

Surname: Nunnally	First Name(s): Frances	Army Number: W/99790	
Maiden name (if applicable): Huppert	Name used during service: Franzi Huppert	Rank: Private	
Main base: Bury St Edmunds Suffolk	Training base: Ripley, Lancaster	Enrolled at: London	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: C Company A.T.S.	Group/Regiment: Suffolk Regiment	Command:
Year(s) of service: Nov 1941 to Feb 1946	Reason for discharge: End of World War II	Trade: Worked in Officer's Mess; men's dining hall	
Uniform Issued: Skirt Jacket Shirts Shoes Stockings Shoulder bag Caps Underwear Pyjamas Tie Greatcoat	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We did PT when off duty. Also took part in Drill, led by a female sergeant major, who was a dragon. • Our work involved serving meals, scrubbing mess tables, swilling mess hall floors, etc etc etc 		
Pay book:	Not available		
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was born in Vienna, Austria and was barely sixteen when Hitler's troops goose-stepped into my town. There was much waving of flags, and the ear-deafening cheering of the population lining the streets. Contrary to later assertions, Hitler was welcomed in Austria with unbounded enthusiasm. My family was Jewish and the persecutions began almost immediately. I could no longer go to school; admittance to parks, museums and libraries was forbidden; movie theatres also, were prohibited to us – a major tragedy for a romantic teen! England generously 		

took in hundreds, perhaps thousands of children and teenagers, thereby saving them from ultimate death in the gas chambers and crematoriums. I was one of those teens, saying good-bye to my parents at a Vienna train station in May 1939. I never saw them or my brother again. They eventually perished in the Death Camps of Europe.

- When the war broke out between England and Germany, I was a refugee from Nazi oppression living with an English family, the Dees, in Surrey. I helped with the housework and cared for their five year old daughter. Soon after the declaration of war, Army lorries filled with soldiers in battledress began rumbling down the streets. The soldiers sang "It's a long way to Tipperary" and they whistled at us girls. A great number of poorly-clad children appeared in town and in the local schools. They were evacuees from London's East End sent to the country for safety. Gasmasks were issued to every man, woman and child. Poison gas was on everyone's mind.
- Soon Mr Dee was mobilised and sent to a military camp near Bath. As an officer he was allowed to bring his family, but despite my status as a refugee I still came from enemy territory and, therefore, was not permitted inside a military installation. So the Dees said goodbye and put me on a train to London.
- London during the Blitz! We slept on the floor of underground platforms as the trains thundered by.
- In November 1941, I joined the A.T.S. and after training in the North was posted to Bury-St-Edmunds, a lovely little market town among Suffolk fields. We were quartered in Gibraltar Barracks, a huge grim edifice, the home of the Suffolk Regiment.
- Discipline for us A.T.S. girls was strict. Hair well tied up above the collar, no jewellery of any kind, thick lisle stockings and sturdy brown brogues. Check-in time at night was 10.45 p.m., and being even one minute late resulted in being confined to Barracks for several days.
- We had 'drill' three times a week. Our drill sergeant was a smart dainty lad with a voice that boomed across the huge parade ground like the thunder of cannons. We took great care to keep in step.
- I was put in a special platoon for mainly foreign-born A.T.S. members. Although most of us were refugees from Nazi oppression, we still, technically came from enemy territory, such as Austria, Germany etc. We were not allowed to work on AA guns, in offices, or even warehouses, but were assigned to serving meals in the Officer's Mess (considered a cushy job) but most of us manned the huge mess hall where hundreds, maybe thousands of troops were fed each day. Our talents and youthful energies went into keeping those wooden mess tables scrubbed a snowy white, and floors the size of a football field swilled squeaky clean.
- We lugged big iron pots of food that weighed almost as much as we did. And we took turns in washing huge mountains of dishes after each meal. An enormous prehistoric dishwasher groaned through the chore of "doing the plates". But once a week these also had to be washed by hand in hot soapy water. The skin came off our fingers in strips and we girls had a time at night explaining to our dates the poor condition of our hands.
- Most of us came from middle class or professional families who had employed at least part time maids to do the heavy housework. Many of us had been pampered and spoilt by doting parents, we would rather have died than admitted to our dates the nature of our work. We wanted to operate Anti-Aircraft guns, drive Generals and decode secret messages in hush-hush offices and were often ashamed of what we had to do. I realise now, that we did indeed do our part for the War effort. We kept the troops fed three times a day and filled their mugs with hot cocoa for "elevenses". I remember standing in front of the cookhouse doors pouring cocoa into mugs as the soldiers filed by. I poured and I poured enough liquid to launch a

battleship! Our work was humble, but as essential as driving a General or filing information for a forthcoming attack. The cookhouses and mess-halls of wartime England were weapons as powerful as guns and tanks. I am proud to have had a share in fighting and winning that War.

- Bury St Edmunds was a quiet little market town before the war, but soon after Pearl Harbour, things really began to happen there. The Yanks arrived! American Airfields were sprouting like mushrooms after a rain. It seemed as if the entire U.S. Air Force was filling the streets, the pubs and the countryside. At dawn we were awakened by the roar of the Fortresses taking off on missions over the Continent. At night the Yanks jitterbugged in the Corn Exchange, literally making the building shake with the energy of their youth.
- In 1944, the war had been going on for more than four years. Meat, milk and eggs were almost non-existent. Chocolate was but a faint memory of the past and we girls serving in the A.T.S. had almost forgotten what it was like to wear a pretty dress! But as the warm days of spring arrived, rumours began to circulate that an invasion of Europe was being planned by the Allies. We spoke about it in hushed voices, looking over our shoulder at who might hear. Then, suddenly, the roar of the planes taking off in the early morning became louder and stronger as bombers almost darkened the sky at dawn.
- On June 6 1944, the Allied launched the greatest seaborne invasion in history. Landing craft dropped off thousands of troops in waist-deep water, with rifles held over their heads, the men waded through the surf towards the beaches of France. We girls in the mess halls and cookhouses of Bury St Edmunds, could only follow events on the map, as the Allies pushed their way across Belgium and France into the heartland of Germany.
- The winter of 1944 was particularly hard. Outside, the Parade Ground was covered with snow, but our icy barrack rooms were unheated. We slept with greatcoats, sweaters or anything that we could find, piled on top of our Army issue blankets. Coal was very scarce, but there was a small A.T.S. sitting room with a fire burning in the grate. We went there to read, write letters, or just to chat before returning to our freezing rooms.
- From Canada came hand-knitted mittens and socks, a love gift placed on our beds in the barracks while we were in the mess halls feeding the troops.
- All of that was forgotten in the spring of 1945, when victory came to Europe. Fires were lit on hillsides, church bells tolled and lights blazed in the streets for the first time in six years. I watched a group of A.T.S. girls and civilians forming a circle, holding hands, singing and dancing "Knees up Mother Brown". But for many of us girls victory and peace meant the beginning of a new challenge – to find what was left of our families on the continent.
- My own way, gradually, led back to Vienna. I crossed a continent in shambles, with buildings reduced to piles of rubble and displaced persons wandering everywhere. In Paris I was able to buy a bottle of French perfume, but searched in vain for a cup of coffee and slice of bread. In Vienna, I found much of the same, but no trace of my family. I stood outside the house where I was born and grew up and felt the emptiness all around. V.E. Day and the months that followed, were the beginning of a search that stretched across the next decades, but yielded few clues. Through the years I learned that my family had perished in the Death Camps of Europe. I am married, with sons, a daughter and grandchildren. But some evenings when the house is quiet and there is time to dream, I am a young A.T.S. girl, working, having fun, and doing my bit for that epoch in history that was World War II.

Photos:



Frances Nunnally 1944



Platoon at Gibraltar Barracks, Bury St Edmonds Suffolk
Early 1940s