

|   |   |                                    |                                 |
|---|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Surname:</b><br>Norton   | <b>First Name(s):</b><br>Alice Lillian  | <b>Army Number:</b><br>W/163782    |                                 |
| <b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b><br>Hudson   | <b>Name used during service:</b><br>Hudson / Norton   | <b>Rank:</b><br>Private            |                                 |
| <b>Main base:</b><br>Manchester<br>Fort Borstal,<br>Rochester, Kent<br>Donnington,<br>Derby | <b>Training base:</b><br>Fenham Barracks, Newcastle<br>Camberley M.T. Training  | <b>Enrolled at:</b><br>Conscripted |                                 |
| <b>Platoon/Section:</b><br>M.T. Section   | <b>Company/Battery:</b><br>566 (M) HAA Battery  | <b>Group/Regiment:</b><br>169      | <b>Command:</b><br>A.A. Command |
| <b>Year(s) of service:</b><br>1942 to<br>1945   | <b>Reason for discharge:</b><br>Demob   | <b>Trade:</b><br>Driver / Mechanic |                                 |
| <b>Uniform Issued:</b><br>S.D.<br>B.D.  | <b>Photo:</b><br>  |                                    |                                 |
| <b>Description of daily tasks:</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering Ammo off site. Plus daily rations, laundry to and from, shoes and boots to cobblers</li> <li>• General duties and personnel</li> </ul>  |                                    |                                 |
| <b>Pay book:</b>  | Lost AB64   |                                    |                                 |
| <b>Memorable moments:</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was called up with the first batch of girls conscripted in 1942 and did my basic training at Fenham Barracks, Newcastle.</li> <li>• From Fenham I went to Driver Training School, Camberley, Surrey. There were several of these schools which were run by F.A.N.Y.s. All very well bred "girls" with plums in their mouths, but they did a marvellous job. We were there to be taught how to maintain and drive army vehicles – the marching and drilling – I shall never forget the first time I was told to get into the driving seat of a Bedford 3 tonner. After only ever having driven the family saloon car, I was very nervous, I knew nothing of 'double de-clutching', crash gearboxes etc. I soon did and after</li> </ul> |                                    |                                 |

two months I passed my test. The last words from my C.O. were "Well done girls – Cap straps up". We all then very proudly took off our caps and put the straps on top of our heads.

- I also met the King and Queen at Camberley. We had the order to "stand by your beds". When they got to the next bed to mine (barracked of course) the Queen pressed the mattress with her hand and remarked to the C.O. "These mattresses are very hard". To which the C.O. replied, "Don't worry about that Ma'am, we work the girls hard and they are soon asleep once in bed." It was afterwards that I realised that they were sussing a place out for the then Princess Elizabeth. If the war was to continue she would have to be seen to be doing her 'bit'. As you know, she did her training at Camberley. I'm sure we are all familiar with the photo of the Princess pretending to change a wheel on a 15 cwt.
- My first posting was to 566 (M) H.A.A. Battery stationed in Manchester. They too were newly formed, so we were all 'rookies' together. The M.T. Section consisted of four A.T.S. drivers, 2 D.R.s (male) and a Tiffy. The man in charge of us was Q.M.Sgt Sherwood – he couldn't drive but he saw to all the paperwork and sent us on our various journeys. My vehicle was an open 15 cwt truck. Being Manchester it lived up to its reputation regarding the weather and I got very wet. Months went by without the sight and sound of the dreaded Luftwaffe. One day we were told to pack our kit – we were on the move.
- This time it was Rochester and our home was an old Fort built on the second highest hill in Kent. Fort Borstal was first built to strengthen defences for Chatham Docks but by the time it was completed it was obsolete. Ideal place for the guns, it had a moat and a bridge. The gunners were the only ones to sleep inside the Fort – ATS quarters were on the other side of the moat together with the NAAFI, Sgt and Officer Quarters, O.R.'s mess and Guard Room. We were part of the 'outer London defences' – I believe in all, there were 32 Batteries in a line. Every Battery had an off site, usually about five miles away. Both had four large guns and a Bofor each – we may not have seen much action in Manchester, but were on full alert from day one. When the raids were 'on' it was very noisy being so near to the guns. Sleep impossible of course, and the noise from the fall out from the shells would land on our Nissan huts with such thuds. I half expected they would penetrate the roof. I think we all felt better to be in the thick of it and we were all cock-a-hoop when we were told that the bombers hadn't been able to get through this long wall of fire and had turned around and gone back.
- Being on an Ack Ack site was like belonging to a big family. Everybody knew everybody else. The camaraderie was strong, we were mates, we looked after each other, watched each other's backs and covered for them. I can't remember much grumbling or quarrels. I think we had a job to do and we just got on with it.
- "Q" Sherwood put ducks on the moat at Fort Borstal and kept rabbits in hutches in one of the many tunnels running under the Fort. I took an interest in the ducks and loved to watch the newly hatched ducklings. I remember one of the cooks telling me that roast duckling and rabbit pie was known to have been on the Sgt's and Officer's Mess menu – Oh dear!!
- Doodlebugs were very noisy and frightening things. We had to wear our tin hats strapped to our left shoulders at all times. We had several come directly over the Fort. We knew of course, it was on its way to Chatham Docks. Whoever programmed these dreadful things must have been very clever. We were only about two miles from the docks and they very, very, nearly reached their target. I think we must have got very blasé about them. We would just glance up and see them going over. Alas, one morning one didn't go over. It cut out directly over the Fort. I remember looking up and seeing the right-hand wing starting to dip – I head a male voice call out "Take cover." Had it dropped on us, there wouldn't have been much left of either the Fort or the occupants, but fortunately, it drifted

away and fell into a nearby field. After the noise had died down all I could hear was the tinkling of glass as the panes shattered from the blast. The O.R.'s Mess was badly hit and I remember dining *à fresco* for several weeks before they were replaced.

- “D” Day, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, was sunny and I was doing some maintenance on my truck when we were called on parade to have the Major tell us “D” Day had started and anyone not on duty could go down to the Cathedral. Of course, there was a great rush to get through the gate – I rather think that as far as the gunners were concerned the pubs did a little better than they normally did.
- After I had finished my work on D Day, I decided to go down into Rochester to fill up my truck with petrol. The army had commandeered a lone petrol pump for the use of 566. It was kept locked just by a small padlock and it was never broken open. In today’s climate I doubt it would have lasted 24 hours. It was dyed pink to stop it being used illegally. This pump was directly opposite the Cathedral and I decided to go inside. It was very busy. Someone was playing the organ very softly, clergy were flitting about, some people were praying, some just sitting with their thoughts. Because of my scruffy appearance – greasy overalls – I stood quietly at the back lost in my own thoughts. Suddenly, the enormity of it all struck me – I remember going out of the Cathedral thinking ‘Dear God – Thousands of our young men are going to be brutally killed or maimed and all because one small insignificant German’. I climbed into my truck – put my head on the steering wheel and broke down, weeping bitterly.
- Weeks passed and from what we could gather (no TV or easy access to Radios in those days!!!) the Allies were making inroads into the continent. The guns fell silent. Eventually we were again on the move, back to Lancashire – Widnes. The M.T. Section travelled by road and as we got further north, we were surprised to see the street lights were back on. At Widnes we went over on the ferry and it was lit up like a Christmas Tree. Obviously we had won the war in the air and Ack Ack Command started to disband.
- Then postings started to come in and I, and my fellow truck driver – who was also my best friend and still is today – were making almost daily trips to Liverpool’s Lime Street Station, taking our friends for the past three years on to their new postings. One day it was my turn, I went to the R.A.O.C. Castle Donnington, Derby where I spent the rest of my service convoy driving. I never really settled – I didn’t like convoy driving and found it very boring. We would go down to Luton and Bedford and pick up 3 ton Bedford’s, straight off the assembly line and take them either to Edinburgh or Southampton. The hours were long and the staging camps very basic and none too clean. My demob came up and I left the army with mixed feelings.
- I met my husband at Fort Borstal. He had been in Iceland for two years with the 5<sup>th</sup> Army – they had been relieved by the Americans and was only with us until his new overseas posting came through. He was very ill at ease having to deal with A.T.S. for the first time. He was also surplus to requirements and ended up helping “Q” with the paperwork. He was, by the way, a Captain. I think out of sheer boredom he often accompanied me on my journeys. I must say that he was very good at helping to load and unload!! And yes, somehow we became yet another wartime romance -very much against the rules and regs. We had to be very very discrete. Arthur’s posting came through and he ended up in Afghanistan. It was months after the war before he came back and we were able to be married.
- After demob, seven of us kept in touch – three drivers, 3 clerks and Addie from “Q” stores. Addie was 9 years older than the rest of us. I think we thought she was “well past it”.

**Photos:**



My original Ack Ack badge