

Surname: Havard	First Name(s): Rosa	Army Number: W/234133	
Maiden name (if applicable): Holmes	Name used during service: Holmes / Wells	Rank: Private L/Corporal 2 nd Subaltern Sub A/J Commander J/Commander	
Main base: Various	Training base: Various	Enrolled at: Cardiff	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery:	Group/Regiment: ATS Signals	Command: Royal Corps of Signals
Year(s) of service: 2/9/1939 to 6/7/1945	Reason for discharge: Demob	Trade: Communications / Signals	
Uniform Issued: Greatcoat Shirt 2 ties Jacket Skirt Khaki bloomers Khaki stockings lisle Brown shoes Haversack Kitbag Gasmask Steel helmet Cap ATS	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a private I was assigned to a telephone switchboard and a teleprinter. We worked on twelve hour shifts. The day shift from 06.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs and the night shift from 18.00 hrs to 06.00 hrs. To swap shifts we worked a twenty-four hour shift every other weekend. As a Junior Commander, my duties consisted of supervising the ATS Other Ranks on duty in the HQ Signal Office and those ATS personnel dispersed on Anti Aircraft sites, and at RAF Stations. I was responsible for the comfort and welfare 		

Junior Commander R Holmes - 1944

	of the girls under my command. I also participated in the daily routines of the Duty Officer.
Pay book:	Not available – can't remember having an O/R pay book.
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My best friend and I grew up in Barry, S. Wales and in 1939, we were working as stenographers, so we could type and knew how to use a phone. Early in August 1939 we volunteered into the A.T.S. at Cardiff Barracks. Early in September 1939, before war was declared we were notified to report to the Army Reserve Depot, which was a supply depot situated on the docks at Barry. • We had no basic training, no identification documents, no uniforms and no interviews – only “our names and our number”. We were assigned to a telephone switchboard and a teleprinter. We worked on twelve hour shifts. The day shift from 06.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs and the night shift from 18.00 hrs to 06.00 hrs. To swap shifts we worked a twenty-four hour shift every other weekend. • To get to the depot we had to walk across parts of the docks – which was not considered a desirable place for young women to be. Our parents were concerned and expressed their displeasure to the O.C. at the depot who – believe it or not – arranged for us to be picked up at and returned to, our homes in a taxi, which was the luxury vehicle used to transport brides to their wedding – and probably mourners to a funeral. • This did not continue for more than a few weeks, by which time the depot had become more organised and a bus was scheduled to service the growing number of civilian and army personnel working at the depot, including two isolated A.T.S. girls. • It was almost a year before we received our uniforms and eventually, an A.T.S. squad arrived to supplement the growing demands on the depot. • When we enlisted we were classified as volunteers for local service only – meaning that we could not be posted to anywhere else without our agreement to a change in our classification. The time came when we had to decide whether we wanted to remain ‘local’ or become available for posting away. I chose to go ‘mobile’ but my friend served at that same depot until de-mobilised at the end of the war. • Some time later, with the rank of Lance/Corporal, I was posted to Western Command HQ in Chester, where I was detailed to shifts on the teleprinter switchboard. I remember we received and sent many messages in both ‘plain’ and coded messages. At that time there were training exercises which were meant to challenge security measures, and sometimes, acting ‘fifth columnists’ tried to penetrate the signals office. • After some time, I was recommended, and was interviewed for entry to an Officer Training Unit, and was posted to the unit in Edinburgh. I can't remember how long it took, but I was granted a commission and left there as a 2/Subaltern, and subsequently attended No 6 ATS Signals Officers' Qualifying Course in 1942 and No 17 ATS Officers' School, Egham 1943. • Gradually I rose to the rank of Junior Commander, where I served in several Signals Company HQs. My duties consisted of supervising the ATS Other Ranks on duty in the HQ Signal Office and those ATS personnel dispersed on Anti Aircraft sites, and at RAF Stations. I was responsible for the comfort and welfare of the girls under my command. I also participated in the daily routines of the Duty Officer, including morning – and other parades of the mixed personnel – male and female – eg Pay Parades and some public fund-raising parades. Also, the

inspection of ATS living quarters and toilet facilities, and the messes and kitchen facilities of the HQ.

- At one HQ early in my Commission, I rode a motorbike to carry me to the remote Ack Ack gunsites until War Office orders were issued limiting bike riders to those over 5' 4". I was half an inch shorter. Riding those bikes in the dark winter evenings was quite hazardous because the headlight was masked with only thin slots to let the light illuminate the road ahead.
- At first, Headquarter Offices, billets and messes were in requisitioned civilian buildings and houses – one of which I served in was a huge Manor House near Leeds, and another one was at a vicarage – also near Leeds. Later on 'Base Camps' with Nissen huts were constructed.
- One really tragic and distressing incident I will always remember was when an enemy 'plane, flying in low fog off the east coast, was fired on by Ack Ack guns and in an effort to gain height and escape the attack, released the bombs, which fell as direct hits on several houses which billeted many ATS girls. Many were killed and more were severely injured. I was one of the personnel detailed to try to sort out personal belongings from among the debris. Not a pleasant task but sometimes a rewarding search.

Photos:



Private R Holmes on right with friend with whom she enlisted.
Studio photo taken soon after they received full uniform in 1940



Private R Holmes 1940/41



Subaltern R Holmes, ATS Signals 1943

The 'flash' on my right sleeve had a red background with a black witch on a broom stick. Motto "We sweep the skies"



Signals Office Staff at HQ 1943



Subaltern R Holmes