

Surname: Holmes	First Name(s): Enid Madeline	Army Number: W/151483	
Maiden name (if applicable):	Name used during service: Holmes	Rank: Private (Conscripted)	
Main base:	Training base: Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester	Enrolled at: Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery:	Group/Regiment: R.A.S.C.	Command: Northern and Southern
Year(s) of service: 27/03/1942 to 00/02/1946	Reason for discharge: Demobilisation	Trade: Shorthand Typist	
Uniform Issued: Two uniforms One greatcoat Two pairs of shoes Four shirts Two ties Four sets of underclothes	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take dictation and transcribe from notes by typewriter. • Filing. • General office work. 		
Pay book:	Not available		
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the war when Ernest Bevan, Minister of Labour, announced in the House of Commons that women born in certain years would have to register for war work and that single women would be conscripted into essential services, the Women's Armed Services, Land Army or Munitions, I don't recall giving it much thought. So, when the registration for my age group came up I gave the Women's Services as my preference, confident it wouldn't apply to me as I was in a reserved occupation, or so I thought! • A week or so after Singapore had fallen (15th February) my family received an official communication from the War Office stating that my brother had been posted as "missing" – he was stationed in the Far East. • Within a few days a buff coloured envelope dropped through our letter box 		

summoning me to attend a medical at Edgware Health Centre. On being passed A1 I was informed I'd be conscripted into the Women's Services, a prospect I faced with some dread – I was a quiet shy girl. Another two weeks passed and another envelope arrived with my call-up papers, railway warrant etc instructing me to report to Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester on 27th March – I was the first girl in my office to be called up.

- I set off on a dull March morning – I was miserable, but knew I must not cry, fearing to upset my father and aunt. On approaching the stairs to the main line station a strange sound greeted us and on arrival at the top we realised what it was. There were masses of people, mainly women many of them in tears. I boarded the train, found a seat and bid my family goodbye. After all these years I can still see their small figures on the platform smiling and waving.
- We gradually began to relax and chat and the crying ceased. We were met at Leicester by A.T.S. personnel and directed to waiting transport. On arrival we were directed to the cookhouse, having been issued with an enamel mug, one knife, one fork and spoon. We were then ordered to a large hall for the completion of masses of forms. Hours later we arrived at our sleeping quarters, a long barrack room containing 26 two tier bunks for 52 girls. I found I'd been given a top bunk, with a Corporal underneath – not a happy prospect I felt.
- Saturday dawned, you queued for everything, to wash to go to the toilet etc. Ordered into line we were marched to breakfast where every article of food was slapped on to the same plate, the cooked items plus butter and jam. By the time you found somewhere to sit the butter and jam had joined together by floating in the eggs and bacon.
- We were then marched along to the stores to be issued with our kit, two uniforms, one greatcoat, two pairs of shoes, four shirts, two ties and four sets of underclothes. The knickers – khaki or course – were the type worn by our grannies and were referred to as “passion killers”, very voluminous with elastic around the waist and at the end of very long legs. We must have looked a sight, skirts had to be regulation length of 16 inches from the ground, so that when on parade, the skirt lengths were in a straight line, ignoring that the girls were all shapes, sizes and heights. The skirts needed to be altered and we had to wear overalls, again only one size and length, until they were finished.
- Back in the hall we were informed we'd be receiving our inoculations that day and would be confined to barracks until Monday evening. Both arms were used for these injections which meant you sometimes couldn't raise them above your elbows, causing much amusement. 48 hours with nothing to do. Nothing to read – how I wished I'd brought a book. The awful feeling of homesickness reared its ugly head. A radio continually blared out a favourite song of that time, “I never said thanks for that lovely week-end” which didn't help matters.
- Monday afternoon was our first taste of drill. Assembled on the barrack square, we could see in the distance the drill Sergeant Major with the usual ram rod back, cane in hand, strutting across his precious square. Barking out his commands, accompanied by the usual expletives there was a sudden break in the ranks as three girls unbelievably walked off. Calling us to a halt he marched purposefully after them demanding an explanation. He was politely informed they were not going to be sworn at. He took their names and resumed his drill.
- The next day another Sergeant, an A.T.S. appeared. The drilling re-commenced. So continued weeks of PT, drill, marching backwards, forwards, every way which way, aptitude tests and interviews. Would we like to do Ack Ack? Certain jobs were not available to me as I was too short. Anyway, they discovered I was a shorthand typist and that was that.
- After the initial three weeks training, we were due for 48 hours leave prior to receiving our postings and were faced with the prospect of being separated from

