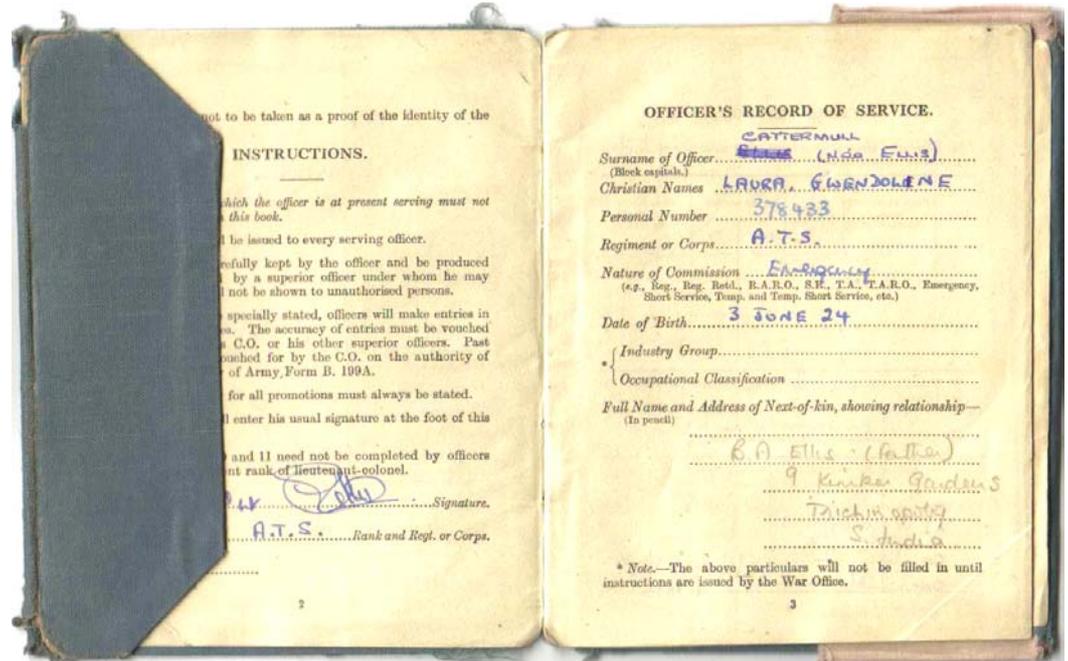


<b>Surname:</b> Cattermull	<b>First Name(s):</b> Laura Gwendoline	<b>Army Number:</b> W/378433	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Ellis	<b>Name used during service:</b> Ellis / Cattermull	<b>Rank:</b> Captain	
<b>Main base:</b> London Guildford Bad Oeynhausen	<b>Training base:</b> O.C.T.U.	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Originally WAC (I) – 1942 A.T.S. London - 1947	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b> 1 <sup>ST</sup> Signal Squadron	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> A.T.S. W.R.A.C.	<b>Command:</b> Southern B.A.O.R.
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> A.T.S. May 1947 to 1951	<b>Reason for discharge:</b>	<b>Trade:</b>	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> Not sure if basics issued – being commissioned it is probable that we bought them from QM Stores. I acquired my Service Dress through an advertisement in some ATS paper – it was a perfect fit and beautifully tailored by Lillywhites.	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details given below.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		

Subaltern Ellis - 1949

**Pay book:**



**Memorable moments:**

- My career in the ATS is unusual, having its 'origins' so to speak in India. I served in the Women' Auxiliary Corps (India) – WAC(I) – from August 1942 to August 1946, trained in Ciphers, starting as Sergeant (8643) and ending as Subaltern (WAC 1149).
- I arrived in the UK in February 1947 still heart-whole and fancy-free, and decided to join the ATS. I was granted a Direct Commission in May 1947.
- *London District Transit Camp* – May 1947 to October 1948. I was the QM in a small unit – the OC was a captain. We kitted and de-kitted the girls going to and returning from their Middle East postings. We were also a holding unit for girls en-route to postings and for those awaiting discharge under para 11 of ATS Regs – pregnancy. The majority were unmarried mothers-to-be. When interviewing the pregnant girls on first arrival, my task was to try and find out who had fathered the child so that we could fight for maintenance for them. On one occasion, the reply was 'I don't know Ma'am, he had his hat on'!! We had a very good relationship with the local Social Services, who in their turn arranged for adoption of the babies. In most cases the girls opted for this, and returned home to Mum on discharge as if nothing had happened,
- *Training Centre, Guildford* – October 1948 to April 1949. HOW I hated this posting, having been so happy in London. I was in charge of the 'Cooks' – we had girls through on courses and a band of senior NCOs who were their Instructors, mostly bossy, beefy, women who decided to give me a hard time. The Officers Mess was no better, a group of very cliquey women. I KNEW I had to get out of it. I applied to go into Signals, being Cipher trained from India. They were short of people like me so I got a posting very quickly, speeded up I suspect by the fact that I had already applied for, and been granted, a Regular commission in the WRAC (as the ATS was about to become).
- *1<sup>st</sup> Signal Squadron WRAC, HQ BAOR Bad Oeynhausien* – We had a WRAC Squadron Commander, Pat Pantcheff with a 2 IC and the usual Squadron HQ staff. The three of us subalterns were Duty Signal Officers each in charge of a Three Shift system where the NCOs and girls manned the Teleprinters, Signal Office and Cipher Office serving HQ BAOR. The adjacent Signals Despatch Office (the hub of a BAOR – wide official mail system using armed Despatch

Riders in jeeps) was manned by Royal Signals. In overall charge was a Royal Signals Chief Duty Signal Officer. There was also a large Telephone Exchange, but this was I think largely manned by German girls and certainly not our responsibility. We were housed in a building which had previously been a German Post Office.

- We initially worked a three-shift system – Day 1 0800-1400, followed by 2000-0800 (overnight to Day 2, which was a rest day.) Day 3 was 1400-2000, and so on. This was VERY tough going, even though one WAS able to snatch a few hours sleep during the night stint. We eventually got this changed to a four-shift system which was a doddle, and also gave us time for administration responsibilities for the girls on our shift.
- On one occasion I changed my night shift, and a Royal Signals Officer stood-in for me. During that night, an armed despatch rider in the Signals Despatch Office (SDO) next door ran amok and shot the corporal in charge, seriously wounding him in the throat. WHAT an escape for me, I might have had to deal with that.
- One Christmas, I was on night shift when the male NCO from the SDO asked me if I would authorise his last stand-by DR to go to the Harz mountains (about a 100 miles away over snow-covered roads) where the C-in-C was on a skiing holiday. I instructed him to open the parcel to see how urgent its contents were. It contained a Christmas cake, a ski jacket and such like! I refused to allow the journey, in case a real need should arise. Needless to say, the NCO was greatly relieved – BUT I was summoned the next morning to my Chief's office. He had had the General's displeasure conveyed to him. He told me I had reason to be grateful to the General, as but for him I wouldn't be in Germany – 'Not at all', said I, 'but for the likes of me the General would not be in Germany, his appointment depends on the number of Troops on the ground' – I have NEVER lived that one down!!
- The CO of the HQ BAOR Signal Regiment to which we were affiliated was very 'pro' WRAC and included us in Regimental parades as well as Regimental Dinner Nights. It was at one of these that I met the Assistant Adjutant, who was at the time re-badging from 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Tanks to Royal Signals. We married about 15 months later. I was by then 26 but David only 24 and 'officially' not meant to marry until he was 25. As a result we were only entitled to a soldier's marriage allowance, and not eligible for a married quarter.
- In the meantime, I moved to Signals Branch in HQ BAOR, initially as a staff officer (granted the acting rank of captain) and then as Personal Assistant to the Chief Signal Officer who was a brigadier. On first arrival in Germany, as a junior subaltern I had been allotted an attic flat in a large requisitioned German house where the Squadron officers lived. During the year of our living in Army 'sin' (until he was 25 and entitled to a married quarter) David would come down from Verden near Bremen, where he was stationed, by train for the weekend – and return on Sunday evenings immediately after 'Songs of Praise' on the radio. One of the 'wags' in the Mess would always greet me at Monday morning breakfast with 'tired, Gwen?' How glad I am that 'they' made life so rotten for me in Guildford!!
- It was a very happy time, both of us giving 101% of endeavour to our respective jobs and having our weekends together. As soon as David was 25 I resigned on the grounds that 'family circumstances had recently changed' without any form of gratuity. Had I been 'clever' I would have waited until I was pregnant! But that would have meant serving for another six months.
- I then started my life as an Army wife, and it has been – Gott sei dank – fun ever since.

Photos:



Subaltern Ellis with Cooks and Major Elliott,  
District Catering Adviser, at Guildford Training Centre - 1948



Lieutenant Ellis leading 1<sup>st</sup> Signal Squadron past the saluting base outside HQ  
BAOR, Bad Oeynhausen



Capt Cattermull in her office as PA to the Chief Signal Officer, HQ BAOR Bad Oeynhausen - 1951

Army Form 8,2606.  
(REVISED)  
MILITARY  
IDENTITY CARD No. A 422926

Surname **CATTERMULL**

Christian Names (and rank or designation at time of issue) **Laura Gwendoline (Lieutenant)**

Sex **Female**

Personal No. **378433**

Height **5'6"**

Colour of Eyes **Brown**

Colour of Hair **Brown**

Other Distinguishing Marks (if any) **nil**

Date of Birth **3 June 1924**

Signature of Issuing Officer *[Signature]*

Date **25 October 1950**

Signature of Bearer **Cattermull**