

Surname: Hall	First Name(s): Eileen Kennett	Army Number: W/119935	
Maiden name (if applicable): Heron	Name used during service: Heron	Rank: M.T. Sergeant	
Main base: Camberley	Training base: Hereford (for 10 weeks) N.T. Training	Enrolled at: Northampton Racecourse, I.T.C.	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: No 3 – “Mulroy”	Group/Regiment: No 1 Motor Transport Company No 1 M.T.T.C., Camberley (for last 3 years)	Command: Southern Command
Year(s) of service: January 1942 to January 1946	Reason for discharge: De-mob	Trade: Driver	
Uniform Issued: S.D.	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver at various places in 1942. • When driving security documents for the War Office from Cheltenham, there were two girls per vehicle, and we had about five stops on the way e.g. Witney (where we often had to pull aside for an aeroplane on a low loader from the Gloucester Aircraft Company) Oxford by-pass where we met a D.R. at a precise time, somewhere in Berkshire, one in West London and lastly Scotland Yard. There were two shuttles a day, one at twelve noon and one at 3.00 pm. We stayed overnight at No 1 F.A.N.Y. Company, Kensington – big house in Phillimore Gardens. On the early shift we managed most of the afternoon off although we were supposed to do maintenance. On the late one there was the morning off and I often went up to Derry & Toms roof garden and wrote letters. • When at Southend-on-Sea I was one of only six girls who would go on the two day training schemes and sleep on hard boards in the back of a truck in a sleeping bag (my own). We generally parked for the night in the middle of a wood, e.g. Ramsden Heath or Rettenden where we would find the cook wagon set up. We queued up in the dark and went for a hot meal with our knife, fork and spoon – 		

	<p>and a large mug. On one occasion two of us girls were sleeping in a 'tilly'. Early in the morning the canopy was suddenly pulled back and rifle butts stuck in our backs "You're dead – Oh my God, they're girls!!". We were the adjudicators' drivers and a mock battle had been going on overnight with some of the cadets taking the part of the enemy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I joined up a private's pay was 11s (eleven shillings) a week and of that 6s. was immediately taken off for laundry etc, so we were left with 5s. for hair nets (hair had to be two inches above the collar) kirby-grips, toothpaste, soap, shampoo and odd food from the N.A.A.F.I. • Instructor's course, Camberley January 1943 – L Cpl • Maintenance yard Camberley, now full Cpl. In the Yard we did almost everything except accidents, de-coking and broken half shafts which went to workshops (ten men). The last item on the small vehicles (10 h.p. 'tilly' and 7 h.p. 'bug') was caused by students doing 'kangaroo hops' on starting off – no syncro-mesh in those days. We wore boots to drive two and three tonners and the field ambulances and had to double de-clutch when changing gear. These big vehicles had split rim tyres which every so often had to be prized apart and graphited. • Cadre Course at Camberley March 1945 with H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth. • M.T. Sergeant – July 1945.
Pay book:	Mislaid 15 years ago.
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to joining the A.T.S. I was an A.R.P. Ambulance Driver from 1 September 1939 to December 1941 at Folkestone – "Hell Fire Corner". My father had taught me to drive in 1936, six months after driving tests started, but early in 1939 Martin Walter Coachworks were offering "four free lessons on a lorry" to people who could already drive a private car and so I went along for this training. Driving a truck is a rather different technique to driving a car. Having completed the lorry training I was then called up into the A.R.P. driving a motley collection of commandeered commercial vehicles. We were assigned a vehicle each and told to take it down to Foord Road to be fitted with a stretcher. I had a Davis & Davis furniture removal van – a Dennis with a blunt nose, cab on top of the engine and the gear lever almost directly behind you. We used these vehicles for at least six months before we got proper ambulances. I still had a job so I only did night work or weekends and I seemed to have a different vehicle each time. • My work in the family shop dwindled, so I became a full time ambulance driver as many of the former volunteers had been evacuated. We were subjected to many hit and run raids from Dorniers and Junkers 88s on the town and the airfields around us. We had been told, in case of invasion, to deposit blankets, pillows, clothes etc in a trunk with friends or relatives inland as if the coast had to be cleared of civilians to facilitate fighting then we would all be evacuated by train or lorry with what we could stand up in plus one small suitcase and no animals (all cars to be left behind). • After the loss of some dear friends to the War, three of my close friends and I suddenly felt that we were not doing enough for the war effort and rushed off to join up. This was Margaret Woodcock, Daphne Catinus, Barbara Cooper and myself, although Barbara was uncertain at first and joined a few months later. The three of us went for a medical at Maidstone before Christmas 1941 and were called up into the A.T.S. on 10th January 1942 – Daphne's start was delayed as she did not pass the medical straight away. Margaret and I were posted to an I.T.C. (Initial Training Centre) on Northampton race course in three foot of snow

and were frozen. The tortoise stoves refused to light in the Nissen huts. They supplied us with coal and damp newspaper but no wood. We were not allowed out of barracks for the first week. We slept with all our clothes including skirts and greatcoats piled on our beds and all helped each other to dress when we had stiff arms after all the injections. The showers on the far side of the enormous parade ground were generally stone cold so several of us trudged into Northampton two evenings a week in the snow and had hot baths at the public baths and a drink of hot Bovril or cocoa at the swimming pool cafe afterwards.

