

<b>Surname:</b> Marley	<b>First Name(s):</b> Vera	<b>Army Number:</b> W/71595	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Chapman	<b>Name used during service:</b> Chapman / Archer	<b>Rank:</b> Private	
<b>Main base:</b>	<b>Training base:</b> Neville's Cross, Durham Oswestry	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Volunteered, Fenham Barracks, Newcastle 20.7.1941	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b> A troop	<b>Company/Battery:</b> 467 Battery	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> 135 H.A.A. Regiment, Royal Artillery	<b>Command:</b> A.A. Command
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 30.7.1941 to 13.7.1945	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> End of Hostilities	<b>Trade:</b> Height and Range Finder Telephonist / Spotter H.A.A.	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> Khaki dress uniform tunic and skirt 2 shirts tie bras bloomers (all is safely gathered in) Lyle stockings Peaked hat Raincoat Brown lace-up shoes Housewife Work uniform Battledress Boots Gaiters Overcoat Grey socks Gas mask Steel helmet	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifts were 8 hours: 6-2-10-6 am. Two of us on duty, one would man the telephone, the other did spotting for aeroplanes. After one hour we would change over. There was always a gunner on duty as well.</li> <li>• We would take our turn at cookhouse, ablutions, drill or guard duty.</li> </ul>		

Pay book:

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(1) SOLDIER'S NAME AND DESCRIPTION OR ATTESTATION.

Army Number W/71595  
 Surname (in capitals) CHARLES V. ARCHER  
 Christian Names (in full) Vera  
 Date of Birth 5-6-23  
 Parish [REDACTED]  
 Place of Birth: In or near the town of [REDACTED]  
 In the county of [REDACTED]  
 Trade on Enlistment Machinist  
 Nationality of Father at birth [REDACTED]  
 Nationality of Mother at birth [REDACTED]  
 Religious Denomination Wesleyan  
 Approved Society Refuge Insurance  
 Membership No. 7186245  
 Enlisted at Newcastle On 30-7-41  
 For the A.T.S. FOR PERIOD OF PRESENT  
 \* Regular Army EMERGENCY Supplementary Reserve.  
 \* Territorial Army \* Army Reserve Section-D.  
 \* Strike out those inapplicable.  
 Duration [REDACTED]  
 For [REDACTED] years with the Colours and [REDACTED] years in the Reserve.  
 Signature of Soldier C. Archer  
 Date 12/3/41

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DESCRIPTION ON ENLISTMENT.

Height 5 ft. 1 ins. Weight 108 lbs.  
 Maximum Chest 32 ins. Complexion Dark  
 Eyes Blue Hair Brown  
 Distinctive Marks and Minor Defects [REDACTED]

CONDITION ON TRANSFER TO RESERVE.

Found fit for [REDACTED]  
 Defects or History of past illness which should be enquired into if called up for Service [REDACTED]  
 Date [REDACTED] 19[REDACTED]  
 Initials of M.O. i/c. [REDACTED]

A.F. X 202 C

7 SEP 1945

16N

RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE

Army No. W/71595 Present Rank PLA  
 Surname (Block Letters) ARCHER  
 Christian Name/s Vera  
 Coy and Group/Unit 4871155 (11) H.A.R.C. 1. C.A.  
 Date of Last enrolment 30-7-41 \* Calling up for military service [REDACTED]  
 \* Strike out whichever is inapplicable.

(a) Trade on enlistment Machinist (c) Service Trade Telephonist A.H.  
 (b) Trade courses and trade tests passed NT (d) Any other qualifications for civilian employment [REDACTED]

Military Conduct Excellent

Testimonial:  
This girl has been with the band for nearly four years. She is a keen steady worker who is loyal trustworthy. A working girl who is always anxious to do anything that is asked of her. Always 7ms in all active times.  
 Place London Road, N.12.11 Date 12 July 45

Signature of Officer [REDACTED]  
 Signature of Auxiliary/Member [REDACTED]

\* Army Education Record (including particulars under (a), (b), (c) and (d) below).—  
 \* This section will not be filled in until the receipt of further War Office Instructions.

(a) Type of course. (b) Length. (c) Total hours of instruction. (d) Record of achievement.  
 (i)\*  
 (ii)\*  
 (iii)\*  
 (iv)\*

\* 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 [REDACTED]

NOTES:  
 (1) Further details of service and of medals to which entitled may be had on application to O. i/c Records, accompanied by the applicant's A.R.64, Part I.  
 (2) If this certificate is lost or mislaid, no duplicate can be obtained.

THE ABOVE-NAMED PROCCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY DISPERSAL 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 i/c Record Office. All personnel released are liable to recall if necessary during the continuing period of the emergency.

