

Surname: Girdlestone	First Name(s): Esther May	Army Number: W/168417	
Maiden name (if applicable): Maughan	Name used during service: Maughan	Rank: Pte	
Main base: East Bedfont Burscough	Training base: Harrogate Oswestry Angelsey Chester	Enrolled at: Chesterfield	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 590 (M) Battery	Group/Regiment: Royal Artillery	Command: AckAck Command
Year(s) of service: August 1942 to May 1946	Reason for discharge: End of War	Trade: Radar Operator Clerk	
Uniform Issued: Tunic, skirt Shirts Stockings Shoes Boots Battle dress top Slacks Hat Knickers Bras Tie PT Kit Leather Jerkin Gas mask and bag Shoulder bag Kit bag Denims Gloves Greatcoat ATS Badge – Flash Lanyard	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance on equipment, generator, transmitter, receiver. • Church parade • Marching Drill • PT • 07.00 – Roll Call • 08.00 – Breakfast 		

	<p>08.30 – Assignments – NAAFE, Fatigues, Equipment Maintenance 10.00 – NAAFI Break 10.30 – Practice drills on equipment 12.00 – Lunch, Padre visit weekly. Dance weekly 14.00 – Duties for 24 hours pr schedule. 3 day cycle. Off 24 hours 6th day. Off 5 pm to 10 pm 3rd day.</p>
Pay book:	Not available
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was 18 years old on June 26th 1942 and by the end of August, I was recruited because I was not in essential employment. My initial training was in Harrogate for 3 weeks. I didn't have much free time after being outfitted, inoculated and interviewed for my future courses. I do recall my rare outings to Harrogate as being very nice because of the city's colourful homes and gardens. • Because many soldiers were going overseas, A.T.S. were replacing the members of Ack-Ack (artillery) and operating radar, spotting, height finders and plotting positions. For this session, most of us were sent to Oswestry for 6 weeks of training. I was fortunate to be assigned to radar, which was still in its infancy. It was here that 590 Battery was formed and I still remember how regimented everything was and rather exhausting. We were transported overnight by train to firing camp in Anglesey. Here, we were in training for one week on our actual equipment. As a radar group we were in times of six: N.C.O. (no 1), range (no.2), direction (no. 3), height (no. 4), we were all in the RX (receiver), no. 5 and 6 were in the TX (transmitter). The radar or G.L. (gun laying) had 3 pieces of equipment: 1-the generator, which gave us the power to operate the equipment and 2 – the transmitter which traversed 360 degrees, sending impulses over the airwaves and 3 – the receiver, that received the signal if any aircraft was in the area. All this information was relayed by cable to the Command Post, which was underground. Because the site we were assigned to was not ready due to it being transformed from male quarters to female quarters, we had temporary quarters at Lippits Hill near Epping Forest and Chingford. I believe it was here that morale started to deteriorate with nothing to do but fatigues and lectures. We began to wonder when we were going to be active. A week before Christmas, we were finally moved to our site which was in East Bedfont between Hounslow and Staines. It had previously been a recreation ground and cricket field. The G.L. "manning hut" was the pavilion and Nissen huts housed our accommodation. I still remember how cold the huts were that winter with one central stove and very little fuel, if any, to start the fire after 5 p.m. My bed was at the extreme end of the hut so I didn't get much benefit anyway. We had 20 beds in the hut, which housed our team of 6: spotters, heightfinders and plotters. What a mixed bag of teenagers, looking back, I think we mixed very well and looked out for each other's needs. • For some unknown reason, we were confined to barracks on arrival in Bedfont, which meant no one could have a pass to leave the camp. The girls from the London area would sneak out of the camp. Most of them came back but 2 of them went A.W.O.L. for ten days and were put on charges. Because of all this low morale, at least 12 girls were transferred to other units and one of them was a member of our team who had become a dear friend. She went back to driving which she loved and was posted to Hyde Park Ack-Ack battery. Later on we used to meet in London, go to a theatre with tickets which were free for the forces. One time, we met and went to see "The Dancing Years", the Ivor Novella play. We

stayed at the Y.W.C.A. in Euston and during the night we were awakened by huge bangs. I wanted to go down to the shelters but my friend Beryl said "Shut up and go to sleep. It is always like this in London". She was wrong, because that was the first night the 'doodlebugs' started. On our way back to camp, everyone was talking about the flying bombs. This dramatically changed our activities on the gun site because they flew so low we were not able to detect them on radar and were not able to fire. One exploded near our camp and shattered many windows on the neighbouring housing estate. When we were not actually on duty, we had to go down in the underground dugouts. We could hear doodlebugs droning overhead. We held hands and prayed they would keep roaring over before cutting out and exploding. Each time the sirens went, we were supposed to take cover. One day a friend and I were on a pass in London and heard the sound of sirens. On our way to the shelter, a young woman with her baby came screaming in. I took the baby and my friend tried to console the mother. Her mother and siblings had recently been killed in their home and lost everything. I am sure this happened hundreds of times in various cities. When the sirens sounded, it sent panic to many because it seemed as though we couldn't defend ourselves against these flying bombs, which didn't seem to have a target. There was very little that Ack Ack could do.

- Another site that used to upset me was to see mothers with young children going to spend the night in the underground tube stations. They carried small attaché cases and hugged a doll or teddy bear with a gas mask slung around their shoulders, not knowing in the morning if this was all they had to call their own. I recall one civil servant telling me she came home from work in the city to find her whole street bombed, killing her mother and sister in their house. She didn't recognize the street.
- Due to the 'doodlebugs' and changing strategy, we were being disbanded. A friend and I came back from leave and found our group gone and for a few days we were lost. We were transported to a temporary canvas site in Kent, sleeping in a different bed each night, depending on who was on night duty. When we finally found our group, we were welcomed with open arms but only for a short while as we were once again posted to a site between Sittingbourne and Sheerness. While we were here, the war in Europe ended with many more changes taking place. I was posted to an ordnance depot in Burscough Lancs. Fortunately I was with a girl who had been a team mate all through 590 battery. Naturally, the 590 people were unhappy to be split up after so long together. We were a small, close unit and we all knew each other. Ordnance was very different. It meant going to the office from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm and working along with civilians, many of whom commuted from Liverpool. We had more freedom of mind though knowing that we didn't have alarms, "take post", night manning and fatigues. Filing vouchers all day was boring but having weekends off was great. It was wonderful going to Liverpool to hear Sir Malcolm Sergeant conduct the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and going by train to Southport to walk along Lord Street and to see the ocean.
- I was chosen to go on a course to the beautiful city of Chester for seven days for an introduction to civilian life. The only thing that I remember about this course was that the sergeant in charge said she would do my fire watch if I would take her dachshund for a walk. Two of us set off and the dog, which was pulling at the leash, got away and disappeared. We were terrified in case it was lost. We finally found it in a canteen being fondled by soldiers. We never told the sergeant in case she put us on a charge for neglect of duty. I would have preferred to stay in the billet, which was a huge house overlooking the river Dee. We were advised how to spend our clothing coupons and money on demob. Because so many girls were being demobbed, change was constant. Goodbye parties at the local pub

	<p>became a weekly occurrence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The war years caused so much sadness and destruction but, at the same time good things happened too. For myself, it changed my life and direction for the better, I think.
Photos:	No cameras allowed on site as Radar hush-hush!