

<b>Surname:</b> Smith	<b>First Name(s):</b> Grace	<b>Army Number:</b> W/230503	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> Burnet	<b>Name used during service:</b> Burnet	<b>Rank:</b> Corporal – 1943-45 Subaltern – 1945-1946	
<b>Main base:</b>	<b>Training base:</b> Glen Parva Barracks, Leicester	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Glen Parva	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b> 113 (M) Rocket Battery, Nr Neath, Glam	<b>Group/Regiment:</b> Royal Artillery	<b>Command:</b> Anti Aircraft Command
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 1943 to 1946	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> Demobilisation	<b>Trade:</b> Radar Operator	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b>	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In charge of radar team - our equipment consisted of a generator, which we had to maintain, which produced 230 volts of electricity which was fed into the transmitter (a large container on a platform with aerials) where it was increased to 25,000 volts by operating various switches, by two of my team. The signals from these aerials would hit the enemy plane and be bounced back to the aerials on the receiver, where three of my team would monitor the height, distance and location which then showed on my radar screen, and this information was sent to the control room where it was plotted on a table map by the Home Guard.</li> <li>• When we were on manning duty we worked for 48 hours from 9.00 am and had to carry sheets, Pillow-slip, blankets, towel, gas-mask and steel helmet and personal possessions in a shoulder bag down the slope, along a lane bordering the HAA site, across the main road and onto our site.</li> <li>• Our alternate 48 hours were spent doing training, PE, fatigues etc. We had a 24 hour pass every week and I usually spent it in Swansea, sleeping overnight in the YWCA and often walking round the Goer Peninsular which was heavenly to get away from everybody.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		
<b>Pay book:</b>	Not available		
<b>Memorable moments:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In November 1939 I started working as a Temporary Civil Servant in Berkeley Square House in London, working for the Ministry of War Transport in the shipping section called Coastal and Short Sea Shipping, with two men from the shipping</li> </ul>		

industry. When the intense bombing closed the east coast ports the ships bringing much needed supplies from abroad had to dock in the west coast ports and we had to arrange for smaller vessels, which were less likely to be bombed or torpedoed, to bring the cargoes round to the west coast. Daily lists had to be typed of all these movements and when the statistics were published after the war, I felt quite proud to know I had helped to produce these figures.

- I lived with my sister and her small daughter, Wendy, on the outskirts of London as my mother and father were still at what had been our guest house in Shanklin in the I.O.W., where my Dad was working making aeroplanes.
- On October 4<sup>th</sup> 1942 I received my calling-up papers – what a lovely 21<sup>st</sup> birthday present. I duly had my medical examination which I passed A1 and received notice to report to Glen Parva barracks in Leicester on 1 January 1943. My sister and Wendy came to see me off on the special train from Kings Cross and you can imagine the scene, with lots of girls leaving home for the first time, there were lots of tearful hugs everywhere. (At that time it was normal to stay with your parents until you married). I suppose I was lucky as I was used to being separated from my parents, and having suffered all the bombing and subsequent problems of living in London during the last three years, I was quite looking forward to doing my bit to bring the war to an end.
- Glen Parva Barracks was the Headquarters of the Leicester Regiment which had been given to the ATS as a Training Centre. It was a typical Army building, large, made of concrete and bleak.
- We were shepherded into groups and queued up to be given our Paybook with our Service number. We then proceeded from table to table in this large hall to receive all our bits of equipment, each of which had to be signed for, starting with a mug, then knife, fork and spoon, and one of the most amusing memories I have of this was hearing the continual clatter of cutlery falling to the floor as you bent over to sign each form and your cutlery fell out of your mug.
- The large barrack rooms which were to be our home for the next three weeks were lofty and very cold, having only one small stove at one end. Double wooden bunks were arranged in rows and it was my misfortune to have to climb into an upper one. This was very painful after the first few P.E. lessons proved that I had been sitting behind a desk for the past three years with not much chance to exercise, apart from rushing backwards and forwards to work. Of course, if jackets or skirts had to be altered to fit, it was not unusual to see a jacket on top of a civilian skirt and visa versa. However at the end of three weeks we were all looking complete and able to look really smart as we practiced our drills and marching.
- We had received various inoculations and vaccinations and were sent home for 48 hours leave before reporting to our new destinations which had been determined after undergoing various tests. I think they were really artful to give us this leave, as lots of us had adverse reactions to the injections – I know I did as all I wanted to do was sleep. My sister was quite worried, but after 24 hours I was alright and set off to Wingate Barracks at Park Hill camp near Oswestry in Shropshire, which was a large Royal Artillery and Anti Aircraft training centre.
- We were going to spend the next six weeks learning all about radar and how it was operated. Firstly we were issued with our battledress uniform consisting of khaki tunic and trousers, brown leather jerkin and brown boots and gaiters which were very stiff, so we had to learn how to walk in them with a sort of rocking sensation. We were supposed to ‘dubbing’ them to preserve them, but we did not like the dull appearance this gave. But as we had inspection and parades every morning, we got quite clever by using shoe polish instead, which polished off after the parades!
- Our training was quite comprehensive, including learning all about generators

which were used to power the radar equipment consisting of a receiver and transmitter, the working of which we also had to master.

