


Surname: Holley	First Name(s): Sheila Barbara	Army Number: W/292431	
Maiden name (if applicable): Fenn	Name used during service: Fenn	Rank: Private	
Main base: Chelsea, London	Training base: Initial Training - Guildford Driving instruction - Camberley	Enrolled at: Volunteered London 13/7/1944 Enrolled CRO London 21/7/1944	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: 920 W.O. Tpt Coy	Group/Regiment: R.A.S.C.	Command:
Year(s) of service: 13/7/1944 to 22/4/1946	Reason for discharge: Class C release	Trade: Driver	
Uniform Issued: S.D. Shirts Tie Shoes Stockings Shoulder bag Side cap Trousers Leather jerkin	Photo:  Sheila Fenn 20/9/1944 at Guildford		
Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to Office in Northumberland House, Northumberland Street, where out day's duties would be given. We were assigned to a 'postman', a civilian, who had the day's instructions. We would then go to my Standard 8 Van and he would direct me to the first point of call. There he would pick up Mail and direct me to the second point. This Mail would be dropped off and more picked up, which then led to a third point and so on. These pick-up points included Downing Street, the Admiralty and many places both in, and occasionally, outside London. All very hush-hush. 		

Pay book:

My original paybook was stolen, along with my shoulder bag, from the side of my bed at night in August 1945. The bag was later found thrown in some bushes nearby but everything had been taken. I was put on a charge for 'losing Government Property'!

Memorable moments:

- When war broke out I was living with my family in Essex. I was evacuated for three years and as soon as I was old enough, I joined up.
- When I volunteered, I was a shorthand typist, and I therefore asked to do something similar. When at Guildford, amongst my friends was a girl called Connie Butler, who had volunteered as a driver. She persuaded me that driving was more exciting than office work and I therefore approached my Corporal and asked for a change of Trade. This was not well received and I had to "go to the Top" to justify my change of heart, but it was allowed.
- Before we commenced training we had to have an aptitude test. We were all in the Test Room at individual tables with a piece of made up Meccano on the desk and an exploded drawing by the side. We were given a short time to dismantle the piece and then put it back in exactly the same way, using the drawing as a guide. As I was not a practical person, my heart sank, but fortunately my elder brother had allowed me to play with his Meccano set occasionally and thus I passed. We then had lectures with slides of engines and had to learn the component parts.
- If we passed each test, we then progressed to a mock-up engine and then a stationary car, where we also learned to change a wheel. Finally, we started learning to drive in earnest. This usually meant we would be allocated to a vehicle and there would be two, three or four of us and a Driving Instructor. We would take it in turns driving, I think it was in the Camp to start with.
- When we were adjudged ready we would be allowed on the roads around Camberley. Every day we were tested and assessed and if we failed at any time we would see on the next day's Standing Orders that we had been RTU'd (returned to Unit). There was many a tear when the unfortunate would-be driver was sent back. I suppose, however, that the War Office could not take any chances.
- The worst thing that could happen to one would be when one was in a vehicle waiting to go out, the passenger door would open, and a Senior NCO or an Officer would get in and announce she would be taking us that day. Enough to make us fail with fright. This happened to me once when I was the first person driving out

of Camp in an unfamiliar vehicle. When it came time to move off, I was unable to release the handbrake and I had a very scary few moments until I managed it.

