

<b>Surname:</b> France	<b>First Name(s):</b> Betty	<b>Army Number:</b> W/16536	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Parkinson	<b>Name used during service:</b> Parkinson	<b>Rank:</b> S/Sgt	
<b>Main base:</b> H.Q. 43 <sup>rd</sup> S/L Regt (5 <sup>th</sup> Duke of Wellington's)	<b>Training base:</b> Drill Hall, St Paul's St., Huddersfield	<b>Enrolled at:</b> The Drill Hall, Huddersfield	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> W.R. Platoon A.T.S. T.A.	<b>Company/Battery:</b>	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> 5 <sup>th</sup> Duke of Wellington's	<b>Command:</b>
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 16/5/1939 to 1943	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> Completion of 4 years (enlisted in T.A.)	<b>Trade:</b> Headquarters Clerk	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> One Jacket One Skirt Two shirts Tie Stockings Shoes	<b>Photo:</b>		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretarial work in Regimental Headquarters Orderly Room.</li> <li>• Notes in shorthand from C.O. (Capt B Schofield A.D.G.B.) and Adjutant (male).</li> <li>• Keeping A.T.S. Company Accounts, preparing pay.</li> </ul>		
<b>Pay book:</b>	Not available		
<b>Memorable moments:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the country recognised Hitler was a real threat and started making plans for War, I saw an advert in the local paper for girls to join the local T.A. unit and I realised that this could be a way out of having to go on munitions. I do not get on very well with machinery and considered that doing my own office work would be preferable and more useful. So, I presented myself to the local Drill Hall and enlisted on 16 May 1939 in 3<sup>rd</sup> West Riding Platoon A.T.S. This A.T.S. unit was attached to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Searchlight Battalion Royal Engineers, formerly the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Wellington's Regiment which had been converted to Searchlights as part of Air Defence G.B.</li> <li>• At this time the A.T.S. numbered about 25, reported each Tuesday evening for Drill taken by the Regular R.S.M. and P.S.I.s (male) much to the amusement of the soldiers doing Searchlight Drill and Maintenance. Believe me it was hard</li> </ul>		

work, most of us had two left feet and we all had blisters. We also had lectures on Army Regulations, etiquette, saluting, Air Raid Precautions, Fire Drill and Gas attack. We all had strict medicals and lectures on hygiene. Some of the girls joined a camp at Strensall.