- After three weeks Margaret and I and five others were posted to Hereford A.T.S. Driver Training Centre for a ten week course on army lorries (80% of the girls on the course could drive already). There was still a little snow. The training centre for the A.T.S. had only opened five months before and our army instructors – regular soldiers – said they were going to turn us into men. Some came from India and all had either been at Dunkirk or in the Norwegian campaign. Many seemed to be suffering from nerves and tried to avoid teaching inexperienced drivers so we ambulance drivers were favoured. We all did convoy driving in the Black Mountains, the Brecon Beacons and Symonds Yat. Also as private soldiers we did ‘spud-bashing’ and ‘coal heaving’. At the end of ten weeks we were posted to Henleaze Barracks, Bristol. After a few weeks Margaret and I found we were not doing anything useful and asked for a posting. Four of us as an experiment were posted at the first A.T.S. to a F.A.N.Y. Company – 31st Cheltenham M.T. Company – and I immediately found myself driving a large locked vehicle to London delivering and collecting security documents for the War Office which had been partly evacuated to Cheltenham. This went on for two months until, suddenly, with less bombing alerts the War Office went back to the capital.
- 31st Cheltenham M.T. Company was moved to Clifton College, Bristol, as A.T.S. drivers for 202 O.C.T.U., R.A.S.C. We girls were billeted in commandeered theological houses on Clifton Down – Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley – a very pleasant area. Very early on Eileen Pearce went to pick up an officer to take him round the scattered night guards. “I can’t take a girl round the guards” he said. “Well, Sir, either I drive or you walk”. No more protests!
- There were already a lot of Americans in Bristol. They were furious that some of the civilian girls were going about with their black troops. How times change. After two months the Americans took over the whole of Southern or South Western Command and 202 O.C.T.U. had to move out. I led an advance convoy of lorries, workshops, cooks, orderlies etc ten days before the main contingent to Southend-on-Sea in Essex in a wretched little ‘tilly’ (Austin 10 utility) with a Captain Middleditch who was organising accommodation, vehicle parks, workshops etc. (“Good driver, rotten car”, he said).
- Now organised work started. Margaret Woodcock drove the Commandant in a Humber. Eileen Pearce drove the Major and I drove Captain Middleditch or a bunch of Officer cadets in an estate car. Workshops were in Victoria Avenue and the unit headquarters and cookhouse were a commandeered Catholic school building about ten minutes cycle ride from our digs. The vehicle park was Kursal where we draped our camouflage nets from the roller coaster track (‘out of bounds’ to climb any higher!).
- After six months of schemes and night driving with hooded lights (or worse, with only a small light shining from under the differential on the lorry ahead) I began to suffer from eye strain. 202 O.C.T.U. was beginning to be reorganised, reduced and possibly moved so I opted to go to No 1 M.T.T.C. (Mechanical Transport Training Centre) Camberley on a driver instructor’s course. At the beginning of February 1943 I found myself at No1 Company “Beaufront” – a company exclusively doing instructor’s courses. The J.C. (Junior Commander) was Violet Wellesley, a great niece of the Duke of Wellington, tall and thin, very like his

portraits and a somewhat formidable character.

- After the course I was posted to No 2 Company “Cordwallis” a former boys’ school but ten days later I got mumps. I was whipped off to Aldershot Military Isolation Hospital where I was the sole occupant of a ward for a fortnight. On my return I was posted to No3 Company in an enormous and beautiful house on the Portsmouth Road which had been built either by an Indian Prince or a Spanish Ambassador. It had ten bathrooms and an enormous balustraded terrace. There were crystal chandeliers in both the officers’ and sergeants’ messes. The former rose garden was filled with Nissen huts for the students and with the cookhouse. Down towards the drive out, was the “Yard”. I was in the house across the woods. We were all Lance Corporals, two or three to a room according to size of room. I instructed for about five months then went on to teach maintenance and the “sixteen tasks” to students. All instructors had to do one full day maintenance on their own vehicle once a month as well as the daily “sixteen tasks” (one per day).
- Then I went on a workshops course and went into the Yard permanently as a full Corporal. Another short course at Beaufront to learn to ride a motor cycle and then I often went out on convoy duty when the students went out in convoy towards the end of their course. Our D.R.’s job was traffic control to police cross roads to allow the convoy through and avoid student vehicles getting split up. We used mostly 350 c.c. Matchless, Royal Enfield and Triumphs.
- For three months before “D” Day all leave was cancelled. On “D” Day itself a continuous stream of thousands of towed gliders passed over us on the way to France. An amazing spectacular sight, never to be forgotten. A week or ten days later I went on 48 hours leave to Folkestone. Only people with passes were allowed past Sellinge (eight miles inland). At Sunnmore I found the field opposite entirely surrounded round the edges by tanks, half tracks and trucks and, in the middle, a manned Bofors gun emplacement. I went up to the bathroom and sketched them!