- My memories of these days are of being woken by the bugler blowing reveille outside our hut at 6 am on our day off, but the soldier responsible was forgiven if he also shouted “eggs for breakfast”. You can imagine the scramble there was to don battle dress (without boots and gaiters) and get to the cookhouse. This rush was very successful until one of the girls forgot to tuck her pyjama cord into her trousers and was discovered by the Orderly Officer. We had to be very careful after that – but it was worth it for that egg!
- After our initial six weeks, twelve of us were picked to train for another six weeks to become No 1s who would be in charge of a team and receive our first stripe as Lance Corporal. As we were now part of the Royal Artillery we were allowed to wear the white lanyard and bomb flash on our dress uniform. My Dad was very proud of this as he had been in the RHA (Royal Horse Artillery) during the first war.
- Our course complete, which we all passed, we had to wait while our teams were trained so spent our time on more training, PE, fatigues etc. Being just twelve of us there was a very strong bond between us and I must admit when our postings came through, tears were shed as we had to say goodbye to our friends – for me it was Marjorie Evans that I missed the most.
- In June I found myself in charge of five girls from Scotland, two Jessies, Cathy, Rita and Chris. At first they were very difficult to understand, especially Jessie from Ayrshire, and the rest of the team had to translate for me, much to their amusement, but within a few weeks I had ‘tuned in’ and could understand what she said.
- Our destination was 113 (M) Z Battery, R.A. Jersey Marine, Nr Swansea, Glam, S Wales. When we arrived we were billeted in a hut on a Heavy A.A. site and what a ‘bang’ when they fired one of the guns one night! After a week we were transferred up the hill to Bleak House which had been the local mortuary! Yes, it was cold, being constructed of concrete, for obvious reasons, but we survived with the help of a large boiler which provided hot water (if the men from the camp remembered to stoke it) and we had a large stove in the room where we slept. The main site was situated at the foot of a hill and we had to march backwards and forwards to it as that was where the cookhouse, NAAFI and general offices were.
- Our equipment was situated on sand dunes, and the Nissen hut we used when on duty had been condemned for the men on the HAA site ... but we were tough! The actual rockets were about eight feet long and eight inches in diameter with fins at the bottom of them, set in pairs on circular revolving platforms, in a square formation. Several nights a week we had to do ‘dummy runs’ for Home Guard training and afterwards they would visit the NAAFI for a drink. However, when they started singing ‘Nelly Dean’ we scarpered!
- Our manning hut consisted of two rooms, one for sleeping and one for relaxing which had an open fire. We had an outside toilet consisting of a cabin with a bucket, which we had to empty ... thank goodness it was easy digging holes in the sand! Of course we had soldiers on the site to train the Home Guard and maintain their equipment and fatigues etc. We used to tease them by singing what was a popular Music Hall song about ‘they’re either too young or too old’ – but don’t worry, they got their own back on us and we had to be nice to them to keep our fires stoked.
- One of my Ministry bosses had put me in touch with a very nice family, the Jones’, who made a great fuss of me on my visits to them.
- At that time the rocket was a comparatively unknown weapon and it wasn’t until later that we were allowed to change the ‘Z; in our address to ‘Rocket’. I believe

they were probably sited near Swansea as earlier in the year it had been badly bombed and although it was the docks that had been targeted, it was the centre of the city which had been devastated, all except one small block which, fortunately for us contained a very welcome fish and chip shop which was our first stop when visiting town. In those days this was the cheapest meal you could buy.

- We only had one alert one night when I rushed out and got the generator working (it generally needed two of us) but after setting up all the controls the rockets weren't fired – I suppose it could have been a stray plane which obviously disappeared quickly.
- Just before Christmas, I got my second stripe to become a Corporal. Life continued as normal, but never dull, with all sorts of temperaments living together. On June 6<sup>th</sup> we were all very heartened to hear of the D Day landings, although unbeknown to us we did see a little part of it. For days before it happened, troop trains were going along the railway behind Bleak House, and by leaning out of our windows (we were quite high up) we could wave to them and exchange a few words. They were on their way to the docks in Swansea and thinking about it later, perhaps we were the last girls that some of them every spoke to. Also the day before when I was returning from my day off, I was amazed to see the whole of the Bristol channel full of every type of ship you could imagine, and 24 hours later they were all gone!
- In August I was sent on a PE course to Beaumaris on the Isle of Anglesey. I really enjoyed the three weeks of sunny weather and was a bit reluctant to be going back on site as, with the risk of raids in Wales being almost nil, although London and the South East were enduring Doodle-bugs, we were becoming almost redundant. We were sent on various courses and I was allowed to enrol at the local Art College on an Architects course which I attended several afternoons each week. When I was posted and had to leave I was quite pleased when my tutor said my work was equivalent to a third year student. (You must remember these sort of vocations were very new to girls.)
- After Christmas our site was disbanded and we were sent to a holding centre at Mumbles on the other side of Swansea while they sorted out further postings for us. Our Junior Commander had already approached me about taking a Commission and knowing that it would be at least a year before I was demobbed I had said 'yes'. I now became involved in lots of interviews and tests and in the interim I was posted to Bridlington to help man an A.A. site. It was very sad to say goodbye to all my comrades, especially Betty Holland, who was a Southerner, like me.
- My new friend was Bud, Rosemary Kent, who helped me settle in to my new surroundings. For one thing we were billeted in private houses, could walk to the shops and along the promenade! From 21-24 March I had to attend a WOSB (War Office Selection Board) on Hampstead Heath and this was my first experience of hearing V2s exploding! Everything was geared to finding out what sort of person you were ... practical and oral tests and interviews, not to mention dining with the VIPs. Perhaps it helped, but I was going on 48 hours leave afterwards and I suppose I was fairly relaxed, but some of the girls were so eager to become officers, they rather over-excelled themselves!
- In April I was told I had been selected for OCTU (Officer Cadet Training Unit). However, in May I was posted to another site in Huddersfield and on 8<sup>th</sup> June reported to Pontefract Barracks for 4 weeks pre-OCTU training which covered everything we would be expected to know as an officer in charge of personnel. Our last week was in the cookhouse, and what a shock to arise at 4.00 am to prepare breakfasts for about 70 girls, although our shift did finish at 2.00 pm. I think the worst memory of this period was having to clean the greasy tins (there were none of the detergents we have now) and cleaning the outside drains which

had the most awful stench it really put me off my food. Thank goodness I had leave to recover.

- I then returned to Pontefract to find I had been posted to a Company in Bradford to practice my Admin skills. This week was followed by another 2 weeks as the Old Guard, where outside visits were arranged, no doubt to broaden our view of life and included going down the Prince of Wales coal mine and into a Newspaper Office where news of a possible Japanese surrender was just coming through. I had 72 hours leave before reporting to the Imperial College in Windsor which had become the ATS Officers' School and OCTU. However, because the Forces had been given 48 hours leave to celebrate the end of hostilities only three of us had turned up, so were sent home again, but not before we had sewed the white band round our hats to show we were Officer Cadets!
- Irene Brown came home with me and I showed her round London for the first time. At last our course commenced and I think we all enjoyed it in our different ways. I was able to get home on my weekends off and to London on Thursday evenings when we finished earlier. On 9<sup>th</sup> September we had our first Church Parade when we had to march through Windsor High Street and into the Windsor St Georges Chapel for a service to celebrate the completion of the course before ours. Afterwards we were free for the rest of the day after marching back to the College. I had arranged to meet my family at the top of the High Street and was rushing along when a figure in blue stepped out in front of me and triggered what was to be a turning point in my life. It was my future husband-to-be Freddie Smith, who had been overseas for three and a half years! Obviously we had changed from the shy girl and boy we had been, although we had corresponded regularly, and spending the rest of the day with him and my family, we found we really enjoyed each other's company. He was on 2 weeks leave from Italy so I was able to meet him several times in London before he had to go back.
- Our Passing Out Parade on 10 October was quite a moving experience, although it was with sadness that we said goodbye to our friends as we went off to our various postings. I was quite pleased with mine to Northampton until our Junior Commander arrived one day and said an Admin Officer was needed at C Company a Transport Unit at Aynho, Nr Banbury and I had been chosen. I must admit I was not very pleased, as having spent the last three years in the wide open paces, I had looked forward to being in touch with civilisation, but it was not to be, so off I went to Aynho.
- The Officers were billeted in the family mansion which was quite an experience, especially when going to bed with the family portraits gazing down at you from the staircases and corridors – it could be quite eerie! My fellow officers were quite welcoming, and it was strange to be in male company after being so long with females. I found the work quite interesting dealing with all the problems of the 100 girls on site. I managed weekends at home and trips into Banbury, often with my Corporal, Lynn Ewart.
- After Christmas 1945 people were being demobbed as it was a case of first-in, first-out. In May there was talk of our moving to Towcester, Nr Brackley, so as our Unit gradually closed I was sharing my time between both sites, which was very hectic.

In June Freddie and I become engaged and he was demobbed in July. I attended another course at Windsor and we finally moved to B Coy, ATS Whitfield, Nr Brackley on 8<sup>th</sup> August. It was strange to be in a full Officer's Mess again. Another course at Windsor helped to pass the time until my own demob on 17 October. I was a civilian again and looking forward to marriage, children etc. although we could not have foreseen all the problems ahead of us, but we survived and were happily married for 33 years. I have never regretted the time I spent in the ATS as I am sure it has helped me to cope with all my life since.

Photos:



113 (M) Rocket Battery, Jersey Marine, Nr Neath - 1943