

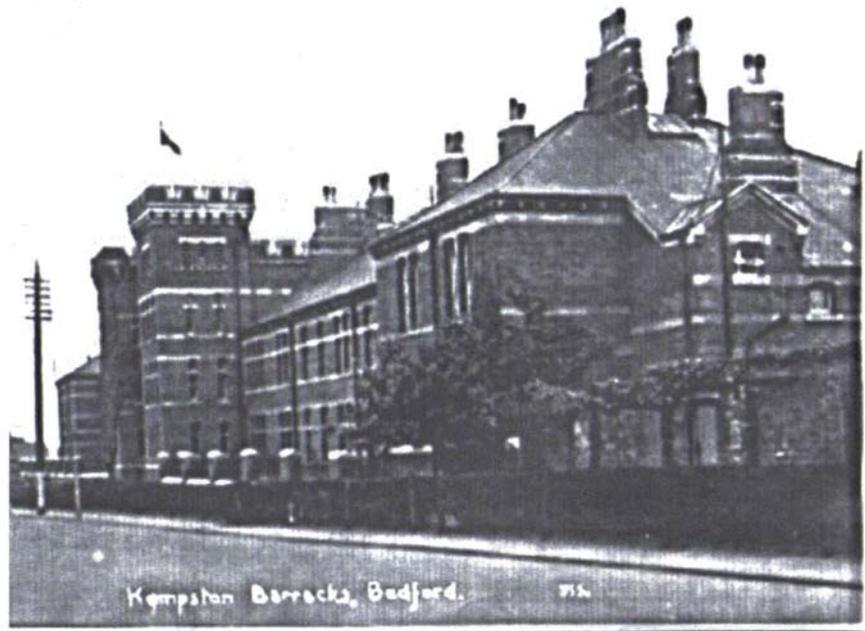
Surname: Sparkes	First Name(s): N	Army Number: W/263109	
Maiden name (if applicable): Bridgwood	Name used during service: Bridgwood / Sparkes	Rank: Private	
Main base: Bedford Lidlington London Dunstable	Training base: Talavera	Enrolled at: Northampton A.W.1 Dispersal Unit Northampton C.W.2	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: E Company	Group/Regiment: A.T.S.	Command:
Year(s) of service: 1943 to 28/7/1945	Reason for discharge: Demob (end of conscription period)	Trade: Clerk Class II	
Uniform Issued: 3 shirts 2 ties 2 shoes greatcoat kit bag waterproof cape knife fork mug army cap	Photo: 		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office and switchboard duties. • P.T. every morning. • Paid 8/- a week until qualified. 		
Pay book:	Not available		
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The A.T.S. started in 1938. Many girls volunteered thinking it would be great but as war progressed, conscription took place with the national service act in 1941. We just had to go to serve for the duration of the war. • So, in 1943 I joined many others at Northampton Station for Talavera Camp for 6 weeks of training and fitting out in uniform. What a pack; 2 complete uniforms, one fine cloth for parades, the other for work. We worked from dawn to dusk packed into Nissen huts, 30 of us. Beds wooden, camp beds with 3 biscuits, 2 		

blankets, 1 pillow. Lectures: jabs for many things by brute of Doctor. Route marching. Marking clothes with name and number. Lights out at 10 pm then 48 hours leave for home, this indeed was goodbye. From here it was just me. The others went all over the country on jobs.