MILITARY DISPERSAL UNIT  
 No. 2  
 13 JUL 1945  
 YORK

Memorable moments:

- Why did I join the ATS? I was out of work and having already experienced war from the beginning; having heard the sirens and seen the Big Berthas rising into the sky on the first day war was declared, a bomb was dropped on the south side of the river Tyne.
- I lived near to a farm and it was not long before a searchlight battery was stationed on the field adjacent to our house. Then came the bombing, we had incendiaries down the chimney leaving soot everywhere but the final straw came very early one morning when three landmines were dropped in a row, one landing close to our house, the glass as blown in from the windows and the front door was blown up the satires. We were in bed but my father was up and looking out of the

window and got the full force of the glass in his eyes. Being a bus driver who drove the workers to and fro to the docks, my brother had to be his eyes until he regained his sight. We had to leave our house and were taken in by friends.

- The raids continued and buildings were destroyed, people maimed and killed my thoughts were turning to what could I do so I decided to join up. Actually I volunteered for the RAF as my father fought in the first world war in the fleet airarm and had medals including the DFC. The only vacancies at the time were for seamstresses, the very thing I did not want to do, no one said it was possible to transfer so the army won.
- I volunteered on 13/7/1941 at the Fenham barracks, Newcastle on Tyne and enrolled on 30/7/1941. Private Chapman Vera W/71595. 7/- a week = 3/6d for my mother and 3/6d for me (17.5p decimal)
- The start of army life at Nevilles Cross Durham. One months training and medicals. We were issued with our uniforms, one dress uniform and one work uniform. A gas mask, steel helmet and a kitbag to put it all in. Hair had to be 1 inch above the collar and skirts 16 inches off the ground. All the kit had to be marked with name and number ...
- Training! Drill and more drills or square bashing as we called it and I.Q. I believe I was offered the choice to be a driver but on being told that I could be stranded out in the county and knowing the northern countryside, I decided to stay with the girls for AckAck.
- The start of a life experience, to Durham station on to a train for a long journey to Anglesey, from the train we marched to our new camp and I noticed that we were quicker and smarter than most. This made one feel proud. When ever we travelled we were never told of our destination until we arrived.
- September 1941. The sergeant majors did not tolerate sloppiness and I think that they could see if you blinked, as their voice would boom out across the parade ground. Every morning after breakfast our beds had to be made correctly. Blankets and sheets folded to form a block which may have included the pillow. Then on to the parade ground – it may be more drill or duties around the camp, ablutions, cook house and lectures about the instruments we would be using on the gun sites. My favourite was plane spotting where we had to say what the plane was that was placed on your hands while they were behind your back feeling the shape of the wings, engines and tails all of course being different. Some British some German.
- During the morning we would have a short break and everyone would go to the NAFFI, the big draw was doughnuts (American). 1d each you stood in a queue and hoped that your turn came before the whistle went. They were hot sugary and scrumptious.
- We were taught how to lay our kit out on the bed for inspection. Everything had to be named and spotless. Buttons shinning, boots and shoes polished, our surplus kit was kept in a wooden locker under the bed. Our own personal things in a suitcase.
- I was trained to be a height finder. Others predictors or radar operators and we would goon to the gun sites; all instruments would be lined up on the same tall object for accuracy then height finders would give direction and height to the predictors who would then pass their readings on to the radar. This would be relayed to the guns who would prepare to fire on an officer's order FIRE.
- We had to pass our gas mask test by going through a building which had gas in, it was uncomfortable if the mask did not fit properly – the gas would sting your eyes. We would do route marches out of the camp being sure to carry both our gas mask and steel helmet. Evenings were usually our own time where we would do our laundry and prepare for the next day, chatting and getting to know each other.
- At time we had canes. This was for when and if we did guard duty.

