

Surname: Henderson	First Name(s): Eileen	Army Number: W/244814	
Maiden name (if applicable): Totman	Name used during service: Totman	Rank: Cpl	
Main base: Holsworthy Devon Oxford	Training base: Wrexham	Enrolled at: London	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 469 Searchlight Battery	Group/Regiment: Royal Artillery	Command:
Year(s) of service: Volunteered end 1942, released from civil service Feb 1943 to July 1946	Reason for discharge: Demob	Trade: Clerk	
Uniform Issued: Flat hat Greatcoat Jacket Skirts Stockings Underwear Blue/white striped pyjamas Walking shoes Shirts Ties	Photo:  <p style="text-align: center;">Brussels 1945</p>		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My first job was ordering spares for guns and motor transport in general. This of course was not done by name, but each item had a number and as I could make sense of that it caused quite a sensation. 		

Pay book:

Not available.

RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE
A.F. X 202/C

Army No. *W/244814* Present Rank *W/5*
Surname (Block Letters) *EILLEN*
Christian Name *EILLEN*
Coy. and Group/Unit *No. 6, G.H.R. and Education 4p B.S.*
Date of Last Enlistment *25-1-43* *Calling-up for military service
(a) Trade on enlistment *Civil Servant* *Strike out whichever is inapplicable (c) Service Trade *4p Clerk Cl. III*
(b) Trade courses and trade tests passed *Pay Course* (d) Any other qualifications for civilian employment
Military Conduct: *Excellent*
Testimonial: *This auxiliary has been employed on clerical duties since Sept. 44. She has shown herself a quick & good worker. She has performed all duties allotted to her with satisfaction & efficiently. Reliable & trust worthy.*
Place *BARB* Date *2 July 1946*
Signature of Officer *S. J. ...*
Signature of Auxiliary Member *E. ...*
* Army Education Record (including particulars under (a), (b), (c) and (d) below).
(a) Type of course. (i)* (ii)* (iii)* (iv)* (b) Length. (c) Total hours of instruction. (d) Record of achievement.
* Instructors will insert the letter "I" here to indicate that in their case the record refers to courses in which they have acted as instructors.
Signature of Unit Education Officer.
NOTES:
(1) Further details of service and of medals to which entitled may be had on application to O. I/O Record, accompanied by the applicant's A.B.94, Part I.
(2) If this certificate is lost or mislaid, no duplicate can be obtained.
THE ABOVE-NAMED PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY DISPENSATION UNIT STAMP OPPOSITE
N.B.—A certificate (A.F. X-202/D) showing the date of transfer to the Unemployed List in the case of A.T.S. auxiliaries, and the termination of release leave in the case of V.A.D. members, will be issued by the Officer/Record Officer. All personnel released are liable to recall if necessary during the continuing period of the emergency.
RELEASE LEAVE EXPIRES ON *29 AUG 1946*
MILITARY DISPENSATION No. 5 *4 JUL 1946*
ORDERLY ROOM *4 JUL 1946*

Release Certificate

Memorable moments:

- On 5th February 1943 we set off together for Wrexham north Wales. The camp I am sure was on top of a mountain, no sign of habitation and it was bitterly cold. Notwithstanding this I enjoyed most aspects of the life from the start. There were quite a lot of tears at night but most of the girls had been conscripted and had not wanted to leave home. Fortunately for us we had been junior civil servants in London during the blitz and would have been sent to Yorkshire as office space was fast running out. I also thought if I had got myself in to something it was up to me to make the best of it.
- I don't remember much about the next 3 weeks at Wrexham except a lot of drilling and marching. The sergeant major was a man and I suspect we nearly broke his heart. At least I knew my left from my right which was a help. We had one weekend when we were allowed out of camp coinciding with an armful of injections and none of us could move our arms. We spent a very uncomfortable few hours trying to get to Chester and back again. We also learnt that the parade ground was sacred and not to be walked on and the company mascot was a goat.
- I was to feel lucky in the end because the very strict discipline I had endured at the Central Telegraph Office (The Post Office) had been worse than anything I encountered in the army. After 3 weeks the whole intake was sent to a holding unit at Bristol. We travelled by train and my abiding memory was standing in the corridor and seeing for the first time the grandeur of north Wales. It was still winter and the mountains were covered with snow and just mile after mile of sheer beauty. I recall we had to change at Crewe. It was considered then almost the centre of the universe, wherever you were going you changed at Crewe. There were very few civilians travelling at the time and being in uniform quickly made you part of a wider camaraderie. People actually talked to each other being

