

Surname: Fearon	First Name(s): Mary (Molly)	Army Number: W/23142	
Maiden name (if applicable): Cheason	Name used during service: Cheason	Rank: Sergeant	
Main base: Stanstead Bushey Felixstowe Lingfield London Northampton Southend Cambridge London	Training base: No basic training Mychett, Nr Aldershot	Enrolled at: Watford – Volunteered 1939	
Platoon/Section:	Company/Battery: ATS Provost Wing	Group/Regiment: ATS ATS	Command: A.A. Command London District Provost Wing Eastern Command
Year(s) of service: October 1939 to 1945	Reason for discharge: End of hostilities	Trade: Shorthand Typist Military Police	
Uniform Issued: 1 cap 2 ties 1 greatcoat 1 raincoat 2 tunics 2 skirts 3 prs khaki lisle hose 2 prs khaki bloomers! 2 prs cotton briefs 2 bras 4 shirts (separate collars) 2 vests 2 prs lace-up Shoes Shoulder bag “Dress” forage cap 1 pr slacks (not to be worn off camp) For provost: 1 peaked hat 1 red top cover 1 whistle 1 MP armband	Photo:  Molly Fearon (nee Cheason) in shirt sleeves Some of the girls at Bushey (A.A. Command HQ) 1940		

Description of daily tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General office duties as a shorthand typist. • As Military Policy our job was to keep up the good name of the A.T.S. in the way of behaviour and appearance and to deal with absentees. We patrolled in twos – in London this was in the central parts and each main Railway Station - checking passes and dress and, if they were discovered, “arrest” any absentees, ‘phone for transport, which would arrive from the men’s M.P. establishment at Chelsea Barracks and take them back to our quarters to await an escort from their own unit to take them back to from where they had absconded
Pay book:	<p>Not available.</p>
Memorable moments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1939 when the war had just begun, I applied to join what was then the W.A.C.S. (Women’s Army Corps Service – later changed to Auxiliary Territorial Service. The formation I applied to were a Watford Company led by Mrs Jean Knox who then arranged for my enlistment. (Mrs Knox later became the head of all the A.T.S.) I had to go to Watford for a medical exam by an Army Medical Officer. Everything then was in its early stages and there were no training centres and so I was sent straight to my job at Stanstead Mount Fychett where I had a test for shorthand typing and was immediately granted the grand sum of 14 shillings per week, while those without a trade received only ten shillings per week. I was there with an A.A. Regimental Headquarters (no uniform but just an A.T.S. Hat). We slept on palliases on the floor with just blankets and nothing to keep our goods and chattels in but our own suitcases. We hung our clothing on the wall with coat hangers on the dado. • A few weeks later I was given a uniform and sent to Bushey, Herts to work in the Battery Office of the A.A. Regiment which was guarding Bently Priory Fighter Command H.Q.R.A.F. at Stanmore, Middx. I was sent there to replace the girl already there who objected to the language of the Sergt Major. He was quite charming and polite I found, so had probably received a ‘ticking off’. There was also another girl there with whom I soon palled up and she was quite short whilst I am very tall and we heard that we were referred to by the R.A.F. boys as ‘The long and the short of it’. We were billeted in empty houses and even had the luxury of beds, sheets and pillows. I can’t remember if we had the ‘luxury’ of tin boxes in which to keep our belongings, that may have come later. The A.T.S. Company we two were attached to was a London Company, several of the girls worked in Bourne & Hollingsworth, a grand department store in Oxford Street which I think, sadly, does not now exist. They would work in the Offices of “Glenthorne” a large old country house which was the Headquarters of A.A. Command. A few others worked for the male Officers residence, cooking and cleaning while others cooked and cleaned at our own A.T.S. Billets – there were three houses that had been commandeered for our use. • After a while, our Regiment was moved to Felixstowe preparatory to going overseas, I went with them with a few other A.T.S. and remember how freezing cold it was. We slept on camp beds and I remember collecting seven blankets to try and keep warm. • When the Regiment went overseas, I was sent to Lingfield (near East Grinstead) to another Regimental Headquarters. I hated it – had to work with a Corporal who obviously resented my interventions she had been the only girl in the office and she was most unfriendly towards me. I therefore asked if I could have a transfer

back to Bushey which I was granted and became a – we were called ‘volunteers’ – in the London Company that was stationed there. I was put to work in the Ops Office of A.A. Command which was within the grounds of Bently Priory (Fighter Command). One of my bosses was i/c camouflage, A.A. Command – and none other than John Churchill, nephew of the late and great Sir Winston and somewhat eccentric! I had quite a happy time there – lots of girls for friends. I should perhaps tell you that there was plenty of bombing at this time and each time the sirens were sounded we had to flee to trucks that would take us to air raid shelters at our billets. However, it was found that so much time was lost with this practice that it was cancelled and we continued working through the raids.

