


Surname: Dodds	First Name(s): Barbara	Army Number: W/148777	
Maiden name (if applicable): Day	Name used during service: Day / Dodds	Rank: WS / Sergeant	
Main base: Bramley London Preston Lancaster Manchester London Stanmore London Southampton Portsmouth London	Training base: Guildford London	Enrolled at: Guildford, Surrey	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery:	Group/Regiment: Royal Signals	Command:
Year(s) of service: 1/5/1942 to 29/6/1945	Reason for discharge: After VE married women could apply for early release – which I did to enable me to spend more time with my RAF pilot husband, due to be sent overseas.	Trade: Cipher Operator	
Uniform Issued: Cap/ badge Sweater Jacket Skirt Shirts Underclothes Stockings Shoes Shoe cleaning brushes Brass button stick Greatcoat Gas mask Steel helmet Kit bag (later- shoulder bag)	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-ciphering and en-ciphering • No PT or fatigues. • Periodic duty NCO – check on blackout, girls in huts etc. Occasionally take a parade. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts – Manchester 24 hours on, 24 hours off. Other places mainly 8 hour shifts. • War Office shifts – 1 week 9 am to 5 pm. 2 weeks alternate nights (5pm to 9 am) – sounds too long but we loved it – being alternate nights off!
Pay book:	Not available.
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I volunteered for the A.T.S. in 1942 for two reasons. In 1940 I had taken on a temporary (as I saw it) job with the Civil Defence in a Control Centre, London outskirts, Lewisham. I had moved from home into 'digs' to be nearer work. Once the blitz began it became worth-while work, and not the time to leave. Christmas 1941 Hong Kong fell to the Japanese. Hong Kong was where I was born in 1921, grew up there, loved the place. It was <u>home</u>. However, my father retired in 1938 from the Hong Kong University and we came to what my <u>parents</u> called home. I thought England, and London especially, a very grey and dreary place full of grey and dreary people. • By then, late 1941, early 1942, air raids were infrequent so I felt I should be doing <u>more</u>. Especially now my beloved Hong Kong was taken over by the Japanese, and some friends were either killed or prisoners. Also, around that time, I lost someone I cared for very much. So I wanted a change of scene. So I asked for my release, got signed permission to apply for one of the women's services, and went along to the Recruitment Office, 1942. There I was told (apologetically!) that neither the WRNS nor the WAAFS were recruiting, there was only the ATS. I replied that well then that would do. • Followed soon after by the medical check – A.I. – and some sort of I.Q. test. On 1st May 1942 I was at the Training Camp at Guildford. Learning all the bewildering complications of simply making a bed (with 'biscuits' as mattresses) folding blankets, laying out kit, who to salute – and how – and how to march etc and keep one's eyes facing front when on parade! In due course I was asked what I would like to be – or do – in the ATS. I suggested, Something in communications? I was asked if Cipher appealed? I thought it could be interesting – and have since been so glad that that officer steered me that way, maybe realising that I was not going to be much of use in ways that would involve working with a lot of others – maybe she was wise or intuitive. Who knows? • After a very brief filling-in time where I spent a week or so at an Ordnance Camp at Bramley, near Basingstoke, until being sent on a cipher course in London, near Knightsbridge. Largely remembered for the Cipher Officer who told us not to lose the pins or paperclips as now they were running out of railings and saucepans, they were making tanks with pins etc. We dutifully – nervously – laughed. At the end of that course, we had to fill in a form, one question being "Where would you like to be posted?" I filled in LONDON, having become fond of it since seeing it being battered by bombs, H.E.s, delayed action, unexploded, incendiaries, land mines, anti-personnel etc. So they sent me to Lancashire. • Preston first, where a friend from the cipher course and I were billeted in a house in Bamber Bridge – just for a few days. A kind couple who were nice to us, showed us our small bedroom – a double bed. One side pushed against the wall. I seem to remember a Stag-at-Bay-type of large picture on that wall – a toss-up which one of us slept in the dangerous position immediately underneath it .. Now, no doubt, two girls sharing a bed would be considered suspicious, very wrong, but then there was no significance – and no problem at all. Within a few days, I was posted to a small brigade (I think) up in the hills outside Lancaster – still with the

same girl. Given one stripe – one's first – mostly remembered for having to sew it onto one's jacket and greatcoat straight – not at an angle as my sewing was wont to make it. Darn it.

- Maybe about two months after that I was posted to Manchester – with two stripes (another sewing problem). For a while there were two of us sharing the job, then the other was posted and for several weeks I was alone – never off duty. Had my own room in the highest and farthest away corner of the large house where we worked (lived in another large house a fair walk away). My own key, safe, typewriter, telephone, desk – and bed. Winter, cold, had a fireplace and used to take ashes down three flights of stairs, and collected more coal in the bucket. I never knew whether I was supposed to help myself this way, but with freezing, no options. So I did not ask. A Cipher Officer visited once or twice over the months I was there and always seemed happy and satisfied. There was a brief period when I was sent to near Birmingham to 'help out' – glad to be back to Manchester.
- Around that time, it was suggested I could apply to try for a commission. However, I had already put my name down as ready for an overseas posting, which meant a medical and dental inspection every three months to be 'ready', if and when required. Also I understood the chances of being a cipher officer were slight, as proportionately few, and so one could be anything .. Admin might be O.K. but in charge of cooks or orderlies – no. I would not be much good at controlling! Ironically, I never did get the overseas posting I yearned for – at that time. What offer I did get came too late – Washington, just at the time I was about to get married And later Europe which I would have loved – so interesting at that time (1946) but I was then waiting for my husband to return from overseas.
- Summer 1943 I was sent down to London (Herne Hill) for the high grade Cipher course I really wanted. From there to Stanmore for A.A. Command (three stripes) – although a very short detour, as one might call it, before Stanmore another place which, with my dodgy memory, I think was Uxbridge – short enough to be forgotten anyway. But it was all this near constant 'posting'. And every time we were 'posted' – winter or summer – one had, of course, to wear that thick uniform, plus carry one's heavy greatcoat, gas mask and steel helmet and everything else in one's kit bag. This sausage shaped kit bag, filled was so heavy I could barely lift it. This was supposed to be carried across one's shoulder (gas masks and tin hat and probably greatcoat already on one's back). Should anyone put it across my shoulder for me, I would buckle at the knees. All I could do was to drag it along station platforms, or wherever, and hope some one – an Army man, understanding – might help. (Later, in 1944, we were able to have much better bags with handles to hold it by – like a case, more or less.)
- From Stanmore, early in 1944, back to London (lovely house in Belgravia) and working (a fair walk away) with part of 1st Airborne Division, for a very short time. Then Southampton – April, perhaps. Life in the ATS was improving all the time.
- Late April – early May – something like that, was then transferred to Portsmouth. Along the Portsdown Hills there were old forts; we – army – were in Fort Widley, and were taken by bus along to nearby Fort Southwick to work, we were deep underground. This was mainly Navy, but it was all part of Combined Forces – gearing up to D-Day. Navy, Army and RAF. Eisenhower "just down the hill" in a manner of speaking. S.H.A.E.F.
- Those South Hampshire roads – at least those I saw around Southampton (or was it Southwark?) – Portsmouth area – were filled with parked camouflaged netted vehicles of all kinds – utilities, tanks, amphibious vehicles – it was incredible. All the build up for the landing in Europe. If the Germans had come along and straffed the lot – or bombed them – what a set back that would have been.
- In Southampton – not in the town, of course – but some miles outside – the usual house and huts. The cipher room was small; on my shift I was with two Army men

– nice chaps.

- Within a few weeks I was transferred to Portsmouth which was very different – large, crowded – and our cipher office was a large L shaped room deep underground – the long end of which we shared with Naval cipher people, with a thick invisible curtain between us. Whereas we were all merely sergeants, the navy cipher people, doing virtually the same job, all had to be commissioned. I understand it was the same in the RAF. More than ever, one realized why it was always called “The poor bloody Army!”
- Occasionally the navy men had to hand over a cipher to us that they were not able to de-cipher (not the right equipment – understandably of course, there were so many different ciphers) but we did have several of the naval ciphers, so were often – childishly - given a (silly, I know!) feeling of superiority .. And all the time we had piped music – seemed strange at first – this made the Navy superior, as it was thanks to them that we had it, and somehow it became a pleasing background – especially Glen Miller – his music when I hear it now, takes me straight back to those days – good memories. Except of course, worrying about all those who had to go off into Normandy ..
- I remember seeing all those boats waiting in harbours and inlets along the coast – one day they were there, the next morning, coming off night shift, they had all gone. The shivers down my spine, I can still feel. One never forgets some things.
- Waiting for the first cipher message to get through from Normandy with more details – to decipher. A map on the wall with (precious!) pins .. Worry when things were not going well – relief when at last a break-through.
- At that time, we were not allowed, of course, to travel inland, and as I remember, not along the coast, out of one’s own defence zone. So it was late July before I met again the RAF pilot I had met – briefly – back in 1943 when he was about to go overseas – apart from when suddenly back in England he came and found me when I was in London prior to Southampton. I did not take him seriously at all – thought of him as far too young (a mere year younger than I) and naïve. Not my kind of man at all. He was later at Hawkinge airfield, near Folkestone, Kent coast, and when he suggested we meet part way – at a friend’s house on the coast early August 1944, I thought it would be interesting ... Thus the very rash and impulsive decision to get married that September. Absolutely crazy; nevertheless we had almost 52 years together before he died in March 1996.
- I was not normally a rule-breaker and was never in any trouble. Coward, probably. I did have difficulty sometimes not laughing at some bit of what I considered nonsense – barking orders, especially when it was my turn to take a parade – inspections (Necessary I admit, but did it really matter just how everything was laid out in a certain order on one’s bed? – not that this happened, thank goodness, once away from early camp days) and saluting- ah, this could rankle, if one let it. Officially of course one was supposedly saluting the uniform, but that did not stop one thinking, that those who managed to put themselves in a position to make it necessary, were more often than not, the officers one least respected. I still remember with embarrassment on my part when I was riding a horse – rather, having a horse riding lesson and clinging on – passing an ATS officer and wondering do I or do I not salute? – and if I try, will I fall off? By then we had passed, and I feel it was a black mark against me for not saluting – somehow!
- That horse episode was way back in 1943 I think. Now back to Portsmouth, late in the year of 1944, there was to be a big Parade in front of King George VI. Along the Portsdown Hills. We waited for what seemed endless boring time in the depths around Southwick (once a moat I think) until it was our turn to join the Parade – Navy first, then WRNS, the Army, ATS and a smallish contingent of RAF. So we duly marched past the King and various other bodies with him – with

the Band of the Royal Marines playing it was really rather good marching. For a change. The silly part was – when does one stop? No one seemed to know, so it ended up in a sort of fizzle out. I think eventually some naval someone decided the end of the long parade must be well clear of the King, who had probably gone inside somewhere for a drink and to get warm, and so we sort of marched back – and I guess eventually found our own way to wherever we were supposed to be – on duty, off duty, or simply sleeping ready for the next night shift.

- Ah – back a bit. 3rd September 1944. For this rare occasion, because of the date, start of the war, we were to have a Church Parade from our Fort Widley (which is just above Cosham) to our nearest Church. It was a compulsory parade, and as I was not on duty at that time, I had to go. I did not know whether to feel proud or embarrassed. Because the banns were to be read out for my marriage that month. Everyone there to hear. Silly me, not that my name would mean anything to most of those there. Even so, I was glad to hear it – the impetuous moment of a very few weeks (3?) ago suddenly made official.
- About January 1945 I was posted to the War Office, living in a lovely house in Cadogan Gardens, and the Mess was in a house nearby. A very small mess – just one polished table, always properly laid (we couldn't believe it after the rather rough W.O. and Sergeants Mess in Portsmouth run by an ex Guards R.S.M.) This was all women, and what a difference it made! Suddenly life was civilised. We would catch a train from Sloane Square station (bombed and rather battered, but still working) to Charing Cross for the War Office.
- I loved the work at the War Office and the more relaxed atmosphere where we lived. Being not many of us, it was a relatively small set up, the officer in charge seemed to respect us as adults, doing a reasonable job, and thus we respected her. We knew our shifts and we were left to get on with it,
- In early March 1945, my husband and I were actually able to get some leave to coincide – so far it had been a six day marriage, plus about one 24 or 48 hour pass. It was arranged that I would get the train for Carlisle one night, which he would join at Leeds. Of course war time trains were always overfull – mainly Services people – the inevitable custom it seemed of someone always being 'posted' somewhere else. Corridors were always jammed. Windows blacked out, of course. (One place I did not like being in an air raid was when in a train – one felt horribly vulnerable – otherwise one was hardened to raids, nothing one could do about it so ...) Amazingly somehow my husband did squeeze through and find me. At Carlisle we were to get another train into Roxburghshire to meet the first of his relations and then onto north Northumberland to meet his parents for the first time. The first time they had seen me. His poor mother – she must have been worried! I was 'a Colonial' – maybe black? We had married in a terrible rush – maybe pregnant? And undoubtedly worst of all – an AT! Well, I was just ordinary fair haired, fair skinned – and I was slim (in those days) and at least I had managed to travel in a suit, not uniform. Thankfully his parents and others were always very nice to me – they were nice people.
- The wedding six/seven months before, had been very modest – at that time of the V.1 (doodlebugs) and V.11 rockets, one did not invite anyone into the area. Our modest Tea (why is it called a wedding Breakfast?) was laid on top of my parents' Morrison shelter – (a large flat table surface) with two or three of my friends, an aunt or two, and a cousin.
- We had six days, then he was back to his airfield – wherever it was and I back to Portsmouth. As I was married when the war in Europe ended that May 1945 I could apply for early release from the ATS, which I did, as I knew he was due to be sent to the Far East at any time, and of course I wanted to spend as much time with him as could be managed in the circumstances.
- What an enormous relief it was when the war in the Far East ended that August

	<p>1945 before he was sent out there. I was in London of course for the celebrations over the end of the war in Europe – joining in the crowds, either before or after being on duty at the war office – but always feeling depressed that although this was <u>great</u>, of course – the fear of the fighting in the East had overhung me like a black cloud.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In due course he was sent out to India, and then on to Singapore (I envied him that – I loved that place). We finally went there again – Changi airport in 1987 – how very, very different from the Changi of prisoner-of-war years. How many, <u>so</u> many suffered throughout the world – and how fortunate we have been. So many blessings. Just to be alive, the basic one.• However, one more step before he returned from Singapore earlier than expected in the autumn of 1946 – around the time of our 2nd anniversary. As soon as he went out to the East, Autumn 1945, I went home and applied to the War Office for my same job back in the War Office, and red tape so soon after the war seemed less of a tie than other times, because various things seemed able to be arranged, even bypassed. Of course, I had to take the Civil Service exams and so forth, but in no time at all, I was back in the Cipher section in the War Office – the only civilian among the Army and ATS – some of whom I knew from earlier. Of course after a while, one by one, civilian staff trickled in – but I only remember one other civilian girl joining me after a while – but no doubt many more later. After I left.• It was while there I was offered a second chance to go into Europe – which was very very tempting – and I admit I wished – but I felt I had to be – wanted to be – there in England for whenever my husband returned. Which, thankfully of course, he duly did.• And life changed totally – yet again.
Photos:	None available