- As the threat of war loomed ever closer there was much paper work to be done and I was asked to help in the Orderly Room working on an ancient typewriter. I gradually learnt how to do Daily Orders and run them off on a flat bed jelly duplicator out of the Ark. As the time for the men to go to Camp came nearer I typed scores of recipes and menus and generally made myself useful to the Orderly Room Sgt. We gradually were given items of uniform, you should have seen my father's face when I put on my jacket which was complete with two stripes. As I was to be Company Clerk this carried the rank of Sub Leader, equivalent to Corporal, I was ribbed endlessly by the boys who were all plain privates.
- In August 1939 I helped with calling up papers for those who were not at camp. Two whole Companies of the Battalion never came home from camp but manned their allotted defence areas on 1<sup>st</sup> September. In the last week of August I spent every evening helping out in various offices of units around the town with the mountain of paper work needed to deploy whole Regiments in a hurry.
- Friday 1 September 1939 I was sent home from the Drill Hall to collect some spare clothes, we only had what we stood up in, tunic, skirt, 2 shirts, tie stockings and shoes. Had to take civilian clothes to make up what we needed.
- Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September those girls contacted reported to 371 Company H.Q. on the outskirts of the town. We were billeted in two three bedroomed houses, formerly the homes of the two P.S.I.s who had reported to their regular units. We sorted out bedrooms, 2, 3 or 4 sharing according to size, drew camp beds and blankets from stores and generally made the place habitable. We helped to make a meal, official titles and rank meant little it was all hands to the pumps, we did whatever was required and whatever we were told to do. It was quite fun trying to get washed and into strange beds without lights as we had no blackouts fixed. We were so exhausted that we slept in spite of being terrified at the thought of War, having seen, in the News Reels, what Hitler had done in other countries. We felt somewhat safer when we saw the Searchlights traverse the sky as they did their compulsory Drill just after sunset. At least we had a roof over our heads, the men were in tents.
- During the day we had been given specific duties, we manned the telephone, the Orderly Room the Stores, the Cookhouse and the Mess Hall.
- Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 7.00 hrs – the girls marched out of the P.S.I.'s houses, formed two ranks and came smartly to attention, we were going to show them that we really were soldiers. The C.S.M. in charge of roll call stared in amazement at the two very smart ranks of A.T.S. and uttered the never to be forgotten, "Women, what am I supposed to do with B!" "£\$% Women." (I reminded him of this when we met 50 years later.) They were all very soon to find out what to do with B!" "£\$% women. We all helped with breakfast, cleared and cleaned the Mess Hall and reported to various places for duty. The Prime Minister's broadcast at 11.00 hours was relayed throughout the Camp so now we were officially at War and none of us were going home for some time – how very long we never guessed.
- By Sunday afternoon more girls had reported for duty so we were divided into teams and some left by transport to be attached to Companies spread out across Yorkshire. Later many of these girls went on courses, were upgraded and promoted and posted to other units but some girls were attached to 43rd S/L Battalion throughout the War, their help very much appreciated. There was much work to be done we were so unprepared for war that it was what could only be described as "Chaos". We did our bit, nobody grumbled we laughed, we sang, it

will be over by Christmas. A few of us went for a short route march as C.O. considered we needed some fresh air. Q.M. had issued us with men's gas masks, steel helmets, gas capes and wellingtons. Use your imagination on what we looked like. We had just about managed to get to sleep when the Air Raid Siren sounded. Still in the dark we found our wellington's (size 9s) donned our civilian coats and dashed out to the slit trenches. Chaos everywhere, NCOs shouting, searchlights in the sky, slit trenches only waist deep as they had only been dug the day before and everyone thinking there would be bombs any minute. Nothing happened and we all trooped back to bed. Our cook made us some very welcome cocoa. Little did we know how very many more times we would have to do that.

- Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September in the morning and it was decided that most of the men had been dispersed to their various units from the Drill Hall so H.Q. staff packed their cases (no such thing as a kitbag) and marched the one and a half miles across town to H.Q. We quickly settled into our various duties. I was to be Company Clerk and help whenever necessary in the Orderly Room. I was immediately pitchforked into typing Mobilization Orders. We were now officially on Active Service until peace was declared (six long years away). After supper we all helped to clear the Mess and the kitchen. I tried to set up the book keeping and pay sheets for our girls and did some letters for the C.O. We collected mattresses and blankets from the Q.M. washed and used the toilet, officially his private one next door to the stores, and bedded down in one of the small side offices leading from the man hall.
- Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September. Rolled up our bedding in the morning, stowed away our few possessions had breakfast and reported for duty. There were so many men wandering uselessly about the Drill Hall that we were not needed in the kitchen. Some kind of routine was now emerging and there was certainly plenty of work to do. We had lunch in relays in order to keep everything going. I was up to my eyes in duplicator ink!! We were still working long after supper but were told to stand down at 20.00 hrs. We sat and chatted in the Mess, made some cocoa but very soon crept off to bed. Most of the men had got away.
- Wednesday 6 September. We got more uniform, shirts, vest, knickers and stockings, order was emerging from chaos. Pay was my priority as the girls were due for some money on Friday and, as they were scattered across Yorkshire, this was not going to be easy. Daily pay varied from 1s 2d to 2s 8d. My pay as Sub Leader was 2s 2d per day 15s 2d per week almost as much as I had been earning working but this was pure spending money. On returning from lunch I noticed a new gaggle of men had gathered in the Main Hall. You can imagine my surprise when I recognised some of them from the same unit as the boy I had dated a few times. They had been sleeping at home and eating in the local Co-op Restaurant. I am sure that you do not really believe that we were so unready for War but it is true, the Government let us all down, they had not seen through Hitler.
- We had been ordered not to talk to the men so I found it difficult to communicate with my friends but eventually managed to pass a note to my boyfriend saying that I would slip out of the back door from the kitchen after supper if he wished to see me. He said that they were moving off next morning but promised to write. We were only friends but had been to each other's houses to meet the families. We were not serious, however, the romance lasted throughout the war, months apart, short meetings in places never heard of, 5 days on the beaches at Dunkirk and 47 years of marriage.
- That night we were told to go home to sleep until proper arrangements could be made. Some girls slept at the Y.M.C.A. but I lived nearby and slept at home for about six weeks, reporting for duty each day at 7.00 hrs until all work was completed sometimes 20.00 hrs and after. By this time it was dark when we got up and very dark when we went home but nobody was afraid, crime was almost

