

<b>Surname:</b> Harrison	<b>First Name(s):</b> Eileen Mary	<b>Army Number:</b> W/226832	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> George	<b>Name used during service:</b> George	<b>Rank:</b> Sgt	
<b>Main base:</b> GHQ 2 <sup>nd</sup> Echelon 21 <sup>st</sup> Army Group, London Oxford Brussels	<b>Training base:</b> Pontefract R.A.S.C. Records, Ore Place, Hastings	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Pontefract	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b>	<b>Group/Regiment:</b>	<b>Command:</b> 21 <sup>st</sup> Army Group
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> 5 years	<b>Reason for discharge:</b> Demobilisation	<b>Trade:</b> Records Clerk	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b> Tunic Skirt Battledress Greatcoat Underwear Shoes Cap Beret Leather jerkin	<b>Photo:</b> 		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision of company recordings</li> </ul>		
<b>Pay book:</b>	Not available		

**Memorable moments:**

- I joined the Service at Pontefract Barracks in January 1942. It was a bitter winter and the barracks old and dilapidated, so the initial training period was a test indeed.
- Square bashing and aptitude tests completed, my first posting was to RASC Records Hastings. Here we worked with civil servants as junior clerks absorbing knowledge of Kings Regulations and learning how to record data, Army fashion.
- We lived in a beautiful C18 mansion on the Downs and were warmly welcomed by the local population who lived in the restricted coastal area of the south Coast. The daily routine was enlivened by the many low level raids in over the Channel with hit and run bombs and machine gunning. I remember seeing the bombing of the Albany hotel when members of the Duke of Yorks Royal Canadian Hussars were killed in 1943 together with many Hastings folk.
- Soon came a 'hush-hush' posting to my next unit. This was sited in two squares in Bayswater London. Empty rooms with available piles of army furniture (folding). Office life soon hotted up as Company Office Staffs arrived from all directions to hand over their documents to nervous young ATS sitting behind those rickety tables. Thus GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group was born. Our boss, General Montgomery.
- The General made no secret of his opinion of women, and one day we were sent in separate ways to eventually hand in our passes at a theatre somewhere in London. We sat for hours waiting for ? Finally a small man strode on to the stage to lecture us on his expectations of us as members of his HQ. At the end we rose to our feet en-mass in perfect silence (no wild acclaim as given by the Tommies)
- Our days were made up of long working hours processing material delivered daily by despatch riders. Our HQ, indeed London itself was alive with troops from every allied nation, but in the midst of all this activity, security was amazingly tight. 'Careless talk costs lives' was the order of the day. Nights were spent in scruffy shelters and the tube became the night-time refuge of Londoners. I can still remember the suffocating smell from those nights. Baths were a rushed luxury between sirens and all became attuned to the cutting engine of the 'buzz bombs'
- There were snatched meetings with friends passing through to unspecified destinations. Air-raids increased and documents were in danger so, the headquarters decamped lock stock and barrel to Cowley Camp at Oxford. We missed the friendliness of London but had wonderful theatre, music and the fantastic British Restaurant to enliven our off duty hours and undisturbed nights as a bonus.
- One day uneasy quiet descended as work dried up. D. Day had arrived. Soon messages flooded in once more, adding casualty and effects to the work.
- In a short time we were packing up once more, lock stock, and barrel, and being conveyed in convoy through the night to an unknown airfield. There, section by section, we were loaded into Dakotas. Sitting on the floor, backs to the fuselage, we were flown by Canadians over the Channel. From our landing place, once more by convoy to the Residence Royal in Brussels. The locals eyed us with some disbelief (but delighted faces)
- What a change of accommodation. This had been a German HQ in luxury apartments. We lived in one block and established offices in the other (as had the Germans). On the cabinet in my office was a large bronze bust of Mussolini and Hitler glared down from the wall in the shape of a large signed charcoal portrait.
- Work early next morning with the promise of every eighth day off duty. At this time our rather shabby uniforms were replaced by smart new ones, and to our delight ATS uniform caps withdrawn and replaced by khaki berets with leather bindings. That made us unique, and we were proud of those hats
- Clementine Churchill, Winston's wife took over a beautiful house in the Avenue Louise, turning it into a club for us. It had all a girl who was far from home could

wish for. Restful lounges, a dining room, books and a garden, not to mention attendant hairdresser. Here was somewhere to meet our friends and be made welcome by the friendly ladies who ran it. Men were welcome, only as friends. As our days were spent as a minority in a man's world Clementines' was a delightful breathing space.

- On our days off we wandered far and wide to be welcomed into family homes and much feted. It was strange how quickly the city recovered and luxury goods appeared once more. The residence housed the staffs of all the Allied Nations, with much coming and going. Famous faces became familiar and our lives full of hard work and excitement with underlying fear for those whose lives we recorded daily. The HQ staff consisted of Army officers, Sergeant Majors and the ATS, most of us being Sergeants. ATS officers were only in charge of our living quarters.
- As battle lines moved forward Bruxelles was made a leave centre for the Allies and the facilities were spectacular. One famous club was set up in a Royal Palace. Theatres were commandeered and shows there varied from Glen Miller to the great stars of English theatre, such as Sybil Thorndike. The Opera reopened with new operas each week and great pictures reappeared in the art galleries. There were fleeting meetings with friends on rest from the front and happy re-union once or twice with the special soldier.
- Hard fought battles were recorded including the crossing of the Rhine and the horrendous horror of the relief of the concentration camps.
- As the line pushed forward victoriously, dismay set in when Roosevelt ordered the Allies to hold back, in order to allow the Russians to reach East Berlin first. How angry and let down the troops felt (much trouble that caused later). It also caused a panic flight of German troops westwards in order to surrender to British troops, rather than to be captured by the Russians.
- We suffered the shock of Runstedt's breakthrough in the Ardennes Christmas time 1944 when our troops were rushed in to block the way in awful weather (which many, now in their fifties have never seen). (No the Americans did not save that day despite modern film propaganda)
- VE Day came out of the blue and the streets were crowded with ecstatic people. They feted us from café to café dancing and singing around us as we went through the city. That evening a Highland Regt. beat retreat in the city square bringing tears to many eyes. A darker side to victory was shown in the treatment meted out to collaborators by their own folk.
- The fighting over gradually the companies were given back control of their own affairs, and one last task awaited us. There was the demobilisation of the older soldiers and sadly the posting of many of the troops to the Far Eastern theatre of war, for Japan was still to be defeated and India was in a state of unrest.
- Our job done we were scheduled for demob. What now?
- That special soldier and I celebrated our 57<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary 2005 and in the oak chest in our hall is a small box bearing my name containing the Franco German Star and associated campaign medals with the two worn shoulder flashes of a blue cross on red ground with gold crossed swords of the Echelon, the proudest reminder of those ATS years.

Photos:

