

Surname: Clark	First Name(s): Joan	Army Number: W/228980	
Maiden name (if applicable): Bennett	Name used during service: Bennett / Clark	Rank: L/Cpl	
Main base: Kedleston Hall, Derby Bletchley Park Harrogate Forest Moor	Training base: Knutsford	Enrolled at: Warrington	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery:	Group/Regiment: Royal Corps of Signals	Command:
Year(s) of service: Nov 1942 to July 1945	Reason for discharge: End of hostilities in Europe Release of married women	Trade: Teleprinter Operator Signals	
Uniform Issued: 1 worn skirt 1 battledress blouse (for work) 1 greatcoat* 1 khaki hat with peak 1 kit bag 1 gas mask 1 housewife (sewing materials) 3 pink bras 3 pink suspender belts (we were allowed to wear our own personal items) 3 vests – white 3 prs woolly pants 3 prs artificial silk khaki knickers 3 khaki shirts 4 khaki collars 1 khaki tie 1 pullover 3 prs khaki lisle stockings 2 prs lace up shoes – brown 1 new tunic 1 new skirt Later issue: 1 or trousers (night shifts only) 1 sidecap (for walking out) 1 waterproof cape/groundsheet		Photo:  Harrogate, Spring 1945	

<p>*The greatcoat and tunic were issued with plastic buttons but we bought brass ones from Army-Navy stores for our tunics – so much smarter!</p>	
<p>Description of daily tasks:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we had been trained and posted to an Operational Station we worked shifts round the clock and seven days per week – with all kinds of permutations as the powers that be tried to find the most efficient system. • If the morning shift started at 7 am we would be called at 5.30 am in order to barrack our beds, sweep the floor and shake the small mat beside the double bunk. In the wooden huts at Kedleston there was a strip on linoleum down the centre, from door to door, about 1 yard wide – brown colour. This had to be polished if there would be an inspection, otherwise it was “rubbed up” with a duster tied over the head of the brush. (At night, the hut lights would go out when the door was opened – to comply with black out regulations). There were wooden shutters for the inside of the windows. • Beds were “barracked” by stacking the three biscuits (which made up the mattress) at the head of the bed. One blanket was folded in four length ways – the others sideways, plus the sheets and were stacked on top of the biscuits – a blanket – sheet – blanket – sheet – blanket on top of the two pillows and all wrapped up with the long blanket – only folded edged to be visible at the front! Then we would go for breakfast at 6.15 am in the Mess Hall – usually porridge, sometimes an egg – or possibly bacon not often both together – followed by a round of bread, a scrape of margarine and if very lucky, a bit of jam or marmalade – at least the tea was always hot – is served in galvanized buckets. We would then line up outside the Mess Hall – in threes – and march up to the Operations Rooms on top of the slope, taking over from those on duty. The Wireless operators could not leave their sets until their relief had plugged in her headset alongside to monitor on the same frequency, and take over. It was easier for the T.P.O.’s to finish typing sending a message and then to change over. • At Harrogate we were eventually in concrete huts in the grounds of Queen Ethelburga’s (which had been a girl’s boarding school – then an A.T.S. Training Camp, before becoming a Signals depot). The Station was up on the Moor – Forest Moor about 20-30 mins drive away – so we had to pile into Bedford trucks for the slow climb up to the Wireless Station. These trucks were very cold in the winter. Later we had more enclosed types of buses which were much warmer. Forest Moor was all concrete, with long corridors which we ran along strictly against regulations. • At Kedleston I don’t remember doing much in the way of P.T. – it was a mile from the camp across the park, then two further miles along the narrow road to the Trolley bus Terminus – and 20 mins into Derby – with the same coming back, unless we had a late pass and late transport was laid on from the Square – possibly on Saturdays depending on shifts. • At Queen Ethelburga’s we would have P.T. very rarely just running round the school playing field.
<p>Pay book:</p>	<p>Not available.</p>

Memorable moments:

- In November 1942, aged 20 and following a medical etc, I was ordered to report to Peninsula Barracks, Warrington. I was working as a library assistant at the Central Library, Borough Road, Birkenhead.
- Once collected at the Barracks a large group of us were taken by army transport to High Leigh, Knutsford, Cheshire for three weeks training. We were housed in wooden huts, in double decker bunks. I always chose a top one. After a weekend leave, those of us who opted for training as wireless operators or teleprinter operators were taken down to Putney, London and billeted in bombed out houses. I was in 6 Mercier Road, Putney. We had lessons in typing at Wandsworth High School or practice if we could already type – then a couple of weeks on teleprinters to reach the required speed.
- In March a group of us were posted to a signals unit at Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire – again in wooden huts in the grounds – a big improvement on bombed out houses in London. We were in a “Y” wing, sending the messages picked up by the wireless operators to BP. We did not know for some time that this was Bletchley Park and the messages were intercepted German ones – but we were warned it was all very secret, the famous Enigma.
- In Derby the two American camps were on opposite sides of the town – one for white troops and one for coloured. They were allowed in town on alternate nights – never EVER together. American Military Police roamed the town in jeeps – they were known as snow drops because of their white helmets.
- At Derby we sometimes went to first house at the Grand Theatre where we sat on the front row of the Gods for 1/-. We saw Emlyn Williams take part in his play “Night must fall” and Richard Tauber in “Old Chelsea”. I still have the programmes with their autographs.
- Ours was a very secret company and I don’t recall ever being told any details about it. The emphasis was all on sending the messages as quickly and accurately as possible – but the unit was to be “invisible”!
- Every month as shifts allowed we would have Church Parade – for Matins. Kedleston Hall has its own village church next to the Hall – (the rest of the village had been moved out a mile away, years before).
- When we started night shifts at Kedleston early in 1943 we asked about trousers – only transport drivers were issued with them then. After several weeks a batch of knickerbockers were delivered, with instructions they were to be worn beneath our skirts – since our skirts were very tight fitting and quite short, this was impossible as the k.bockers were like serge riding breeches ending below the knee – quite ridiculous. Wide bottoms! So they were sent back and eventually we were issued with nice khaki trousers. As we were not inspected before going on night duty we went without our hats – the girls dressing each others hair into high styles – a la Pompadour – and wearing quite a lot of make up – (raised the spirits no end). We also wore coloured socks as a relief from so much khaki – but one night a couple of H.Q. officers (as opposed to Signals personnel) with nothing better to do, went to see the girls going on duty – and took exception to the non-issue socks, which were then forbidden, as if one typed more accurately while wearing only khaki!
- At the end of 1943 we heard a new Y wing was being formed at Harrogate, Yorkshire, so Marjorie Williams and I applied for a transfer and were in at the beginning of the new station at Forest Moor – doing the same work.
- We could walk into Harrogate comfortably though we would sometimes share a taxi back to camp. There were two American Camps near Queen Ethelburga’s – Field Hospitals – so large numbers of predatory males who thought they were an Army of Occupation – so the girls were always careful to go about in groups.
- At Queen Ethelburga’s there was the School Chapel as part of the complex – with resident Padre.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Harrogate, of course, on our afternoons off we had afternoon tee at Betty's. We were amazed to find they still served trifle and cream cake with fresh cream – the place was always crowded, as you can imagine. After a visit to the cinema it was the more mundane fish and chips – we were always hungry. • I was married in June 1944 – but only just. I had chosen 24th June, Midsummer's Day and the ceremony was booked for our old Parish Church of Holy Cross, Woodchurch, Wirral early in the year. Then ALL Service Leave was stopped on 1st March indefinitely! However, since I had booked my Wedding before the ban, the Adjutant allowed me 7 days compassionate leave!! So I was married in the white dress and veil which my friend Marjorie had brought back from Canada for <u>her</u> wedding. She wanted me to have it as she would not wear it considering the circumstances – and of course, clothes were on coupons – and we in the Services had none, not being allowed to wear "civvies" in any circumstances. (Several of my friends later borrowed the dress and veil so were able to have white weddings too). At the time I was the only one in camp to get leave for six months (D Day had been 6th June!) • My husband was working on the Tyne at this time, for Vickers Armstrong – ship builders – repairing Naval vessels. I was able to get a Sleeping Out Pass on Saturday night in each four weeks (shift work) and met Bert on Harrogate Station off the noon train from Newcastle. A lady we knew kept a boarding house in Dragon Parade and we stayed there – she was very kind to us and on winter mornings brought us breakfast in bed. • That year 1944, I had Christmas leave – it was to be a wonderful Christmas as we knew the war against Germany was entering its final stages. On Boxing Day came the telegram to my parents saying my brother was wounded and missing in Italy. He had been called up with the militia in July 1939 aged just 21 – he served in France on Heavy Anti Aircraft guns until the fall of France when the unit managed to get away from St Nazaire. Then for 18 months he served in H.A.A. on the N.E. coast being sent to the Middle East in December 1941. After the defeat of the Africa Corps the gunners were transferred to the infantry and took part in the invasion of Italy. Later in January we heard his body had been found once the snow went (I have visited his grave near Faenya) • I well remember the hectic days before D day and the piles of messages which came flooding through, so many we had a pile on the floor several feet high. Despatch riders had to take the backlog to Bletchley as we were told to keep sending the most recent. • On Easter Sunday 1945 our Watch was on duty all day so no chance to go to Church (8 am H.C. or 10.30 am Matins). The R.C.'s and Methodists were to be given Evening Services so we C of E said "How about us"? We were then told the Padre would put on a Eucharist at 5.30 <u>am</u> - if there was any demand for it! A bit stunned we discussed this and 14 said 'yes' – (Tele-ops). The Wireless Ops had to double our figures – as there were more of them, so a matter of pride. This meant Sergeants were needed, and Sgt Major and Officer – who coaxed her friend to come too – then they bullied several male colleagues also. Transport drivers took the opportunity and Padre finished up with nearly full house! • Then there were again many irregular messages leading up to V.E. day with the codes breaking down and the traffic coming through as plain language. • Most married A.T.S. were discharged at the end of July 1945. We were cold and hungry at times but always confident of victory and proud of our Signals Unit.
Photos:	Not available