	<p>non-existent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Late October – when the Q.M. was posted to one of the main equipment centres we took over his three bedroomed house about 1 mile from the Drill Hall to which we marched each morning for breakfast at 07.00 hrs. We did our best to make this house comfortable – bare wooden floors were scrubbed weekly, washing done in the cellar which was also our Air Raid Shelter. We had very few actual raids in Huddersfield usually planes lost on their way home from Manchester and Liverpool. We lived at this house for two years until the Regimental H.Q. moved to an old Manor House near Castleford.</li> <li>• The girls were now fully integrated into the Regiment (now R.A. Ack Ack). We organised half-days off duty and occasionally 24 hour passes. We had new recruits from all over England and formed lasting friendships. We received comforts for local communities, sweaters, scarves, gloves, sweets and cigarettes, chairs and settees, curtains, cushions and extra blankets. We had a make do and mend night each week, mending our stockings and learning to knit and do embroidery from those girls who had done it in the past. We were given a gramophone and a wireless and learnt all the latest pop songs along with many army ditties. We formed a hockey team. Early in 1940 I was instructed to attend a Corporals course in London. Remember I had never been to a Training Depot, learnt all my army routine from the local unit and had been to London once before in my whole life. I enjoyed every minute, found the instructions interesting and easy to learn and obtained a glowing report. On my return I was promoted to Sgt – baffling my father even more.</li> <li>• I was now able to do most of the official work on my own, help the C.O. and Adjutant (male) with the mountain of forms and reports necessary to keep a Regiment on full alert (2,000).</li> <li>• We were always very busy but still had to fit in gas drill, first aid, fire drill dealing with incendiaries and an occasional night at the theatre or cinema.</li> <li>• During Dunkirk fed numbers of survivors who landed from trains in Huddersfield and remember being touched by the state they were in. Two weeks later my boyfriend arrived, a Dunkirk survivor who was so traumatised that he asked me to marry him. We compromised by becoming engaged.</li> <li>• Chief Clerk's course Woolwich May 1942.</li> <li>• Recommended for Officer training but instead posted to H.Q. 31 A.A. Bde as Chief Clerk to release men.</li> <li>• Because I spent the whole of my service life at H.Q., Regiment and eventually Brigade I never had to organise P.T. or Squad Drill. All the girls under me worked the whole time at their particular jobs. We did this to the best of our ability, never worked set hours just did whatever was required when it was required. We did not work a shift system, if someone was on leave another girl covered for her as well as doing her own job. We were a very small unit (15 at the most) helped one another with very little supervision and very few orders.</li> <li>• At the centenary celebrations of the Drill Hall in 1989 the T.A. A.T.S. were invited to become members of the Old Comrades Association, Duke of Wellington's Regt. I am still included in their activities. They have been responsible for the erection of a plaque to the honour of all A.T.S. members who served with the Regiment during WWII.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Photos:</b></p>	<p>None available</p>