

Surname: Pollitt	First Name(s): Margaret Eleanor	Army Number: W/288275	
Maiden name (if applicable):	Name used during service: Pollitt	Rank: W/S Sergeant	
Main base: Essex and Suffolk	Training base: Pontefract, Yorks No.1 P.T.I. School, Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester	Enrolled at: Romford, Essex	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery:	Group/Regiment: 2 Corps HQ	Command: Eastern
Year(s) of service: 16/7/1943 to 2/1/1947	Reason for discharge: End of Emergency	Trade: Secretary / PA Part time P.T. Instructor	
Uniform Issued: 1 greatcoat 2 tunics 2 skirts 2 pr shoes 2 sets undies Tie Collars 1 steel helmet 1 overall P.T. kit (brown shorts, orange T-shirt, brown track-suit) 1 groundsheet 1 gas mask 1 cap 1 forage cap	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretarial duties: at District HQ level, 6 days a week 8.30 am to 7.30 pm with 1 night duty a week in addition. • Part time P.T.I. – 7.30 am classes – 3 times a week. 		
Pay book:	Not available		
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chilly dull July day in 1943 saw me on my way by special train from King's Cross to Yorkshire with a few hundred other raw recruits bound for ATS Training Centre at Pontefract Barracks. I remember I was wearing a long-sleeved satin white 		

- blouse, black skirt, black patent-leather shoes and pale blue edge-to-edge coat,
- My first shock was sight of the barracks: high walls, armed soldiers at the entrance (reminiscent of Colditz). We were herded in and immediately lined up for head inspection for nits. Then to barrack rooms – single beds for about 30; issued with blankets, sheets (off-white and rough like sandpaper) and shown how to ‘barrack’ the beds. Issued with a spoon, knife, fork and enamel mug, and marched off to the Mess – bare wooden trestle tables for 10 with one recruit allocated in rota to serve out the food. Orderly officer on duty at each table to ensure we left nothing on our plates. I remember one girl stuffed some left-over peas into her tunic pocket to avoid detection. Main menu throughout my career was boiled mutton, peas; spam fritters for supper (I can’t look at a tin of spam these days). I wondered what I’d let myself in for when we had to wash our own cutlery under an outside cold water running tap. I think I shed a tear.
 - Vaccination and inoculations were next: lined up with a medic moving from one to the next – cotton wool dab on arm, needle in, and on to the next (this method would be banned as unhygienic these days).
 - Reveille 6.30 am lights out 10.30 pm. As soon as sets of undies, stockings, shoes and wrap-over khaki overall were issued, civvies were packed in our suitcases and taken away to be locked up (there was no escape). It was a few days before we were issued with 2 tunics, 2 skirts, greatcoat and cap. PT and walk-runs every day whatever the weather; lectures, gas chamber tests, rota for cleaning duties, ablutions etc. and we were always on barrack square for drill. Days passed quickly and after 3 weeks it was time for Passing Out Parade for 4 platoons. I remember feeling quite thrilled when our platoon won the shield for best turned-out squad of the intake. RSM announced that something positive and efficient had been made out of a bedraggled bunch of unruly girls who’d arrived 3 weeks before. But really it was due to our enthusiastic efforts and loyalty to our platoon sergeant. I never heard anyone grumbling. All the above was a cultural shock at first as most of us were naïve and had never been away from home alone. Yet I remember it all with affection and nostalgia.
 - I wanted to train as a Driver but I was ordered to use my secretarial skills and high-speed shorthand so was drafted to 11 Corps HQ (subsequently 2 Corps) at Felsted, Essex on General Templer’s staff. One other recruit arrived on the same train from London and we’ve remained close friends ever since. I was billeted in Room 5, New Block, Felsted School – 30 of us, 15 bunk-beds, totally inadequate heating, 1 bath a week on rota. I worked in A-Branch in a large mansion in the village from 8.30 to 7.30 or when the day’s work was finished, 6 days a week, 24 hour pass once a week and 1 late pass to midnight. I was on rota for extra duty at night to listen to the radio for news updates, a summary of which had to be on the General’s desk by 8.00 am.
 - For light relief Saturday night dances were held in the school’s magnificent Grignon Hall and we attended 8th USAAF weekly dances in an aircraft hanger in the nearby village. Sad to note at times a missing place in their dance band when one of their aircraft had not returned from a raid. The US boys always loaded us up with goodies: tinned fruit, biscuits, cakes, oranges etc. and we were assured of excellent refreshments at their dances.
 - Christmas 1943 was great fun: we put on a pantomime “Babes in the Wood”. The producer was Capt Piggot (former stage manager to Jessie Matthews) the band leader was a young guitarist Bert Wheedon who became a well known professional – he died recently. Rehearsals were tough, commencing at 11 pm to about 1 am through November/December. I was in the chorus, high kicks and tap dancing to “We’re going to get lit up when lights go on in London” and “Be like the kettle and sing”. Costumes were on loan from Drury Lane Theatre.
 - One incident that I remember was on barrack-square parade inspection - I was