- the friends we'd made in these last weeks to form others at our new postings.
- Assembling in the large drill hall the following Monday, names began to be read out. The process took ages until you began to wonder whether your name was ever going to appear. It did, 151483 Holmes, E.M. – Strathpeffer. Wales, I thought. Wrong again! Scotland! We were instructed to take down the train times when and where to change trains. I got as far as Inverness and gave up.
 - After a journey of some 20 hours, with many train changes, we arrived at Strathpeffer and dragged our kit bags up the station steps to the path for the Ben Wyvis Hotel where we were to report. The Commandant of the Clerks School was appalled at the time we'd been travelling and at the lack of rations issued for our journey. Four of us were to share a room in the attics of the hotel with wonderful views over the valley with the mountains in the distance, at that time covered with snow. It was now April with double summer time, a war-time regulation, it hardly ever got dark in the Highlands during our stay.
 - We were to undertake a course lasting 10 weeks working from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm with Saturday afternoons and Sundays free. We were formed into small squads and ordered to elect our own Squad Leader, all very democratic. Each squad marched to the various hotels for the lessons we were to have and after completion of the course you sat an exam and if successful, obtained tradeswoman's pay of one guinea a week.
 - Our weekends were spent walking through the countryside and going into Dingwall, a pretty Highland village. There were the usual Saturday evening dances, with French Canadian and Norwegians who were employed logging in the nearby woods.
 - Shortly before the end of the course a group of us was informed we were to be posted to Chilwell, an Ordnance Depot outside Nottingham. It was a huge place, like a town on its own. Discipline was harsh. The vast area was staffed by the military and some hundreds of civilians, not the happiest environment especially as they enjoyed many more privileges than we did.
 - Imagine our horror when we learnt we were to go on another course of a few days to recognise various parts of engines – what the heck had we been on a Clerks' Course for? We decided to write to the C.O. at Strathpeffer acquainting her with our situation. We all signed the letter, subsequently discovering that if there are three signatures or more on a petition it is mutiny! Ignorance is bliss! We completed the course and following this I was allowed 48 hours leave. Back home it was apparent to my father and aunt that I was unhappy, although I didn't mention it. Returning to Chilwell on the Monday morning four of us were informed we were to be sent to HQ Northern Command at York. Had the C.O. managed to pull strings? We never did find out.
 - We were billeted in requisitioned houses overlooking the Knavesmire (the racecourse) and were billeted in Victorian houses with lofty ceilings. Each room had bunks, the lower bunk was anything but comfortable except for sleeping, for if you sat up, you hit your head on the bunk above. Our room slept eight girls who each had their own little space. Belongings were kept in what was called a soldier's box which was placed at the end of the bed. One mirror was provided amongst eight of us and there was always one who managed to monopolise it.
 - We worked a seven day week, with one day off. If life was hectic, you missed the day off.
 - The nightly visit to the canteen run by volunteers from the local churches was a must. I can still remember what a wonderful party they'd given the troops on our first Christmas and I realised many years later that they must have given up some of their meagre rations for us.
 - The first winter in York was very cold, no heating in the billet except in the recreation room so some of the girls slept together to keep warm. How two of

them managed in the small bunk, I never knew. We were aware it was a criminal offence, but didn't realise why. We were shortly to be enlightened by two chappies in the office. Feeling I would be cold, my aunt sent me her aluminium hot water bottle as they were unobtainable at that time. We used to manage to heat the water in the huge black kettles in the kitchen. It was then passed from bed to bed in an endeavour to warm them – referred to as Oscar it was very popular those cold nights. The snow lay on the ground for weeks and as we walked to work, quite often on arrival at the office the hair outside our caps was stiff with frost.

- York was surrounded by the aerodromes of Bomber Command. Each night you could hear the drone of the planes overhead. I hated the light evenings when you could see the planes getting into formation for their raids on Germany. It saddened us for we realised only too well some of the planes would not return. Dances took place at these aerodromes, what fun we had. The crews were so full of life and laughter – how did they manage it – for life for so many of them would be so short. After a raid frantic telephone calls would be made to the base on the report that some of the bombers were missing. Then you saw the sad faces of girls whose boys had not made it back.
- In the spring of 1944 all leave was cancelled and we were confined within a five mile radius of York. Operation Overlord and “D” Day had come and our hopes and fears rose.
- In September I got leave, the first for many months and had my first experience of flying bombs. I was terrified and made a dive for the cupboard under the stairs. I was amazed my aunt seemed so calm. “I don't always hear the warning,” she said. We sat quietly waiting for the beastly engine to stop. It seemed so relentless and we were thankful when it did and that it had dropped elsewhere.
- 1945 came and in the early weeks I saw a notice on Orders. “Shorthand typist stationed at Winchester wanted a transfer to York”. I decided I would apply. It was nearer to home and I might be able to get a few days leave occasionally.
- In a requisitioned house again, but we had beds, lovely. There were masses of Americans around which was a new experience for me. They appeared to find it odd that girls walked together and would continually approach us. Coming back late at night from weekend leave was a problem as they would walk alongside you ignoring your polite suggestions that you were OK. Then you'd see in the distance our troops and sailors. They wouldn't put up with this – a fight would ensue and then along would come the Military Police.
- On 8th May we heard that Germany had surrendered. Everyone went barmy – we knew this would only be a respite for there was another war to fight against the Japanese, which was so important to our family. Within a few weeks things began to happen. All requisitioned properties were to be vacated and we were to be transferred to an Army Camp nearby.
- On August 9th the first atom bomb was dropped on Japan. I don't think many of us realised its consequences. A second one was dropped and on August 15th peace was declared. The war was over at last. Shortly after we were to learn that my brother was safe in Burma. At the time it did not occur to me that I might be involved in work to do with the return of these prisoners to the UK. However, we were delegated to type out lists of these prisoners and the ships on which they were returning. Perusing these lists I finally saw his name and boat – Chittra – the Officer in charge asked me if I would like to go to the docks when it arrive. Docks at the time were out of bounds – what a question!
- On a dull cold November morning I stood at the gangway and waited and waited. There was a continual flow of soldiers – suddenly I noticed that they had erected another gangway. The medical corps then informed me that he had gone on the other lorry. It was a short distance to the transit camp and I suddenly saw him

	<p>standing in the doorway looking very yellow and much thinner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• So the war was over for us – my brother was demobbed within weeks and I had another 5 months to wait. We were both changed. He went to University and then took up teaching and I changed my job. This period of our lives was over.
Photos:	Not available