British that was quite something.

- From Bristol about 50 of us boarded a train for our final posting. My friend Vera and I had heard that if you were volunteers you could ask to stay together. This we did, not really holding much hope but amazingly we were kept together for the next 18 months when I made the break by volunteering to go abroad.
- The journey from Bristol was a very long slow one. We had not been told of our final destination and I can only conclude there was someone in charge of us somewhere. It was all unknown because all the station names had been removed. This was done to avoid helping the enemy should they parachute spies in or invade (both these options had been very real). Gradually through the journey various numbers were dropped off until the last four and Vera and I still remained. The other two were sent to separate destinations and looking back I suspect that was at Exeter. The very last were Vera and me. There was certainly no one with us when we finally arrived at Holsworthy. We could see nothing but there was one elderly man (porter, station master probably both) who didn't seem too surprised to see two lonely souls waiting. A phone call was made and transport eventually arrived. It was then about 10 pm, we were shown two beds and that was that. No cup of tea or food I presume we must have been given sandwiches at Bristol.
- I think we were too tired to care and anyway we were now in the army. We quickly got undressed and got in to bed. Later we were wakened by the occupants of the other two beds in the hut, there was some swearing (new to me) we were discussed but remained cowering under the bed clothes. How glad we were at that moment to be together. Anyway sheer exhaustion and I suspect our youth we slept. I suppose someone took charge of us the next day and I was sent to work in the quartermaster's stores and Vera the main office.
- During our first weeks we were asked our job preferences. I like many asked to be a driver was told that I didn't pass the mechanical test. The test was just one of the many we all took. One very knowing person (always one) told me I had a high IQ. I was most impressed no one has ever said that before or since. I suspect that as our occupations in civvy street would have been listed as civil servants we were destined to be clerks anyway. The fact that I could do a job on my own saved the day for me and it was the start of quite a happy time.
- Even with my limited experience of "LIFE" it didn't take me long to realize the quartermaster was a very influential person on the site, so when he suggested that I might like to go on the lorry to Plymouth with the laundry and dry cleaning, I did what I was told. It was actually quite satisfactory for me as it got me out of the way for a whole day about once a week. This then was the start of a period of me touring Devon in the cab of a three ton lorry, high up so I could see for miles. It would of course have been contrary to army rules but there was little traffic on the roads except for convoys and these were easily seen. I disappeared in to the back of the lorry as we neared towns.
- Whilst at Holsworthy some very kind people opened up their bathrooms to us and transport took us in for a weekly bath! There was a constant shortage of water. When any came through the taps we would try and hide some to wash our hair or stockings. The rest of our attire was taken to Plymouth.
- We usually had Sunday afternoon off and one day we went to Bude. We were sitting in a café having a cup of tea when the door opened and a woman pointed directly at us and said "I am not going in with them there." We were embarrassed and I suppose fortunately too surprised to say anything, but the nicest thing was the husband walked over to us and apologised which I suspect was quite brave.
- We stayed at Holsworthy for about nine months and then the whole unit moved by train to south Devon. I think it was near Ottery St Mary and Honiton. There was talk of a second front, this was 1944 and gradually huge areas of southern

England were covered with equipment guns lorries and ammunition all fairly well camouflaged. We didn't get much news in those days so much was censored out, so little actual paper, and we had one radio to at least 12 girls but we all knew the second front was in the offing. We were woken by a loud noise overhead and looked out to see the sky black with gliders being towed. We knew then that the second front had started. There was a huge amount of emotion. We were all young many of the girls were engaged or had boyfriends they knew would be part of it and none of them knew whether they would ever see them again.