ordered to step forward and told to "wipe that lipstick off".

- I also remember General Montgomery visiting our HQ just before D Day – the place was buzzing with excitement.
- In September 1944 2 Corps with some ATS were drafted overseas to Norway. Unfortunately, I was not selected and I was sent to Holding Unit at Donkey Common, Cambridge, allocated all sorts of duties: sweeping up leaves, peeling potatoes for a couple of weeks until despatched to HQ East Anglian District, Newmarket, billeted in 3 old houses in the main street (all now demolished and replaced with a block of flats). My bed was in the attic with two others and we still mention the noise of the water cistern going all night and every night. I was thankful to be sent away to Cambridge on a PT leader course for 3 days. Early in 1945 I was selected for training at No 1 ATS PT School at Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester, qualifying as a part time PTI and awarded my first stripe. Back in Newmarket I took PT classes out of doors 3 days a week at 7.30 am before breakfast and occasional walk-runs through the town and fields much to the amusement and cheers from trainers out with their horses from Newmarket Racecourse. This was in addition to my secretarial duties in A Branch.
- While taking a PT class at the Instructors' school in Leicester in front of a row of examining officers I said "Stretch up tall, arms straight up close to your ears, now ... bend down and drop your trunks". Everyone laughed.
- I also remember Marching in the Victory Parade 1945.
- As a Sergeant I was severely reprimanded by my C.O. for failing to request a Private friend I was chatting to in the street to replace her cap which she was carrying in her hand.
- In November 1945 I attended a course for WO/Sgts at ATS WOs & NCOs School at Newark, Notts. I was posted back to Cambridge, this time as Chief Clerk, Education Branch, Army Education Corps, and stayed with them for 12 months during which time the Branch transferred to Colchester. I was billeted in Cavalry Barracks until demobbed in 1947.
- Before demob we were given the opportunity to attend a Formation College course choosing any subject we wished to help us get back into civvy street. As I was a piano-player with pre-war qualifications from Trinity College of Music, I selected a Music course held at Chisledon, Wilts. Only 7 on the course, all able to play different instruments. At the end we each had to narrate and play recordings of a musical piece. I chose Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf, having genned up on information from the local library.
- Another proud moment was winning a mixed doubles Badminton tournament (I still have my prize of a leather writing wallet).
- The main highlight of my time in the ATS was the people I met and the friends I made, which have lasted through the years. As an only child I so enjoyed the company, the camaraderie, the laughs, the privilege of meeting girls from all walks of life and from many countries.

Photos:



**W.O.s' and Sergts.' Mess "K" Company, East Anglian Group
Colchester, August 1946**

Sgt Raper St Rands G Sgt Coveney S/S Pilbeam Sgt Pollitt
Sgt Rands A Sgt Wood Sgt Williscroft Sgt Dean

Sgt Preece Sgt Brown Sgt Piedot Sgt Smith Sgt Shuttleworth Sgt Lean
Sgt Brown-Constable Sgt Stanbridge Sgt Flint

WOII Marx WOI Sim CSM Van Os RSM Roberts WOI Weeks WOI Salby
CSM Sullivan

**W.O.s' and SERGEANTS' MESS, EAST ANGLIAN GROUP
Newmarket - 1945**



Back row - Standing
Sgt.Garwood, Sgt.Luscombe, Sgt.Coburn, Sgt.King, Sgt.Higham, Sgt. Flint
Centre row - Sitting
WOII Salby, Sgt.Aitkie, WOI Pelling, WOI Sim, WOII Gardiner, Sgt.Pollitt
Front row
Mr.B (dog) Pte.Costick (cook), Sgt.Metzner, Pte Ryler (orderly)