- All the vehicles were dummies put there to mislead the enemy into thinking the main invasion was to be via the Pas de Calais. A week later flying bombs (V1’s or “doodle-bugs”) began to appear over Kent and that weekend I saw several crash into the North Downs behind Folkestone.
- In January 1945 D.I.s came back saying that they had seen J/C Wellesley out on

driving instruction with Princess Elizabeth. In early March I and two other girls from Mulroy were told to go and see our Commandant at 6.00 pm. I presumed it was for an overseas posting! On arrival we found eleven other girls three from other companies. The Commandant informed us that we were going on an N.C.O.'s course that included H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth who would be an honorary Subaltern. We were not to tell anyone, preferably including our own families until after the event. 24 hours later we were installed in a Nissen hut at Beaufront. After the presentations next morning we soon settled down to work and lectures which included A.T.S. administration, map reading, Highway Code, military law, theory of mechanics and practical mechanics. This latter often involved – in dungarees – getting underneath the vehicle or changing tyres, cleaning spark plugs etc.

- I wrote at the time "Princess Elizabeth is quite striking. Pretty, short brown hair, crisp and curly, lovely grey-blue eyes and an extremely charming smile. A beautiful skin and small hands". One day Princess Elizabeth and J/C Wellesley were orderly officers at lunch. She was thankful to see a table with people she knew and we got a beaming smile".
- Apparently Princess Elizabeth had wanted to join up at 17 and a half years, but Churchill would not allow it. In January 1945 P.E. and Margaret Rose caught mumps and were in quarantine (like so many of us).
- The King and Queen came one day to see their daughter working – in dungarees. They were obviously so proud of her and didn't really want to leave us to go and inspect other companies. The Queen very interested to see who these girls were, consorting with her elder daughter. The King was absolutely charming, asked lots of questions and was tall and handsome. Princess Elizabeth fitted in so well and worked hard and was charming. She would have loved to have stayed on as an Officer at our H.Q. (where she had all her meals) but V.E. day came only a month later, as it turned out.
- At the end of the course H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth and J/C Wellesley drove up to Buckingham Palace in uniform and in an army vehicle for a garden party. They were stopped at the gate and asked for their identification cards.
- Three months later things were relaxed a little. We had been taking part in a cross country competition (organised by the Officers) on Chobham Ridges where the Sandhurst despatch riders train and practice. We used 15cwt Bedford trucks with a breakdown lorry standing by for one of the worst slopes. It was great fun but tricky. H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth came to take a practice 'march past' and in the afternoon went round the course which she much enjoyed and completed successfully. Workshops made Princess Elizabeth a wooden clock with the three vehicles she had driven stuck round it in fretsaw appropriately coloured. They were an Austin Utility 10, a 15cwt Bedford truck and a two ton field ambulance. The R.S.M. presented it to her in the morning after the march past and we heard that she kept it on her bedroom mantelpiece.
- Teaching students continued for some months after hostilities in Europe ceased, in fact we called it the nursery school because they came at seventeen and were entitled to extra milk. I had sixty vehicles under my care. Towards the end of September the last of the students completed their courses and we began to clear up. Tools had all to be counted, items taken to depots and all the motor bikes taken by Jill and I to Pontefract in Yorkshire in 'Cinderella' (a 3 ton Bedford Truck). A horrid journey back next day in autumn fog. Then in the middle of October, we were both posted to a remaining M.T. training centre at Gresford in North Wales having left a skeleton staff at Camberley.
- I was de-mobbed on 16 January 1946. The last six months had been somewhat devastating. I came out of the A.T.S. thin as a rake but with rippling muscles.

Photos:



3 former A.R.P. Ambulance Drivers from Folkestone
Southend-on-Sea 1942
Pte Heron on the far right



No 3 Coy "Mulroy", Camberley 1943
E Heron, back row on left



Cadre Course with H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth
March - April 1945 - Camberley, No 1 M.T.T.C.



Cpl E Heron being questioned by His Majesty the King
(J/C V Wellesley – H.R.H's driving instructor – far right)