- I eventually came to the conclusion that if you were a shorthand typist there was no chance of promotion whereas if you were a clerk you could become a chief clerk and be awarded stripes. Most unfair I thought. We were of course too useful to change over to clerking duties so there I would have probably stuck for the duration of the war were it not for a couple of years later when a notice came on the office board asking for volunteers for the Military Police – a group that was about to be formed in order to cope with the absentees (we were not allowed to call them deserters) and to keep up the good name of the Service in the way of behaviour and appearance. I came from a police family – my father was a London policeman and my brother was already in the Military Police, so I thought this might be my ‘cup of tea’ and applied. I was sent up to the War Office in Whitehall where I was interviewed (don’t know who the gentleman was) apparently found suitable and sent on a course of training at the men’s Military Police Training Barracks at Mychett, near Aldershot. We were the first girls they had had there apart from a few cooks, so quite a novelty and it was most enjoyable – one of the girls on the course eventually married a Sergt Major M.P. she had met there.
- From there, those who passed the course were divided into two groups one for London and the other for Scotland. We were stationed firstly at Catherine Place, very near to Buckingham Palace, in a very beautiful house and then we were moved to three rather grand houses in Buckingham Palace Road. We all left the course with the rank of Lance Corporal – one extremely nice girl (I say that loosely, she was about 40 which was ‘getting on’ to us youngsters) was appointed Sergt Major to be in control of us – plus two Officers (female). There we would patrol in twos – the central parts of London and each main Railway Station, checking passes and dress and, if they were discovered, “arrest” any absentees, ‘phone for transport, which would arrive from the men’s M.P. Establishment at Chelsea Barracks and take them back to our quarters to await an escort from their own unit to take them back to from where they had absconded. After a while it was decided to open up sections in other parts of U.K. and I applied for Eastern Command and was sent there to start up units in Northampton, Southend and Cambridge, and gained, through this, three stripes. Eventually, I decided this was not for me as it seemed pretty ‘tame’ after London with not much happening and so applied to return to London and spent the rest of my Army Career there until I was demobilised at the end of hostilities in 1945.
- The main reason for the absentees decided the Army was not for them was that conscription took place and no doubt this brought girls in who were either not really suitable for Army life or preferred other lifestyles of which the arrival of the Americans had a large part to play in this, I fear! My pay on leaving as a Sergeant was £3 a week.
- I had a rather interesting experience while serving in what was known as ‘The Provost Corps’, that was the job of escorting a German nurse as far as Belgium from where she was taken back to Germany. I was not told anything of the whys and wherefores – as it was treated as very hush hush. However, putting two and two together I concluded that the girl was pregnant and therefore an encumbrance

at the hospital that had been staffed by a German Hospital staff which had been transported, when the British and allies took over Belgium, to a hospital at Watford. It would have had to have been kept secret for fear that other girls would decide it was a good way to be sent back to Germany, one would presume. She seemed a pleasant girl, signs of obesity in front and had several knitted baby garments in her luggage which had to be searched before she left. We got on quite well, mostly through sign language and she and I were not a little concerned when I had to leave her with two soldiers who had brought the truck to Belgium in which to return her to Germany.

- Other parts of the duties of the provost girls in London were to be on duty at Lyons Corner House which was then near to Charing Cross Station – they liked being given that ‘beat’ as they were provided with supper by the establishment. Also, they had to go, I think it was to Woolwich where German Women P.O.W.s were brought in a searched – I think they would be mostly nurses, but am not sure. The girls would tell how nervous the Germans were when the air raid sirens sounded and call out “De Bonkers!! De Bonkers” – meaning either the shelters or the cellars. We had become a little more used to the bombs (if that were possible) but it was no joke not knowing if the next bomb might get you and then came the V1 ‘doodle bugs’ which you recognised by the sounds of their engines and waited to see if that “had your number on it” – I think that was the worst of all. After those came the V1s which were rockets that you would not hear until they landed – with a sigh of relief that that was not meant for you. We really felt like ‘wet rags’ at times as we lost so much sleep with the noise and fear of the bombings. However, we would not have changed places for anywhere else as London, being the heart of everything, was an interesting and sometime exciting place to be. Outside our billets was a ‘bus stop and who should we see waiting for a ‘bus one day but Noel Coward himself – he lived nearby.
- Our ranks were changed from volunteer etc later in the war, to those of the men’s Army, ie private, Lance Corporal, Sergt etc and were called (other than by our friends) by our surnames. Must add we never had rifles or did work unsuited to women! This applied to all servicewomen.
- Another little snippet of interest, perhaps I forgot to mention was that our Officer at one time at Bushey had been an opera singer. She formed a choir amongst us and picked out half a dozen to take off to the B.B.C. to sing in a programme mainly for the Forces called “Ack Ack – Beer Beer”. We actually sang with Vera Lynn and you may find it interesting that, although on radio, the presenters were all in evening dress – though it was during the day – and the ladies wore long dresses and furs – what a contrast to our uniforms!
- After war I married a policeman and lived at Brockley (near Lewisham).

Photos:



First ATS Proving Training Squad (1 of 3)
Mychett Bcks Aldershot February 1942
Molly Fearon (nee Cheason) tall ATS at centre back