- We were responsible for our own cups and cutlery which we washed up ourselves, the only meal I did not like was cheese and potato pie. I still dislike cooked cheese.
- The camp rules were strict and it was not until later that you could appreciate the reason why.
- It was goodbye Oswestry as we leave by train for a new destination to do the work we had been trained to do. A troop, 467 battery, 135 regiment, HAA Royal Artillery. A very long journey and I was back where I started, Newcastle. A shorter trip to another camp, Lobley Hill, Gateshead and then to our first active gun site, Harton South Shields which was off the main road along a farm track, once assembled we were allocated huts.
- The ATS and gunners were never together, sexes were always segregated. The huts were nice and airy with twenty beds in each, once the kit was sorted it was time to explore the rest of the camp.
- This was when all the hard work was put into practice. Information gained relayed to the command post, the position of the planes plotted on a wall board similar to a road map which is mirrored by the same grid in front of the duty officer. This enabled each plane to be tracked effectively. I was sent on a telephonist course for one week at Gosforth where I was taught to use a switchboard and how to repair damaged wires. On returning to camp I became a telephonist spotter. This meant doing shift work, working with different girls and gunners who would be on duty with you. My first night shift was rather scary while doing the spotting it was all quiet when suddenly the wind increased. There were chains rattling canvas flapping and the gunner had to go and find out what was causing the distraction. Fortunately it was a generator cover which had come loose. Imagination is a wonderful thing.
- Stationed near to home enabled Pt Janet McLackland and I to go home when we had a day pass, thus we became good friends. When the bombs fell near my grandmother's fish and chip shop not far from the camp people were left with no means of cooking, soon our day off Janet and I spent the day helping with serving the people fish and chips and anything else that was required before returning to camp. We would often go to the YMCA in North Shields to meet friends for a cuppa and socialise, playing darts or table tennis. It was here that I met the gunner who would later become my husband. He was attached to the maritime T>A> as a gunner on the ships doing what was later known as the hell run. He had been in service since 1939 with the Royal Sussex regiment.
- Our next gunsite was Nitshill Barrhead near Paisley. This was a quiet place and although we did continue our training we were able to do more PT and route marches. Eventually we had to leave the Nissan huts and rats that came out at night running along the shelves looking for food.
- Next camp was Lepe near Fawley in open fields, near woods. It did not take long for us to settle in nor for the action to begin. Every day we did our routine checks cleaning the instruments and lining up being ready and oh boy the bombs began to arrive day and night. Then the doodle bugs. They were awful. You could hear them, the motor stops, you count to ten and hear them land and explode. April 18<sup>n</sup> 1944 we shot down a Junkers 188 and it landed in a field near the camp. Later we were allowed to go over to see the wreckage which was scattered over a large area. The airman did not survive and although we were told not to touch anything, someone did bring a parachute back. I had some silk cord and the material was used to make silk underwear.
- Our nearest entertainment was the Lepe village hall. Silent films were shown and not having seen them before I found them interesting and very enjoyable. Occasionally we had Saturday night dancing and were allowed to sign in visitors, usually the Americans. I celebrated my 21<sup>st</sup> at a pub in Fawley. My mother had

asked me what I would like and I said fresh fish. Well when it arrived the fish was high but the kippers were enjoyed by all the girls in the mess. Although this was a restricted area, my sister managed to meet me in Winchester and was allowed to stay over night as she was leaving to nurse in India with the Queen Alexandra nurses. The next day she left on the morning food truck and we did not meet again till the war finished.

- We went on to Titchfield with barracks in the woods on a road to the coast. At times we would walk along the road past the command post to the beach and some of us would bathe in the Solent or just relax and enjoy the view.
- Next move to Dollis Hill, Kilburn in London. Our barracks were in the park beside the synagogue with the command post near by. Still more bombs but they are sending a new type, now V2. Very silent till they land; my experience was being in bed after duty and feeling the bed being lifted up. Raids became shorter but more frequent. Whilst this was going on we still had normal duty to do, barrack room inspections, drill and dress inspection by the Major. Off duty evenings I was taken to the theatre, the Embassy, Swiss Cottage by a male friend of my sisters who lived near the camp. Other times Edith and I would go to Battersea. We also visited the Stage Door canteen which was a forces only club.
- 1945 it seemed different somehow. The bombing not so intense but we still had to be ready on parade the gunsite or delegated to the cookhouse or guard duty. This is the year I decided to get married to John, my boyfriend since 1942. Janet was my bridesmaid and we wed on April 28<sup>th</sup>. It was lovely to see our friends and family and to know they were all well. I returned to camp and my husband to his. Janet Edith and I were off duty on VE day. We visited friends in Battersea and then went into London. Where did everyone come from. Civilians and forces alike standing and cheering. We were helped onto a lamp post, so we could get a better view. Unfortunately Janet had her purse stolen then it was back to camp and reality.
- The end of hostility and I left the army on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1945 a civilian to await my husband's demob. I left behind a lot of friends and still have good memories of playing cards, learning to crochet but best of all our evening in our room when we had sing songs in the barracks. Molly her lovely voice singing 'Ava Maria' and other favourites and a spoon player from Sunderland.
- The respect the gunners had for all the ATS being there to help us and make sure we were safe. The officers who trained us must have had a difficult job. My thoughts go out to all the forces who gathered for D day. Many did not return but those who did I hope they lived a good life and those from A troop thank you for being there during the difficult time.
- Private Edith Lewis was married in September 1946 to Edward Wharram, Janet was her bridesmaid and I was a guest with my daughter Suzanne. It was lovely day and a happy reunion. Janet stayed in London when she left the army and became Mrs Anderson. We all married and had children, so much for saying we would stay single, have a farm, and rear chickens when we were in the farm.

Photos:



Some of the gang with an officer

On guard duty Pte Janet McLackland and Pte Doreen Armstrong



Pte Edith Lewis



Pte Janet McLackland