- On another occasion I was reversing for the first time in a wooded area and finding it difficult. When the Corporal quietly told me to stop and turn and look behind me, I found I was about a foot away from a tree trunk. I was sure that was the end for me, but all was well.
- We were trained in all sorts of vehicles, the tiny “bug”, jeeps, staff cars, trucks and Ambulances. The idea was that we could be posted anywhere and drive whatever we had to.
- I believe that at the end of the course we were all given a final road test and then we waited for our results and our posting.
- Our sergeant told us that if we wished to be posted to a specific place, it was best if we put a different destination as we were seldom sent where we asked. As I had never been anywhere but Ipswich, then Wales, when I was evacuated and to my grandparents in Bristol, I fancied going somewhere new, so I put several destinations. I was posted to Chelsea to my dismay but to my mother’s delight at my being so close! However, I did enjoy my Chelsea posting.
- A copy of the studio portrait that was taken on 20/9/1944 was sent to my brother in the R.A.M.C. overseas and was subsequently published in the Forces Newspaper.
- When at Camberley, some of us were billeted away from the main camp in a private (empty) house. There was no heat and little hot water and we were forbidden to light a fire. It was freezing cold and we weren’t too happy. To get to the Mess for breakfast we had to go across a Golf Course. Of course, it was pitch dark, being the depths of winter so I don’t think we did the greens a lot of good as we stumbled along aiming for the faint lights of the camp ahead of us! However, breakfast was always very good and we all appreciated it.
- One time, my co-driver Gillian Sweeting and I were out on our own, having made good progress and we were driving a tiny car we called a “bug”. There was thick snow and ice and on one of the lanes the car skidded into a ditch. Fortunately, a passing truckload of soldiers stopped and the car was literally heaved out by some of the men, with much ribald remarks about women drivers.
- I remember being in London during bombing raids and vividly remember the V1s (doodle bugs) and terrible V2s which arrived out of no-where. I don’t remember driving during a raid, but I’m pretty sure we heard raids going on elsewhere. If we needed shelter, there was nearly always a well signposted one nearby.
- Another time, Gillian and I were driving a 15 cwt truck on night map reading manoeuvres. This took us across Great Windsor Park, and while I drove, Gill leant out on her side and literally helped me by noting where the faint track was, while I was leaning out my side trying to do the same. Fortunately we got to our rendezvous on time.
- When we had to go to Downing Street or the Admiralty we always felt that there must be something important in the bags. The other places were just various Offices around the Capital. I do recollect that I had to go to a place (in Surrey I think) and my postman would not give me any details. Instead he just directed me the whole way. When I returned some of the girls said I had been to one of Winston Churchill’s many meeting places. Whether that was true or not I don’t know.
- My time at Guildford was unfortunately extended as returning from our final weekend leave before going to Camberley, the carriage door of my train compartment was slammed by the Guard on to my thumb and I had a cracked bone which prevented me from leaving. I was put in a holding unit for about 6 weeks until it healed. As my hand was heavily bandaged I was excused cookhouse or cleaning duties and instead spent the time in the warm QM’s Stores which eased my disappointment a little! While in this state of limbo, I was sent

with one of the Sergeants to collect and bring back an absconder.

- I must mention the comradeship I found amongst the girls, the excitement of driving around London in Wartime, the thrill of being taught to drive (still doing so in my 78th year!) and my disappointment at my early release (my Mother wanted me home to help look after my little brother who was four years old at the time). I didn't want to leave but wasn't given much choice!

Photos:



3rd Platoon Company No 7 Training Centre Guildford



Gillian Sweeting and Sheila Fenn in Trafalgar Square 1945

115160 Army Form X262/D (Revised)

CERTIFICATE OF RELEGATION TO THE UNEMPLOYED LIST OF A.T.S. AUXILIARY OR V.A.D. MEMBER

Army No. 4292431 Rank PLC

Surname (Block letters) FENN

Christian Name/s SHEILA BARBARA

Corps A.T.S.

The relegation to the Unemployed List of the above-named is confirmed with effect from* 22 April 46 *In indefinite period*

Record Office Stamp. S.V.V. 21

A.T.S. RECORD OFFICE
25 APR 1946
WINCHESTER

S.V.V. 21. A. Ames. Capt
25 APR 1946
39/112 25/11/47 *W. Cabinet*
 Date *25 APR 1946* Officer to *A.T.S. Records.*

* The date to be inserted here will be that following the day on which Release Leave terminates, including any additional leave to which the Auxiliary or V.A.D. Member may be entitled by virtue of service overseas.

WT 24239/0207 200M 9/48 R 31,871/16 Gp. 38/3

Military Conduct Very Good

Testimonial.

a good driver of light vehicles, dependable in her duties, an honest and reliable person.

M. A. Ames. Capt
Colonel,
A.T.S. Records,
Winchester.

Relegation Certificate and Testimonial