- For various reasons I was getting restless and decided to volunteer to go abroad that being about the only option to get a change of scene. My posting eventually came through, I think it was about September 1944. I first of all was sent to Cowly Barracks near Oxford and in the end stayed there for about 7 months. It was the most miserable time of all my time in the army. I had joined the 21st Army Group. This was the records group for the British Army by then fighting the second front. I was allocated to the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) which was the largest unit and my friend Alcia to the much smaller one. I worked in the gymnasium I suppose the only place on the camp big enough for all of us. I and many others faced wall bars all day every day. The man I sat next to was a spiritualist older than most and later when we were in Belgium he, Norman, was to have quite an effect on my life.
- On almost my first working day I had a good look round at my new colleagues and to me one man stood out above all others. I soon noticed he had a girlfriend and from then on thought no more about him (perhaps just occasionally!) There were 500+ girls in this unit and probably more men so although we were due to go to Europe this was postponed several times because of set backs. Eventually on 5th May just 3 days before the war ended we arrived in Brussels. The journey was really quite a fiasco. We were told to be ready at 3 am – we had no idea where we were going but boarded 3 ton trucks and set off. I suppose about 2 hrs later we arrived at RAF Lyneham. The 'we' being 500 girls. The men were making the longer journey by sea taking all the work with them.
- At Lyneham there were absolutely no facilities at all for women. Fortunately for us it was dry but cold as we had to just sit on the airfield grass until take off time. There were either 20 aeroplanes with 25 girls aboard or vice versa, the planes were Dakotas. The planes were transport planes with no proper seats. The flight took about 2 hours then we landed in an airfield outside Brussels. Taken in army trucks to Brussels itself and then to a block of flats where our accommodation though basic was better than anything we had ever had in England. The first person I met was the handsome Staff Sergeant, he had come out some time in advance of us to get things ready.
- We worked on the demob programme and also sorted out the young fit men who would be sent out to the Far East to relieve the men still fighting out there. To us they were not "the forgotten army" but they weren't to know that. When we first arrived in Brussels we were made to march to work, after all it was the army and if possible you were made to march everywhere. However, the Belgians were mad drivers and drove straight at our columns or hung out of the side of the trams to ogle us, so it was quickly decided that we were capable of walking to work on our own. We were working in Brussel's largest hotel. It was by then in a sorry state. It had a large underground car park something I had never seen before. The army in their wisdom made any of us that hadn't got a good excuse do P.E. there every morning. It was dark and cold and not pleasant..
- I was sitting on my own working on a Saturday morning when the door opened and in walked my staff sergeant "Johnny" as we all knew him (his surname was Johnson). He had come to ask me out for a meal that evening. This was the start of a lovely friendship, later an engagement and eventually a very happy marriage.

Johnny was demobbed and returned home before me as he had joined up early on in the war. I remained in Brussels and after many months I had a letter from him asking me to marry him. I didn't need much persuading.

- My demob was finally in view. It was then decided that our unit was to move up to Hamburg. The date of the move to Germany was made and I was attached to another unit in a different part of Brussels for the last 3 weeks. Really nobody wanted me. There was no point in teaching me a new job for 3 weeks, so I more or less had the time to myself. It was not as good as it sounds, I hardly knew anybody by now and had very little money and like most of the others in spite of having a job to go back to was apprehensive about the future.
- I was demobbed in true army style. Travelled to England by boat. There were others of course. We were sent to a large house Hatfield in Hertfordshire stayed one night then as I was from Surrey I was sent to Guildford for my final discharge.

Photos:



Brussels 1945



Just a few of us 1943/4



Netball Team 1943/4



Officers, NCOs, 2 Other Ranks
469 S/L Brigade
Holsworthy, Devon 1943/4