- To Kempston Barracks, Bedford. What a rude awakening!! Bunk beds crammed in part of the building for it was for the Army Boys not us. No one knew what to do with me. I was a snob to this crowd of girls! So I was sent down the road each morning (1.5 miles walk) to the men's 101 convalescent camp to work. No other girls here but I did enjoy my work preparing food for the boys kitchen, slicing sides of bacon, cutting cheese etc and talking with them as they rested in the grounds, but no one knew what to do with me so I just made myself useful having fun with the sick boys!
- Then once again 'pack you're moving'.
- Just a wee scotch girl came to the Barracks and we went into Bedford on the river trying to manage a canoe!! What fun we had – a brake from the bossy barracks and men officers who needed educating.
- Lidlington here I come! Dropped in the village, found Coy Office, B house empty, one Sergeant who was arranged to see me. Took me into the village to a cottage, I had a glorious bedroom. Back to the brick works where all the men were working. Still lots of Italians loading trucks. In I went to the Mess, the one and only A.T.S. girl amongst this crowd. I was glad to escape back to my sleepy cottage. Given a pair of overalls, no skirts here, covered your top as well to keep you clean. Had to check the compost packs, correct food for the troops at the front! Then see nailed down correctly by lty's!! Put on the labels etc. A bully S/Major from Birmingham always bullying you to get on with it! Trucks had to leave at night and a new load tomorrow. Then into the office, collect labels etc with an army corporal and go along the train labelling everything. Then other girls arrived. They had got the Duke of Bedford's big house for the girls!
- Then I was not supposed to be there: so into the office again and with a great crowd of men, the old type unit again! All of us under the men officer but I was just left alone in my cottage: the villagers were great and had some great times with them. Sunday School party etc.
- The A.T.S. took over and the men went to the 8th army desert rats. In the evenings when off duty, truck sometimes to Bedford for night classes I went. The girls went off with the boys etc. Once more happy feeling settled: "Why are you in the office demanded the Army Officer in charge – not needed here!!"
- Next port of call 'Chimney Corner' Stewetby!! Carrying all your kit, gas mask, helmet etc and dropped at the bottom of a long muddy lane!! "Just down there to the camp!!" 1.5 miles! A huge brick works. Tents; mud, duck boards, men (army) sleeping in them. Nissen huts, one for the girls A.T.S. – not many here. Into Company Office back to my old typewriter, really peaceful. Italian prisoners of war working loading rail trucks for night delivery. The hardest winter I've ever known: snow coming into the hut on to your pillow; greatcoat on your bed to keep warm. We had fun making tents with our water capes over our heads and pillow at night to keep dry. The food was better here! Night duty on the switch board, off duty some of the girls went down the lane to the Chimney Corner Pub, that's all there was to do! I scorned such practice and just went in the fields or walked 2.5 miles into Kempston village to meet my church people! But it meant missing dinner – nothing till tea time. Then the air raids stopped me from going. Once more no one knew I was here! So one night on switchboard coded message I took – me posted to Lidlington! Joy of joys! I did go off duty pack and away, kit again down the lane the Army lorry picked you up "If you miss it you'll have to walk to Lidlington". Did I move! The whole thing was a complete mess up, they were not ready for such an influx of girls no matter where you went.

- Once more posted. Horrible Brigadier and Major so off I went to London: Gower Street. Never been to London – what fun!! This was a college. Reported and given a lovely bedroom and study. Back down to see what! One week here, lecture studying, but no sleep at night. Terrific air raids. After the college was hit by air attack we were moved to Hampstead Heath.
- Put into houses, bedroom. 3 bunk beds, 6 of us. Over the road more houses. Big ones. We went for meals, such great houses we tried to explore them but not allowed upstairs. This we did one day. What a lovely sight. Gold bath taps. Mother of pearl tiles. We marvelled at such things. Back to work, endless typing day after day for weeks. Not much freedom. In the end we were moved to Dunstable.
- We did have fun though. None of us had been on the underground. We got on and went round and round back to the starting point. We were doubled up with laughter, but at last some one told us our stop we wanted to go to the Albert Hall! What a place such splendour – in we went for Tom Rees was holding a (Campaign 1944) here I met some of our members of our church. Tom Rees: Alan Redpath: Lindsey Gregg: it was just perfect giving us courage to yet go on face the days ahead.
- Dunstable – the Coy office was a row of houses outside the centre, by the downs. Taken to Nissen huts: row after row of them. Got end bed. Back to cookhouse, miles of walking. Back again to Coy Office. One of the Subalterns did not know, so gave me a 24 hour pass home. The first leave for 9 months so I vanished for the train and home. What a joy to turn up so suddenly! But not enough time to see everyone but leaving was sad. Back to the Coy Office No 30, First Avenue. Monday morning met J/C King. She sent me to The Brewery in the High Street. Golly what a place; down in the cellars! Maps, typewriters, switchboards etc – rows of A.T.S. girls. Down I got to the typewriter; add figures etc, codes but what a muster (Major – Colonel) can't remember names – too many of them.
- For weeks I enjoyed it all but the girls so quiet too scared to speak, so when the bosses were out to lunch, I used to get up and have fun dancing around chatting to the girls till one returned too soon from his lunch and caught me! "Golly who are you! What are you doing here! You're not on our list!" So back once more to Coy Office.
- Coy Office: "What have you done to offend his Lordship!!" J/C King was great, she understood you can't work and no play. Instructed in Coy Office a dream. We did PT every day (mornings). Back in Office to work – what a happy team we were. Then came the blow, you have got to go to Donkey Common, Cambridge. Off I went, 2 weeks this time – great – never been to Cambridge, but more exams and interviews. I passed but I discovered if you are not R/C or Church of England, they are not interested in you as Officers!! Still back I went to Dunstable.
- Back again: working together but all was subdued. Everyone was going to medical etc. I was not interested. I had asked for leave to get married for I'd met my husband to be in Dunstable. So home I went. J/C King came to my wedding but when I returned everyone had been posted abroad. New staff etc. I was stunned!
- So to work once more then I had two accidents on duty, but just had to go on working. Then came V.E. day – we worked on. After this news came war over in Germany etc, so as cons work was ended, office closing etc. So being newly married and still in barracks we married were the first to be demobed.
- So Release Book July 28 1945. I was free. Dispersal Unit Northampton.

Photos:



Kempston Barracks, Bedford. 75.

Barracks - First view of Army life



Lidlington Office Staff



E Coy Dunstable
Junior Commander King