

Surname: Wilkinson	First Name(s): Mary	Army Number: W/92630	
Maiden name (if applicable): Finch	Name used during service: Finch	Rank: L/Sgt	
Main base: St Paul's Cray, Kent Holywood, Belfast Doodlebug Alley, around Folkestone Isle of Sheppey London Wales	Training base: Guildford Devizes Bude Firing Camp, Cornwall	Enrolled at: London	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 490 Heavy Ack Ack Battery 499 Heavy Ack Ack Battery	Group/Regiment: Royal Artillery	Command: Anti-Aircraft Command
Year(s) of service: 1941 to 1946	Reason for discharge: General demobilisation	Trade: Radar Operator Clerk	
Uniform Issued: S.D. Shirts, collars, studs Skirts Tunic hats Raincoat/groundsheets Greatcoat brown lace-up shoes Ties B.D. Brilliant pink brassieres and corsets White vests and pants and khaki rayon bloomers Lisle stockings Blue cotton overalls Khaki boiler suits for maintenance Shoe brush, button brush, button sticks,	Photo: 		

<p>toothbrush and housewife (pronounces hussif – white linen purse containing needles and thread etc)</p> <p>Kit bag Gas mask</p>	
<p>Description of daily tasks:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At training camp, a plane flew over the sea towing a sleeve. Our job was to line up the target, get a bearing, height and angle on it and this was relayed to the predictors who told the guns where the plane would be when the shells went up and then the guns fired. • Manning radar equipment and maintenance. • We spent many hours cutting down any weeds that showed their heads above the wire matting that surrounded the radar hut. This wasn't so bad where the ground sloped down, but when there was just a few inches of space, it meant lying flat and wielding the sickle above your head and feeling for the weed – it was not one of our favourite jobs. • After the war ended in 1945, I was retrained as a Clerk.
<p>Pay book:</p>	<p>Not available</p>
<p>Memorable moments:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During basic training, being taken into a large hall to be taught how to distinguish between bugle calls. In the enclosed space the bugle sounded so loud and out of tune that we were all just glad to get out of there and do something else. • Pay parade – where we were marched to the hall and told to 'stand easy' while the pay clerk called out our names in alphabetical order from the Acquittance Roll (a nice long name for a list). When you heard your name, you had to come smartly to attention, march the length of the hall, stop with a great show of halting and salute the officer. The clerk would read out the amount of money you were about to draw, whereupon you signed the Acquittance Roll, picked up the pittance, smartly saluted the officer, about turned and marched back to your place. • Being issued with ATS handbags. We had been using the respirator bag with the gas mask removed to carry comb, make up, cigarettes etc. We decorated the ATS handbags with the cap badges of boyfriends. • Experiencing living and working in an area which was hundreds of miles from home. At that time, people mainly stayed within a short distance of where they lived and worked and for the most part mixed only with neighbours and friends who were in similar circumstances. There were accents I had never heard before. • One memorable night, we were in a little manning hut in the middle of the common, when we were called out. We had a diesel generator, which powered the transmitter and receiver, and two people always ran first to this, to crank the handle and get it started. This was usually quite near to the hut and the transmitter not far off, so we got to those but there was a thick fog and we couldn't find the catwalk that led to the receiver. It had to stand on an area of flat ground and this was achieved by stretching a wire netting mat over stakes in the ground and there was a catwalk made of wooden

duckboards leading to this little wooden hut in the centre. We couldn't have powerful torches of course, and had to make do with well-shaded hurricane lamps radiating very little light. After what seemed like a very long time, someone tripped over the edge of the duckboards and we felt our way along only to hear after a few minutes that it was a false alarm, but at least we'd reported for duty!

- Whilst in Northern Ireland all the girls were given a talk by one of our Officers, who warned us that very soon the black American troops would be coming and on no account must we speak to them. There were a good many indignant questions about this and the answer was that in their own states, white women did not associate with black men and if we did, then they would expect that to happen when they returned home. We were appalled that such an attitude should exist and in fact we had seen very few black people and had no intention of obeying such an order.
- When in Doodlebug alley, we had no running water, and were issued with one bucket of water between four who shared a tent which we collected from a water wagon

Photos:

