


<b>Surname:</b> McKerron	<b>First Name(s):</b> Eileen Olive	<b>Army Number:</b> W/236284	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Graves	<b>Name used during service:</b> Graves / Buckle	<b>Rank:</b> Pte	
<b>Main base:</b> HQ Northern Command, York HQ S.E. Command, Reigate HQ London District	<b>Training base:</b> Pontefract Signal School, Strathpeffer HQ Northern Command	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Pontefract, Yorks	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b> C Coy HQ SE Command	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> ATS Signals	<b>Command:</b> Northern Command S Eastern Command London District
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 11/12/1942 to July 1945	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> End of War in Europe	<b>Trade:</b> Radio Operator (O.W.L. - Operators, Wireless and Line)	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> Greatcoat 2 jackets 2 skirts Cap 3 shirts Collars and studs Tie Stockings Underwear Shoes Pyjamas Trousers- (Reigate, for night duty) Gas mask Polishing kit	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 week of each shift or one day of each. 8 am-2pm, 8pm-8am, 2pm-8pm.</li> <li>• Mornings / afternoons not on duty: one of these – PT, Drill Inspection, Pay parade.</li> <li>• Sending and receiving radio messages in Morse code or enciphered.</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional turn at routine clerical work in signal office.</li> <li>• Orderly work; scrubbing, dusting, lighting, tending fires and stoves.</li> <li>• Occasionally laying out kit for inspection.</li> <li>• Sunday morning, Church Parade.</li> </ul>
<b>Pay book:</b>	Not available.
<b>Memorable moments:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On December 11<sup>th</sup> 1942, two weeks before Christmas and my twenty-second birthday, I arrived at Pontefract barracks to begin my military service. It was a raw, damp, sleety day and Pontefract was a dreary grey mining town in Yorkshire. The barracks, large red brick buildings and metal Nissen huts surrounding a parade ground looked uninviting. We registered and were assigned to a bunk in a Nissen Hut. During the next few days we were issued with our kit which consisted of a heavy greatcoat, 2 skirts, 2 jackets, 3 khaki shirts, 4 collars, collar studs, 2 pairs of stockings, 2 pairs of flannelette pyjamas, woollen gloves, 2 pairs of shoes and underwear, that amused us as in addition to 3 white woollen panties we had three pairs of large khaki bloomers which reached half-way to our knees. We were told we were supposed to wear both, but nobody ever did. The girls called them chastity protectors. We also received a cleaning kit: shoe polish, metal polish and 2 brushes. For some unknown reason the coats and shirts fastened on the men's side. Our days were full. We lined up for kit, meals, medical exams, intelligence tests and aptitude tests. We had drill, parades and physical training. We barracked beds and laid out kit for inspection.</li> <li>• After three weeks I was posted to the A.T.S. Signal School in Strathpeffer in Northern Scotland for training as a radio operator. We went by train to Inverness and then in an army lorry to Strathpeffer. I enjoyed the time at the signal school, especially learning Morse code. It fascinated me. I learned it easily and was soon able to read and transmit at more than the minimum speed of 15 words a minute. We were called Owls, Operators, Wireless and Line and would be among the first girls to take over from the male signallers. After graduation my roommate "Bunny" Harmsworth and Renee Petterson were posted HQ Northern Command in York to gain experience in a real signal office. We were so lucky. It was staffed by expert signallers from the regular army and they spoiled us. We found that working on live radio was much more demanding than we expected. We had to tune out all the unwanted signals and atmospherics and concentrate on our own. In the autumn we three girls were considered proficient and were posted to a small unit in Doncaster, another mining town. We were the only radio operators and the only southerners.</li> <li>• The other girls who were telephonists, teleprinter operators or cooks and orderlies all came from Yorkshire. We envied them as they were able to go home on a 24 hour pass. We three Owls covered the 24 hours in the signal office, so if one of us was sick or on leave the other two did 24 hours on, 24 hours off. We were billeted in a small house on the outskirts of the city. The water was heated by coal boiler and the coal was stored in a great pile in the front yard. One day there was a great deal of fuss. We were ordered to move all the coal from the front of the house to the back, I thought, "At least we didn't have to whitewash it!" We scrubbed and polished, our billets were inspected and so were we. Then we heard the reason for it all. H.R.H. Princess Mary, the Princess Royal, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Signal Corps was coming to inspect our unit.</li> </ul>

When she came into our office I had to look busy sending a message so I didn't get inspected and I only got a quick glance at her.

- There were no A.T.S. Officers, our C.O. was a captain in the Royal Signals. He knew that Bunny and I weren't very happy and suggested that we might apply for a posting. We did so. We didn't think anything would come of it as we had no compassionate reasons. After a rather lonely miserable Christmas when most of the other girls had gone home for at least part of the holiday I was amused to be informed that I had been posted to H.Q. South Eastern Command in Reigate, Surrey, my home county.
- Reigate is situated in the North Downs at the bottom of Reigate Hill, a huge steep hill. The signal office had been tunnelled out of the chalk hills. To reach it we had to climb a steep flight of about eighty steps and negotiate a narrow path along the edge of the slope. It was tricky at night as there were no lights of course. The whole area was covered with camouflage material. The office consisted of numerous tunnels leading to the different areas of the office, the cipher room, the office, the radio room, the switchboards and the teleprinter room. There was continuous transmitting on the radios, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so we were always busy. Somehow we had a sense of urgency when so many messages were flagged : IMMEDIATE, MOST IMMEDIATE, URGENT. When we heard the news of the invasion of Normandy we knew why the messages had seemed so important. Towards the end of the year the offices weren't so busy. Some of us were transferred to other units. I was sent to HQ London District. I was sorry to leave Reigate but glad to be in London because Fred Buckle, my boyfriend lived there and my home was just outside the London area. The signal office was in Curzon Street near Hyde Park and we were billeted near Hyde Park Corner. It was easy for me to get home on the bus and for Fred to meet me. I regretted that there was no radio office. I worked in the dispatch office for the dispatch riders.
- The war was drawing to a close. For the first time girls were being allowed to go overseas. I had no desire to do that, so I didn't volunteer. Then orders came through that any single girls could be sent overseas. Fred and I decided to get married as soon as possible. We were sure the war would soon be over. We were married on March 31<sup>st</sup> in St Mark's church, Mitcham. We had a very simple wedding, a reception at home. Then we had an Easter weekend honeymoon in an inn near Leith Hill in Surrey. The war ended in May. I was demobbed in July, as married women were the first to get their papers. Fred and I were able to start our life together.
- Memorable moments:
  - Reigate – working on radio before and after D Day, feeling I was really doing valuable work. Companionship of other A.Y.S.D. on and off duty hours. Cycling in Surrey with most signposts missing. Watching the doodlebugs spluttering overhead.
  - York – assistance we received from the experienced male signallers and the respect with which they treated us. Weekly visits to theatre. Table tennis at Y.W.C.A.
  - Strathpeffer – walking in the highlands and trips to Inverness at weekends.
  - Doncaster – loneliness. Not feeling one of the group. Pleasurable visits to local residents when off duty.
  - London – The strange sensation, hearing the whine of the V2s when we had already felt them landing.

**Photos:**

