

15 Red form used at Beaumanor Hall to record intercepted transmissions: <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/our-story/ats-80th-anniversary/>

16 Battledress insignia of Beaumanor SWOPs; - JN

17 Family photo: Mum in Battle dress whilst based at Brand Hill camp

18 Family photo: Mum, Edith Evelyn Guyver nee Binsley, before her conscription into the ATS, date uncertain, almost certainly before war was declared in 1939.

19 Territorial Local HQ, Hanley Street, Bloomsbury/Kings Cross, London as it appeared in the early 2000s and called Yeomanry House. From Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yeomanry_House,_Handel_St,_London.jpg, 1024px-Yeomanry_House,_Handel_St,_London,

20 Example of ATS 'Procedure on Calling Up' form
<http://www.atsremembered.org.uk/historyats.htm>

21 Example of ATS 'Instructions on Embodiment' from
<http://www.atsremembered.org.uk/historyats.htm>

22 Example of ATS 'Notice to Join' form
<http://www.atsremembered.org.uk/historyats.htm>

23 Example of ATS 'Report for Duty' form
<http://www.atsremembered.org.uk/historyats.htm>

24 Pontefract Barracks
<https://www.ukholocaustmap.org.uk/map/records/pontefract-barracks>

25 ATS recruits receiving Greatcoats; NAM

26 ATS regulation khaki bloomers; NAM

27 ATS regulation bra 1939; NAM

28 Cartoon ATS Gas Drill; GG

29 ATS Gas Drill; NAM

30 ATS pay parade; NAM

31 Family photo: Mum 10/10/1942 in ATS uniform 2 days after completing her basic training

32 Map of train and ferry connections UK Readers Digest Complete Atlas of the British Isles, 1965. Modified by author.

33 Ferry 'Mona Queen' to the Isle of Man in the 1930s (it was actually sunk in 1940 during action in Dunkirk)
<https://www.steam-packet.com/blog/80th-anniversary-of-the-evacuation-of-dunkirk/>

34 Douglas, Isle of Man, probably late 1930s. University of St Andrews <https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/item/loch-promenade-douglas-isle-of-man-by-night/701806>

35 ATS physical exercise, Hempshill Hall, NAM

36 ATS marching, Colwyn Bay, NAM

37 Cartoon ATS members learning Morse code, GG

38 Family photo: Mums Isle of Man Brass Pixie door knocker with quote "I Guide Ye Well Through Moor and Dell"

39 Family photo: Mum marrying my father Alfred Stanley Guyver (known as Stan) 19/12/1942.

40 Family photo: Page 4 from Mum's Soldiers Service book, AB64, showing her recorded completed training

41 Quorn High Street seen from Station Road, derived from Google Streetview image of 2023.

42 The Towers, 99 Chaveney Road, Quorn, derived from Google Streetview image of 2023

43 Southfields, Quorn, JN. Possibly still existing but unidentified.

44 Rose Cottage, Quorn; 21 Loughborough Road, now demolished, QST/JB

45 Photo claiming to be of ATS trainees billeted at guest house "Homefields" in Douglas, Isle of Man— JN

46 The Bulls Head, ATS HQ and Mess Hall, now an apartment block called 18 High Street, retrieved December 2024

<https://www.onthemarket.com/details/2004785/#/photos/1>

47 Fearon Hall, Loughborough, home to the "commando course", derived from Google Streetview of 2022

48 Cartoon: cold nights GG

49 Cartoon: Evening entertainment at Brand Hill by Dot Spencer, ATS soldier at Beaumanor, QST/JB

50 Family photo, Heather Garland left, the two others unnamed.

51 Family photo, thought to be Brand Hill Camp, Autumn 1943 or 1944. Mum on the right

52 Family photo, thought to be Brand Hill Camp, Autumn 1943 or 1944. Mum on the right

53 Family photo: ATS 'Spud bashing' in Brand Hill Camp presumably.

54 Family photo: fire drill, mum on right, Brand Hill Camp, Hut 97

55 Family photo: Mum's embroidery dated 1943-44, seemingly available in shops as a design printed on the base cloth.

56 Family photo: Mum, right, looking hearty and confident with ATS comrades Heather Garland centre and unnamed woman.

57 Family photo, Off duty and sporting army issue canvas shoulder bags, Mum centre with Margaret Gibbons right and unnamed woman.

58 Family photo, ATS in their pyjamas, Mum bottom left, Margaret Gibbons and Heather Garland top left and right.

59 Olive Spinks, Bletchley Park Roll of Honour, one of the ATS women Mum remembered.

60-66 Family photos: Mum's Beaumanor comrades, names unidentified except fig 61 Margaret Gibbons

67 Family photo: Mum Dad and their first child Carol July 1948

68 Family photo: Mum's army kit bag as in 2024

69 Example of War Office award of good service, JN

70 Letter of congratulations accompanying the good service award in Figure 69, from the commanding officer of Beaumanor Y station, JN>

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APPENDICES

These are open-ended documents being built up as and when required.

They include:

Corrections and additions.

The reasoning behind the interpretation of Mum's own photos.

The closeness or otherwise to Mum of the authors of memoirs used to recreate her war story.

Further details and considered opinions about Beaumanor Y Station and the listening operation by key authors e.g. Joan Nicholls and Sinclair McKay.

Specially illustrative video material e.g. identified passages from the film 'The Gentle Sex' (1943), not a documentary but with sections depicting with considerable historical accuracy training and life in the ATS.